

France: Enlightenment and Revolution

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21H.241/21G.054
Spring 2021
MW 9-10:30

This seminar explores the relationship between the French Enlightenment and the French Revolution. We will study some of the central texts of the French Enlightenment – Montesquieu, Rousseau, and Raynal/Diderot – with an emphasis on their ideas about monarchy, slavery, and (in the case of Rousseau) democracy. The course then turns to the influence of enlightened ideas and the role of popular mobilization in the events of the revolutionary era that extends from 1789 to 1804. One of the major issues of this period involved how to define the boundaries of France. We will explore that question by asking how revolutionary ideas circulated in the French Caribbean. The course concludes with a look at some of the legacies of the eighteenth-century French experience for modern politics.

Office hours:

Office hours are by appointment. A sign-up sheet and Zoom link are available on the course Canvas site. Please remember to email me after signing up for a slot with the date and time you have selected. I encourage all students to drop in at least two to three times during the course of the semester.

Required materials:

1. Keith Baker, ed., *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*, vol. 7 of *University of Chicago Readings in Western Civilization* (University of Chicago Press, 1987) [ORFR] – electronic reserve access available via the MIT Libraries at <http://library.mit.edu/item/000376532>.
2. *The Major Political Writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, trans. John Scott (University of Chicago Press, 2012) [Rousseau].
3. Lynn Hunt and Jack Censer, *The French Revolution and Napoleon: Crucible of the Modern World* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017) [Hunt/Censer].

All other readings and resources are posted on the course Canvas site (web links for some of these items can also be found in the “Schedule of Meetings and Readings” below). Students should have the relevant readings for each class session before them in hard copy or on their screens.

Attendance Policy:

By registering for this class, you are making a commitment to attend the duration of class twice a week, to “arrive” on time, and to come prepared to discuss the readings each time. If you must miss a class, please contact me in advance. The vast majority (if not the entirety) of our sessions will involve synchronous interaction. If you are located in a time zone that makes connecting at 9am EST difficult, please contact me at or before the start of class so that we can discuss the feasibility of your taking this seminar.

There is a possibility, weather and Covid-19 conditions permitting, that we will shift to in-person learning in an outdoor space on the MIT campus beginning in April. If you have concerns about the prospect of such a transition to outdoor, in-person learning, please feel free to share with me in the early days of the course.

Digital distraction:

We will be learning in virtual mode this semester, which, by definition, involves the potential for all kinds of digital distractions. You will learn more during this course if you avoid the use of computers and other electronic/digital devices during class sessions for purposes unrelated to the subject matter of this course. That includes reading email, surfing the web, texting others, watching Youtube videos, etc. Try to make the following a habit for all class sessions: have open on your screen only your Zoom window, the course Canvas site, and one other window displaying course reading(s) for that day.

Zoom policies:

Zoom will have become familiar to all of us by now, perhaps to the extent of experiencing the affliction known as Zoomitis – an aversion to the overuse of video conferencing technology. To alleviate the symptoms of Zoomitis, we will take regular five-minute breaks at the halfway point of each class session: use these to stretch your legs, grab a cup of tea, etc. Most of us will have background noises going on in our respective spaces: in the interests of keeping these private, please keep your Zoom mic on “mute” when you are not speaking. Some students may feel the need to turn off their video screen during class. I understand the need to be off screen at times, but – unless the circumstances at your location dictate otherwise – please try to keep these occasions to the minimum, so that we can preserve the sense of a collective discussion involving give and take among all the members of the class.

At a few points over the course of the semester, we may engage in exercises, or watch mini-recorded lectures or films, that do not involve synchronous discussion on Zoom: I hope these too will serve to counter Zoomitis.

Finally, a note about computers and wifi connections: we will all be relying on these to make this course work. If yours are not reliable, please seek out the aid of a laptop, iPad, and/or hotspot from MIT IS&T [via this link](#). Some students find that an erratic connection can be improved by turning off your video, but to the extent possible, do what you can to improve the overall quality of your wifi connection before resorting to this (sometimes necessary) strategy. That said, there will be times when wifi will fail us despite our best efforts; when this happens, shrug it off, drop me a note in the chat to let me know you have to drop off for technical reasons, and try again the next time. We will do the best we can with the resources we have at hand in dealing with the effects of this wretched pandemic. Sometimes, the virtual learning experience can and will seem very clunky indeed.

