

## PL 265 Interpreting the French Revolution

Mondays, 15:45-19:00

Instructor: Ewa Atanassow, e.atanassow@berlin.bard.edu

Guest: Prof. Dr. Daniel Schönplug (Freie Universität /Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin)

The French Revolution of 1789 was a source of inspiration and horror beyond the country of its unfolding and long after the time of its actual occurrence. The principles associated with the Revolution — rights of man and popular sovereignty — marked a radical departure from a political system based on divine-right, royal absolutism and feudal hierarchy. Yet within a few years, revolutionary change gave way to factional conflict, Terror and, since France was a global Empire, warfare on a planetary scale. Often considered as the birth date of political modernity, 1789 and its aftershocks were also the crucible in which modern political thought was forged. Along with fashioning a global vocabulary that inspired revolutionary struggles worldwide, the Revolution catalyzed the emergence of ideological currents — liberalism, conservatism, socialism, feminism, anticolonialism — that continue to shape modern politics. In this course, we shall learn about the main events, personages, structures and concepts that constituted the French Revolution, and trace the controversies surrounding its interpretation. We will look into sources that were produced in the middle of revolutionary turmoil and read some of its major theorists in order to think with them about the meaning of this cataclysm today. The course will feature guest seminars and a lecture by the historian of the French Revolution Prof. Dr. Daniel Schönplug.

### Required Readings

- \* Jeremy D. Popkin, *A Short History of the French Revolution* (Routledge, 2024) ISBN 9781032532417
- \* Alexis de Tocqueville, *Ancien Regime and the Revolution* (Penguin, 2008) ISBN 9780141441641
- \* Course Reader

### Additional Materials

Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (Penguin Books, 1977)

Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Hackett Publ. 1987)

Jeremy D. Popkin, *New World Begins: The History of the French Revolution* (Basic Books, 2021)

Germaine de Staël, *Considerations on the Principal Events of the French Revolution* (LF, 2008)

Films

## Requirements

### Attendance and Participation

Careful preparation, regular attendance and active participation are essential to the success of this course. Absences beyond two will affect the seminar grade. **Arriving late or leaving in the middle of a session will count as half an absence.**

**Reflection paper and presentation:** over the course of the semester, students will take turns to reflect on the proceedings of each week, and present these reflections at the beginning of the following week. The reflection paper should offer a concise (up to 1000-word) account of the week's reading and discussions by recapitulating the main themes, probing one important issue, and articulating questions for further discussion. The reflection papers should be posted on google classroom by noon on Mondays.

**Proposal and Final Essay:** at the end of the semester students will write a substantial final essay of 3000 words on one aspect of the course material. Students are expected to devise their own final essay topic and submit (by Sunday, November 27) a 500-word proposal to be discussed with the instructor. The deadline for the final essay is Friday, Dec 19, 2025.

### Assessment

Assessment will be based on **seminar participation** (30%); **reflection paper and presentation** (20%); a **proposal** (20%) and **final essay** (30%).

### Late Submission and Academic Integrity

Late papers will be downgraded in light of the policy outlined in the Student Handbook. Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

