

Early Modern Europe
History 316
Spring, 2007

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This course examines Europe from the later sixteenth century to the French Revolution of 1789. We'll be concerned partly with the dramatic events and colorful personalities of the period: these years included destructive wars, overseas conquests, and the technicolor doings of Louis XIV, Catherine the Great, William Shakespeare, René Descartes, and others. But the course also attempts to understand the basic processes of Europe's modernization over these centuries. In 1550, European society was still organized on essentially medieval lines. By 1789, Europe's industrial revolution was well underway, and elements of a democratic political culture were visible. The course explores how Europeans arrived at this point. What changes in Europeans' personal lives accompanied economic and political development? How much changed in the ways they understood the world and themselves? How did Europeans arrive at the edge of modernity?

The course will require about 100 pages of reading each week, some of it drawn from primary sources written during the period, most of it from studies by recent historians. In other words, this course is as much concerned with how historians think and use evidence as it is with the facts of the period. A good deal of class time will be spent discussing these books, and students will be expected to keep up with the assignments. There will be no textbook supplying an overall picture of the period; that material will be supplied in lectures. About 5 percent of students' final grades will be based on attendance and participation in class discussions. A take-home mid-term, take-home final, and short (about seven pages) essay will also be required; each will count for a little over 30 percent of the final grade.

Topics and assignments

January 16: "Early modern Europe:" a concept and its implications

Part 1: Traditional Europe

January 18-25: Social organization
assigned: Joel Mokyr, The Lever of Riches, pp. 31-56 ; Carlo Ginsburg, The Cheese and the Worms, pp. 1-27

January 30-February 1: Mentalities
assigned: Ginsburg, The Cheese and the Worms, pp. 27-128

February 6: No class meeting

Part 2: Forces for change

February 8-15: Religious revolution and its fall-out: the impact of the Reformations
assigned: Blaise Pascal, Pensées, pp. 88-95 (no. 198-202), 38-72 (no. 44-139),
149-165 (nos. 418-435)

February 20-27: War and societal change
assigned: Geoffrey Parker, The Military Revolution, pp. 1-81

March 1-8: Europeans and the world
assigned: Parker, The Military Revolution, pp. 82-154; Mokyr, The Lever of Riches, 209-238
Mid-Term Examination due

March 13-15: Spring break

March 20-22: Politics and personalities in seventeenth-century life
assigned: J. H. Elliott, Richelieu and Olivares, chapters 1-3, 6

Part 3: The great divergence: England and the continent

March 27-29: The English revolutions of the seventeenth century
assigned: Steven Pincus, England's Glorious Revolution, pp. 1-33, 55-82, 102-123, 147-167

April 3-April 5: Louis XIV and the French state
assigned: William Beikue, vii-viii, 1-29, 50-78, 82-96, 108-125, 136-144,
166-173, 199-222

Part 4: Eighteenth-century modernizations

April 10-12: The new technologies
assigned: Mokyr, The Lever of Riches, 57-112, 239-269, 301-304
Essay assignment due

April 17-19: The new attitudes
assigned: Robert Darnton, Mesmerism and the End of the Enlightenment in France, 1-125, 161-167

April 24-26: Conclusions: how does a society modernize?

May 4: **Final examination due**