COURSE DESCRIPTION

“The nineteenth-century, an extremely restless model, so difficult to keep in place.” So wrote Balzac about a century that, by common agreement, began with a revolution and ended with a war, but lacked its own defining event or moment or figure. Gustave Flaubert and others hated the century’s bourgeois stupidity, with good reason perhaps, but it is Balzac’s restlessness that captures the attention. It is the perpetual flux and unnerving perception of flux; the marches towards democracy and reaction; the social changes that contemporaries embraced while seeking to escape them; the economic innovations that brought in the new without displacing the old; the technologies that altered experiences of time and space (though not for all, and not at the same time); the dialectical dance between forces of reason and belief, competing for religiosity and the sacred; the conflicting drives towards unity and individuation; the outward march of the colonial empire, bringing civilization without citizenship. The nineteenth century was nothing if not restive, unsure of its own destiny, and self-contradictory.

Beginning with the waning Old Regime, we will seek to capture and understand a century that was anchored in tradition and inherently modern. Analyzing primary and secondary sources alike, we will gain a triple introduction to French history, key historiographical debates, and historical method. Class time will be divided between lectures and discussions in which students engage critically with the sources and outline their own nineteenth century, alongside Balzac’s and Flaubert’s.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Class Attendance and Participation. Attendance and punctuality are required. This class rests on your close and critical reading of diverse sources. Please be ready to discuss them in class every week (and always bring the course readings to class!). Make sure that your comments pertain to what has just been said and please respect every opinion—even if you disagree. Respect also entails presenting only your personal work as your own. Plagiarism (using ideas or material without given the authors credit) is theft. (20% of your grade).

2. In-Class Mid-Term Exam (two-and-a-half hours): essay questions and source analyses (35%).

3. Final Exam (two-and-a-half hours): will cover material since the mid-term exam, using the same format (45%).

READINGS

The books below have been ordered at the NYU bookstore. The other readings may be downloaded from the course’s Blackboard website.
Keith Baker, ed., The Old Regime and the French Revolution (Chicago, 1987)
David Garrioch, The Making of Revolutionary Paris (California, 2002)
Lynn Hunt, The Family Romance of the French Revolution (California, 1992)
Lynn Hunt, ed., The French Revolution and Human Rights (Bedford, 1996)
Auguste Comte, Introduction to Positive Philosophy (MacMillan, 1970)
Honoré de Balzac, Lost Illusions (Vintage, 2001) — available in French and English
Mark Traugott, ed., The French Worker: Autobiographies from the Early Industrial Era (California, 1993)
William H. Sewell, Jr., Work & Revolution in France: The Language of Labor from the Old Regime to 1848 (Cambridge, 1980)
Ruth Harris, Lourdes: Body and Spirit in the Secular Age (Penguin, 1999)

CLASS SCHEDULE

September 8 INTRODUCTION

September 15 THE OLD REGIME: STASIS AND CHANGE
Jürgen Habermas, “The Public Sphere,” in Steven Seidman, ed., Jürgen Habermas on Society and Politics (1989), 231-36.

September 22 1789 — AND ITS INTERPRETATIONS
Primary: Jean-Baptiste Sieyès, What is the Third Estate? (1789), in Baker, Old Regime, 154-79.
Decrees of the National Assembly, in Baker, Old Regime, 226-31 and 237-42.
Background: Popkin, History of Modern France, chs. 5-6.

September 29 RADICALIZATION AND TERROR
Primary Documents on the Jacobins, the Sans-Culottes, and the Terror, in Baker, Old Regime, 290-96, 330-40, 342-54, and 368-84.
Reports by Agents of the Ministry of the Interior and Questionnaire of the Committee of Public Safety (1794).
Background: Popkin, History of Modern France, ch. 8.
October 6 WHO IS A CITIZEN?

October 13 THE QUEST FOR STABILITY
Primary Selection from the Civil Code (1804).
Alexis de Tocqueville, Introduction to Democracy in America (1835).
Auguste Comte, Introduction to Positive Philosophy (1830-42), 1-33.
Sean Quinlan, “Physical and Moral Regeneration after the Terror: Medical Culture, Sensibility, and Family Politics in France, 1794-1804,” Social History 29, no. 2 (May 2004): 139-64.
Background: Popkin, History of Modern France, chs. 9-11.

October 20 IN-CLASS MIDTERM EXAM

October 27 BOURGEOIS FRANCE
Primary Honoré de Balzac, Lost Illusions (Les illusions perdues) [1843].
Background Popkin, History of Modern France, pp. 93-101 and 111-13

November 3 WORKERS AND REVOLUTION
Etienne Arago, “To the Electors of the Seine” (1848)

November 10 PARIS, CAPITAL OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY
Primary Emile Zola, The Ladies’ Paradise (Au bonheur des dames) [1883].
Background: History of Modern France, chs. 15-16.

November 17 CATHOLICISM AND ITS OPPONENTS
Primary Ernest Renan, The Life of Jesus (1863), 13th preface (1867) .

November 24 THANKSGIVING BREAK

December 1 NO CLASS (TO BE RESCHEDULED)

December 8 WHAT IS A NATION?

December 12 WHAT IS A FRENCHMAN? (rescheduled class)
(Evening)

December 14 RACE AND THE COLONIAL EMPIRE—ABROAD AND AT HOME
(Wednesday)
Documents on French colonialism (Jules Ferry et al.)

TBD FINAL EXAM