### Deadlines at a glance:

The schedule for reflection papers will be set up by Sunday, September 7

Proposals for final projects are due on Sunday, December 7

Final Essay due: Friday, December 19

## Schedule

Week: date	1 <sup>st</sup> half	2 <sup>nd</sup> half	Films
1: Sept 1	<b>Introductory: The Age of Revolutions</b>	<b>The first age of global imperialism</b>	"Lafayette" (Jean Dréville, 1961)
2: Sept 8	<b>Global Speculation, Debt &amp; the Origins of the French Revolution</b>	<b>Towards a National Assembly</b> Source: Emmanuel Sièyes, <i>What is the Third Estate?</i> , Paris 1789.	"One Nation, one King" (Pierre Schöller, 2018)
3: Sept 15	<b>July 14, 1789</b>  <a href="#">Reichardt / Lüsebrink, <i>The Bastille. A History of Symbol of Despotism and Freedom</i> (Duke Univ. Press 1997), ch. 2</a>  <a href="#">J.-B. Humbert, clockmaker, report on the storming of the Bastille</a>	<b>Constitution</b>  <a href="#">Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, Aug 26, 1789</a>  <a href="#">French Constitution of Sept. 3, 1791.</a>	- "La Marseillaise" (Jean Renoir, 1938)  - "Farewell, my queen" (Benoit Jacquot, 2012)
4: Sept 22	<b>Rights of Women</b>  Gisela Bock, "The French Revolution: The Dispute is Resumed," in: idem, <i>Women in European History</i> (Oxford 2002), 32-78.  <a href="#">Olympe de Gouge, Declaration of the Rights of Women, 1793</a>	<b>Revolution in Sainte Domingue</b>  <a href="#">Report of the Colonial Committee of the National Assembly</a> ; Documents from Jeremy Popkins, <i>Facing Racial Revolution. Eyewitness Accounts of the Haitian Insurrection</i> (Chicago 2007), 42-58.	- "Olympe, une femme dans la Révolution" (Juilie Gayet, Mathieu Busson 2024/2025)  - "Toussaint Louverture" (Philippe Niang, 2012)
5: Oct 29	<b>The Second Revolution</b>  Noah Shusterman, 'The Coup d'État of August 10, 1792,' <i>French History and Culture</i> , vol. 11 (2023), edited by Briony Neilson, 63–74.	<b>The Death of Marat (and others)</b>  Antoine de Baecque, "The Trajectory of a Wound: From Corruption to Regeneration," in: Keith Michael Baker: <i>The French Revolution and the Making of Modern Political Culture</i> , vol. 4, Stanford 1994, 157-175.	- "Danton" (Andrzej Wajda, 1983)  - "Reign of Terror" (Anthony Man, 1949)
6: Oct 6	<b>The Reign of Terror</b>  Germaine de Staël, "On the Institutionalization of Fear. The Terror of 1793-94," in: idem, <i>Considerations on the Principal Events of the French Revolution</i>	<b>Abolition of Slavery</b>  Nicolas de Condorcet: "The Sketch" and "On Slavery: Rules of the Society of the Friends of Blacks" (1788), in: idem., <i>Political Writings</i> , edited by Steven Lukes, and Nadia Urbinati,	<b>Prof. Schönplüg Lecture</b> <b>Oct ?, 19:30</b>

	(1818). Ed. by Aurelian Crăiuțu (Indianapolis 2008), 354–372. Marisa Linton, “Terror and Politics,” in: Dave Andress (ed.), <i>Oxford Handbook of the French Revolution</i> , Oxford 2015, 471-486	Cambridge 2012, 1-38, 125-147, 148-155.	
7: Oct 13	<b>The Directoire</b>  Literature: Howard G. Brown, “From Organic Society to Security State: The War on Brigandage in France, 1797–1802,” in: <i>The Journal of Modern History</i> 69, 4 (1997), 661–695.	<b>Napoleon comes to Power</b>  Benjamin Constant, <i>The Spirit of Conquest and Usurpation and Their Relation to European Civilization</i> (1814), Cambridge: 1988, p. XXX.	- “Napoléon” (Abel Gance, 1929)
Oct 20-24	<b>FALL BREAK</b>		
8: Oct 27	<b>Part II: Interpreting the French Revolution</b>		
	Burke, <i>Reflections on the Revolution in France</i> , selections	Burke, <i>Reflections</i> , selections	
9: Nov 3	Tocqueville, <i>Ancien Regime</i> , Foreword (7-15)	Tocqueville, <i>Ancien Regime</i> Book 1, chs 1-5 (8-35)	
10: Nov 9	Tocqueville, <i>Ancien Regime</i> , Book 2, chs. 1-8 (36-88)	Tocqueville, <i>Ancien Regime</i> , Book 2, chs. 9-12 (89-139)	
11: Nov 16	Tocqueville, <i>Ancien Regime</i> , Book 3, ch. 1-5 (141-177)	Tocqueville, <i>Ancien Regime</i> , Book 3, ch. 5-8 (178-207)	
12: Nov 23	Tocqueville, <i>Ancien Regime</i> , Appendix 208-218	Tocqueville, <i>Old Regime and the Revolution</i> , vol. 2, selections	
13: Dec 1	Karl Marx, <i>The Class Struggles in France</i>	Karl Marx, <i>The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon</i>	
14: Dec 8	Arendt, <i>On Revolution</i>	Arendt, <i>On Revolution</i>	
15: Dec 15-19	<b>Final Essay due: Friday, Dec 19, 23:59</b>		