

# **The French Revolution and Napoleon**

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University of Massachusetts-Lowell

Professor Patrick Young

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office hours: Tuesdays, 2-3:30, Thursdays 9:30-11, and by appt.

## **Course Description**

This course will examine the central events, issues and historical resonances of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic periods. Few eras of history have been as passionately observed and discussed. Our own engagement of the subject matter will lead us into core questions of modern politics: the nature of political liberty, the rise of the nation and national identity, the politics of equality and inequality, the use of violence and terror in politics, changing media of political communication, the conduct of modern warfare and empire. As a principal aim of the course will be to capture the intensely divisive quality of this period's history, we will return regularly to debate over clashing interpretations of events. We will also analyze a great range of historical materials, including not only secondary interpretations but also speeches and pamphlets, philosophical and literary texts, prints and paintings, music, popular and material culture.

## **Course Objectives**

The aim of this course is to enable students to

- identify and analyze the main themes and problems of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic periods
- reflect upon the legacies of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic periods for Modern French, European and World History, including contemporary politics
- work critically and effectively with historical evidence (primary sources, secondary texts, visual materials) in their reading and essay writing
- demonstrate tangible improvement in written work

## **Course Texts**

The following are the required books for the course. They are available at the campus bookstore, and should be acquired as soon as possible. Additional readings will be housed in digitized format on the course website, and/or put on reserve at O'Leary Library.

Sylvia Neely, *A Concise History of the French Revolution* (Rowan and Littlefield, 2007)

Philip Dwyer and Peter McPhee, *The French Revolution: A Document Survey* (Routledge, 2002)

Timothy Tackett, *When the King Took Flight* (Harvard University Press, 2003)  
David Bell, *Napoleon: A Concise Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2015)  
Jakob Walter, *The Diary of a Napoleonic Foot Soldier* (Penguin, 1993)

## Course Website

The course website can be accessed at <http://continuinged.uml.edu/online>. See handout entitled “Blackboard Access Information for Students” for instruction in logging on to the course website.

The website is a vital component of the course, and employs the Blackboard Learn course management software. All of the essential assignments, class readings, images and other course materials will be posted there. You should go to the web address as soon as possible, bookmark it, confirm your registration to obtain a user name and password, log on and familiarize yourself with the website’s content.

Please contact me, or Continuing Ed if you are having any difficulties whatsoever at any point in accessing or using the course website.

## Course Requirements

The graded work of the course will comprise written work and involvement in discussion, and break down as follows:

Unit One document response and paper 20%  
Unit Two optional response and paper 20%  
Unit Three debate assignment 20%  
Unit Four final paper project 20%  
Class Participation 20%

Due dates for the assignments are provided below. The penalty for late work is one half-letter grade per day. Any extension of the deadline must be arranged with me at least 24 hours in advance of the due date.

### On Class Discussion and Participation:

This course has a discussion-based format, and requires active student participation. A formal requirement of that participation is that students assume responsibility for being a primary discussant for **two** classes of their choosing at some point over the course of the semester. In line with that task, students are required to submit (by email attachment, at least two hours prior to class) a one to two-page response to the main discussion question of that class, as indicated on the schedule of classes below.

The primary discussant work will be combined with a grade for daily participation, to produce an overall class discussion grade. Lateness and/or incomplete preparation for the discussion will lower the participation grade, as

will any more than three absences. It goes without saying as well that phone usage and texting are strictly forbidden during class.

## Schedule of Classes

9/1 Course introduction: What is revolution? Why and how do we study the French Revolution?

## Unit One: The Coming of Revolution

9/6 The 'Old Regime': Absolute Monarchy

reading:

Neely, 1-16

“Jean Domat on Social Order and Absolute Monarchy” (course website)

course website: view image file, “Images of Early Modern Monarchy”

main discussion question: How was monarchical power defined, visualized and exercised in France prior to 1789, and how strong was the monarchy?

9/8 Life in a Society of Orders

reading:

Peter McPhee, “France in the 1780’s” (course website)

choose one:

aristocracy: Henri, Comte de Boulainvilliers, “Essais sur la Noblesse de France” (course website)

peasantry: Pierre Jean Baptiste Le Grand d’Aussy, “Voyage d’Auvergne”; F.Y. Besnard, “Souvenirs d’un Nonagenaire” (course website)

Paris: Louis Sébastien Mercier, selections from *Panorama of Paris, 1781-8* (course website)

main discussion question: What were the main features of French society in the 1700’s, and was this in your view a society ripe for revolution?

**\*Old Regime document response due**

9/13 A Revolution of Ideas? The Enlightenment

reading:

Neely, 16-28

Denis Diderot, “The Encyclopedia”, selections (course website)

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “The Social Contract,” at:

<http://legacy.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/rousseau-soccon.asp>

main discussion question: What was ‘Enlightenment’, and to what extent did Enlightenment ideas challenge the intellectual, social and political premises of Old Regime France?

