COURSE DESCRIPTION

“The nineteenth-century, an extremely restless model, so difficult to keep in place.” So wrote the novelist 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. By analyzing both primary and secondary sources, 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. Some weeks, I will ask you to email questions for discussion prior to class (20% of your grade).

2. In-Class Mid-Term Exam (two-and-a-half hours). Will include definitions of concepts/events, analyses of primary sources, and essays (35%).

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

The books below have been ordered at the NYU bookstore. The other readings may be downloaded from the course’s Blackboard website.

Auguste Comte, *Introduction to Positive Philosophy* (Hackett, 1970)
Michael Burns, *France and the Dreyfus Affair* (Bedford, 1999)

CLASS SCHEDULE

September 13  INTRODUCTION

September 20  THE OLD REGIME: STASIS AND CHANGE


September 27  1789 — AND ITS INTERPRETATIONS


**Background:** Popkin, *History of Modern France*, chs. 5-7.

**October 4**

**RADICALIZATION AND TERROR**


**Background:** Popkin, *History of Modern France*, ch. 8.

**October 11**

**NO CLASS (Columbus Day)**

**October 18**

**WHO IS A CITIZEN?**

The October Days (1789) and Olympe de Gouges, *Declaration of the Rights of Women* (1791), in Baker, *Old Regime*, 232-35 and 261-68.
Decree Regulating Divorce (1792).

October 25  **STABILITY AND AUTHORITY**

**Primary**

**Secondary**
Sean Quinlan, “Physical and Moral Regeneration after the Terror: Medical Culture, Sensibility, and Family Politics in France, 1794-1804,” *Social History* 29 (2004): 139-64.

**Background:** Popkin, *History of Modern France*, chs. 9-11.

November 1  **IN-CLASS MIDTERM EXAM**

November 8  **CLASS RELATIONS**

**Primary**

**Secondary**

**Background:** Popkin, *History of Modern France*, pp. 93-95 and 105-24.

November 15  **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 22  **WHAT IS A NATION?**

**Primary**
Charles Péguy, account of the 1899 inauguration of the Place de la Nation monument (1900).


**November 29**

**WHAT IS A FRENCHMAN?**


**December 6**

**SCIENCE, RELIGION, AND THE SUPERNATURAL**

**Primary** Renan, *The Life of Jesus* (1863), 13th preface and ch. 15.


“Nostradamus the Astrologer,” *Every Saturday* (23 May 1874).


**December 13**

**THE VIOLENCE OF EMPIRE**


Jules Ferry, Speech of 28 July 1883.

Benjamin Claude Brower, *A Desert Named Peace: The Violence of France’s Empire in the Algerian Sahara, 1844-1902* (2009), introduction and chs. 3-6, 8, and 10.


**Friday Dec. 16**

**THE DREYFUS AFFAIR**


**December 20**

**FINAL EXAM** (class time)