

History 326
The Ancien Regime:
France in the Early Modern Era
Spring, 2006

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In 1789, France underwent one of the most dramatic revolutions in world history, an event that continues to shape our own world. This course examines the society and culture that produced the events of 1789. We will consider relations between social classes, the functioning of royal government, changing ideas. We will also attempt to understand the changing texture of daily life in these centuries, how men and women perceived the world around them and managed their lives. Throughout, our concern will be with understanding how this society worked or failed to work-- and with assessing the discontents that its failures produced.

Reading assignments will amount to about 100 pages weekly and will be drawn entirely from works written during the period. About 10 percent of students' grades will be based on class discussions of these readings. A take-home mid-term, an essay, and a take-home final will also be required.

Topics and assignments

January 17-19: Introductory questions: What is France? What is an Old Regime? Why do they matter?

January 24-26: The late medieval background: values and crises
Assigned: Jean Froissart, Chronicles, ed. Geoffrey Brereton, pp. 57-96, 146-198, 263-294

January 31-February 2: French society in the mid-sixteenth century: men, women, violence
Assigned: Marguerite de Navarre, The Heptameron, pp. 60-166

February 7-9: The Reformation in France
Assigned: Marguerite de Navarre, The Heptameron, pp. 167-274

February 14-16: The sixteenth-century crisis of faith
Assigned: Michel de Montaigne, Essays, pp. 36-91, 105-133, 343-406,

February 21-23: Absolute monarchy and its culture
Assigned: Keith M. Baker, ed., The Old Regime and the French Revolution, pp. 13-47, Molière, The Misanthrope and Other Plays, pp. 23-75, 99-164
mid-term examination due

February 28-March 2: Politics and experience in the later seventeenth century
Assigned: Madame de Sévigné, Selected Letters, pp. 29-154

March 7-9: Crises of the absolutist order

Assigned: Madame de Sévigné, Selected Letters, 271-320; Montesquieu (Charles Louis Secondat de), Persian Letters, pp. 39-93

March 14-16: spring recess

March 21-23: Toward a new society and a new culture: the early eighteenth century

Assigned: Montesquieu, Persian Letters, 128-281

March 28-30: Cities, capitalism, and careers

Assigned: Denis Diderot, Rameau's Nephew and Other Works, pp. 8-87

April 4-6: Enlightenment values

Assigned: Diderot, Rameau's Nephew and Other Works, pp. 92-175

Essays due

April 11-13: State, society, and critics in the late eighteenth century

Assigned: Baker, ed., The Old Regime and the French Revolution, pp. 51-123

April 18-20: The coming of the French Revolution

Assigned: Baker, ed., The Old Regime and the French Revolution, pp. 124-237

April 25-27: Some conclusions

final examination due