- 9/15 Varieties of 'Enlightenment'  
reading:  
 "Salon Life" at <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/18salons.html>  
 Robert Darnton, "The Forbidden Bestsellers of Pre-revolutionary France" (course website)  
main discussion question: How were Enlightenment ideas more widely disseminated within French society, and how significant was their impact?  
**\*Enlightenment document response due**
- 9/20 The Crisis of the French State  
reading:  
 Neely, 29-69  
 Dwyer and McPhee:  
choose one:  
 Sieyès, "What is the Third Estate?", 3-5  
 Cahiers de Doléances, 5-15  
 Tennis Court Oath, 16-17  
main discussion question: How and why did the French state experience a financial and political crisis in 1788-9?  
**\*Third Estate document response due**
- 9/22 The Crowd and Revolution: Fall of the Bastille  
reading:  
 Neely, 69-78  
 Dwyer and McPhee:  
 The storming of Bastille, 18-19  
 The killing of Bertier and Foulon, 19-20  
 George Rudé, "July 1789" (course website)  
main discussion question: What were the motivations behind the storming of the Bastille, and what was the significance of that event for the French Revolution?  
**\*Paris Crowd document response due**
- 9/27 Group Discussions: The Coming of the French Revolution

## **Unit Two: The New Liberal 'Order', 1789-1792**

- 9/29 Liberal Reforms of the National Assembly  
reading:  
 Neely, 78-106  
 Dwyer and McPhee:  
 The Great Fear, 22-23  
 August 1789 decrees on Feudalism, 24-26  
 Declaration of Rights of Man and Citizen, 26-28

main discussion question: To what extent did the early reforms of the National Assembly, such as the August 4 decrees and the Declaration of Rights of Man and Citizen, revolutionize the basis of French society and government?

**\*Unit One paper due**

10/4 The Boundaries of Revolution: Gender

reading:

Neely, 147-151

choose one:

“Women Testify Concerning Their Participation in the October Days,” course website

Olympe de Gouges on women’s rights, in Dwyer and McPhee, 39-42

“Manon Roland on the Meetings of the Girondins in Her Home”, course website

main discussion question: To what extent can it be said that the French Revolution introduced a fundamental questioning and even changing of women’s roles?

10/6 The Boundaries of Revolution: Slavery and Race

reading:

Neely, 151-155

Dwyer and McPhee:

Civil Rights for free blacks, 37-38

An attack on the slave trade by Frossard, 38-39

“Slavery and the Haitian Revolution,” at

<http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/chap8a.html>

main discussion question: How did the issues of slavery and racism enter into, and impact, the French Revolution?

10/11 **Monday schedule; no class**

10/13 Religion, Revolution and Counter-Revolution

reading:

Neely, 106-116

Dwyer and McPhee:

Petition from Jewish communities, 35-37

“The Church and the Revolutionary State”, 43-50

Edmund Burke, “Reflections on the Revolution”, course website

main discussion question: Why and how did the new revolutionary government reform religious policy, and how successful was it in doing so?

10/18 The Flight of the King

reading:

Tackett: 1-118

main discussion question: Why did Louis XVI attempt to flee in 1791, and what was the impact of his decision to do so?

10/20 Crisis of Constitutional Monarchy and the Radical Turn

reading:

Tackett: 119-223

main discussion question: Why, according to Timothy Tackett, was the flight of the king from Paris in 1791 such a turning point in the French Revolution, and how convincing do you find his case?

### **Unit Three: Radical Revolution, War and Terror, 1792-1794**

10/25 The Art of Revolution: Jacques-Louis David

main discussion question: How did the paintings of Jacques-Louis David represent the events and ideals of the French Revolution?

**\*Unit Two Paper due**

10/27 The Republic: Challenges and Ambitions

reading:

Neely, 163-188

main discussion question: How did the first French Republic come about, and what were the main challenges the new republic faced?

11/1 War, Equality, and Dictatorship

reading:

Neely, 189-197

Dwyer and McPhee:

“The Republic at War”, 90-96

“Revolt in the Vendée”, 97-102

main discussion question: How did the leaders of the Convention address the military and political crisis they faced, and how defensible were their policies in your view?

11/3 Terror

reading:

Neely, 203-220

Dwyer and McPhee:

“The Terror at Work”, 103-113

webservice: Robespierre, “Justification of the Use of Terror”, at  
[www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/robespierre-terror.html](http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/robespierre-terror.html)

main discussion question: What factors explain the genesis of political terror in the French Revolution, and how was the Terror justified and carried out?

11/8 Creating the New Citizen: The Civic Culture of Revolution

reading:

Neely, 197-203

Dwyer and McPhee:

“A New Civic Culture”, 84-89

course website: see image file, “Revolutionary Festivals”

main discussion question: Why and how did the French government attempt to “revolutionize” culture, and what was the impact of its cultural reforms upon politics and everyday life?

11/10 In-Class Debate on the Terror

**\*Debate brief due**

## **Unit Four: War, Empire, and the Napoleonic Regime 1794-1815**

11/15 Revolutionary, Consul, Emperor: Napoleon’s Ascent

reading:

David Bell, *Napoleon*, 1-63

Dwyer and McPhee:

“Proclamation to the Army of Italy, 26 April 1796,” 128-130

“Justifying the coup of Brumaire, 10 November 1799,” 136-139

main discussion question: What was Napoleon’s relationship to the French Revolution, and how might we explain his meteoric political ascent?

**\*Final Debate write-up due**

11/17 Features of Napoleonic Rule

reading:

David Bell, *Napoleon*, 64-113

Dwyer and McPhee:

“The Concordat,” 149-152

“Founding the Empire,” 153-154

“The Civil Code,” 155-156

main discussion question: What was the political, ideological, and institutional basis of Napoleon’s rule, and how successful was his regime?

11/22 Final Paper Overview: Modern War and Empire in the Napoleonic Era

### **Thanksgiving Break**

11/29 paper group meetings: War, Army and Society

12/1 paper group meetings: Napoleon’s Egyptian Campaign

12/6 paper group meetings: Representing War and Empire

12/8 Course Recap and Final Paper Review

**\*Final Paper due**