Evaluation and support:

A letter grading system with extra flexibility will be in effect during the Spring 2021 semester (details can be found [here](#)). Within these parameters, grades will be determined as follows:

1. Participation. Participation means contributing to class discussions in a way that indicates you have done the readings and thought about them. If you do this for most, though not necessarily all, of our meetings, you will earn a grade somewhere in the “A” range for this part of the course. [20%]
2. An in-class quiz (March 10) on the readings for sessions 1-7. [15%]
3. A 9-10 page paper on Enlightenment ideas about slavery (due March 31; prompt/format to be posted to Canvas two weeks prior to deadline). [25%]
4. An 11-12 page paper on the relationship between popular mobilization and elite discourse during the revolutionary era (due May 19; prompt/format to be posted to Canvas two weeks prior to deadline). [40%]

If, at some point during the semester, you find yourself dealing with a personal or medical issue that is impacting your ability to attend class, complete work, or take an exam, you should contact a dean in Student Support Services (S3). S3 is here to help you. The deans will verify your situation, provide you with support, and help you work with your professor or instructor to determine next steps. In most circumstances, you will not be excused from coursework without verification from a dean. Please visit the [S3 website](#) for contact information and more ways that they can provide support.

Communication:

Course emails will be sent as announcements through Canvas, which requires students to make sure they have set their Canvas notifications for Announcements to “notify me right away.” This option should be part of the default setup of your Canvas notifications. First, on the lefthand side of Canvas, click the Account link, then click the

Notifications link. This will bring you to your notifications setting, where you can ensure “Announcements” is checked off as “notify me right away.” Further instructions on managing your notification settings can be found [here](#).

Help with Writing and Other Communication Skills:

Please consider me your first line of defense when it comes to help with any of the communication skills you will need to exercise in this course. I would also like you to be aware of MIT’s Writing and Communication Center (WCC), which offers free one-on-one professional advice from communication experts with advanced degrees and publishing experience. The WCC can help you further develop your oral communication skills and learn about all types of academic and professional writing. You can learn more about the WCC consultations [here](#) and register with the online scheduler to make appointments [here](#). WCC hours are offered on Monday-Friday, 9:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m., and fill up fast.

Schedule of Meetings and Readings:

1. Feb. 17: Introduction to the course, review of syllabus
2. Feb. 22: The Old Regime and the French Revolution (An Overview)
 - Peter R. Campbell, “Absolute Monarchy,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Ancien Régime*, ed. William Doyle (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 11-38.
 - Hunt/Censer, viii-xiii.
3. Feb. 24: Absolute Monarchy
 - *ORFR*, pp. 13-47 (Loyseau and Bossuet)
4. Mar. 1: Montesquieu (I)
 - Montesquieu, [Persian Letters \(1721\)](#), trans. Philip Stewart (© 2020), letters 2, 9, 10-14, supplementary letter II, 24, 32, 55, 62-63, 117. (Students who wish to read the original French text can find it [here](#).)
5. Mar. 3: Montesquieu (II)
 - Montesquieu, [Persian Letters \(1721\)](#), trans. Philip Stewart (© 2020), letters 132, 136, 138-148, supplementary letter X, 149, supplementary letter XI, 150. (Students who wish to read the original French text can find it [here](#).)

6. Mar. 9: Montesquieu (III) (Monday schedule meeting on Tuesday)
 - Montesquieu, [*The Spirit of Law \(1748\)*](#), trans. Philip Stewart (© 2018), Book XV (“How the laws of civil slavery relate to the nature of the climate”).
7. Mar. 10: Rousseau (I)
 - Rousseau, 163-203 (*On the Social Contract (1762)*)
8. Mar. 15: Rousseau (II)
 - Rousseau, 205-241 (*On the Social Contract (1762)*)
9. Mar. 17: Rousseau (III)
 - Rousseau, 243-272 (*On the Social Contract (1762)*)
10. Mar. 24: Empire and Enlightenment (I) [Guest speaker: Professor Jeremy Popkin]
 - Jeremy Popkin, “Emile in Chains: Rousseau, Algerian Captivity, and Hegel’s Phenomenology” (manuscript).
 - *A History of the Two Indies*, ed. Peter Jimack (New York: Routledge, 2006), books 4 and 10.
11. Mar. 29: Empire and Enlightenment (II)
 - *A History of the Two Indies*, ed. Peter Jimack (New York: Routledge, 2006) books 11 and 13.
 - Laurent Dubois, “An Enslaved Enlightenment?: Rethinking the Intellectual History of the French Atlantic,” *Social History* 31, no. 1 (2006): 1-14.
12. Mar. 31: The Prerevolutionary Critique of Absolutism
 - Hunt/Censer, 1-17.
 - *ORFR*, 51-70 (Remonstrance of the *Cour des Aides*).
13. Apr. 5: The Collapse of the Monarchy
 - Hunt/Censer, 17-35.
 - *ORFR*, 124-135 (Proceedings of the Assembly of Notables)

14. Apr. 7: National Sovereignty

- Keith Baker, "Enlightenment Idioms, Old Regime Discourses, and Revolutionary Improvisation," in *From Deficit to Deluge: The Origins of the French Revolution*, ed. Thomas E. Kaiser and Dale K. Van Kley (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press), 165-197.
- *ORFR*, 154-179 (Sieyès, *What is the Third Estate?*)

15. Apr. 12: Human Rights

- Hunt/Censer, 41-46.
- *ORFR*, 237-239, 242-247, 261-268 (Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen; Gouges, *Declaration of the Rights of Women*; Viefville des Essars, *On the Emancipation of the Negroes*).
- Joan Wallach Scott, "French Feminists and the Rights of 'Man': Olympe de Gouges's Declarations," *History Workshop* 28, no. 1 (1989): 1-21.

16. Apr. 14: Popular Mobilization and the Church

- Hunt/Censer, 46-53.
- *ORFR*, 231-237, 239-242 (The October Days; the Civil Constitution of the Clergy).
- Suzanne Desan, "Gender, Radicalization, and the October Days: Occupying the National Assembly," *French Historical Studies* 43, no. 3 (2020): 359-390.

17. Apr. 21: The Flight of the King and War

- Hunt/Censer, 53-70.
- *ORFR*, 272-278 (the Champ de Mars Massacre) *ORFR*, 296-302 (The September Massacres).

18. Apr. 26: Revolution in the Colonies

- Julius C. Scott, *The Common Wind: Afro-American Currents in the Age of the Haitian Revolution* (London: Verso, 2018), 118-158.

19. Apr. 28: The King's Trial

- Hunt/Censer, 77-90.
- *ORFR*, 302-324 (The King's Trial)

* At some point between Apr. 28 and May 3, please watch the film "Danton" (dir. Andrzej

Wajda, 1983), at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u-b7Rtu-nuk> *

20. May 3: The Terror

- Hunt/Censer, 90-107.
- *ORFR*, 330-340, 342-354, 368-384 (Documents of the Sans-Culottes; “Make Terror the Order of the Day”; the Law of Suspects; Robespierre, *Report on the Principles of Political Morality*)

21. May 5: The People of Paris

- George Rudé, *The Crowd in the French Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 178-231.

22. May 10: Thermidor and the Directory

- Hunt/Censer, 115-136.
- Colin Jones, “The Overthrow of Maximilien Robespierre and the ‘Indifference’ of the People,” *American Historical Review* 119, no. 3 (2014): 689–713.
- *ORFR*, 392-393 (Manifesto of the Directors).

23. May 12: Napoleon and Toussaint Louverture

- Hunt/Censer, 136-142, 149-164.
- Laurent Dubois and John D. Garrigus, *Slave Revolution in the Caribbean, 1789-1804: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston, MA: Bedford, 2006), 147-158, 167-170, 175-180, 188-191.

24. May 17: Legacies

- Hunt/Censer, 211-218.
- Lynn Hunt, “The World We Have Gained: The Future of the French Revolution,” *American Historical Review* 108, no. 1 (2003): 1-19.
- *ORFR*, 452-461 (Constant, *Ancient and Modern Liberty Compared*).

25. May 19: Conclusion

- Note: we will spend 10-15 minutes at the start of class filling out the online subject evaluations.