

THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

HISTORY 224
WINTER 2009

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Texts for purchase*

Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*.
NAL. ISBN 978 04515 30578

William Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution*.
Oxford University Press. ISBN 978 01992 52985

Simon Schama, *Citizens*.
Vintage/Random House. ISBN 978 06797 26104

*There will also be many documentary handouts, which you should date, upon receipt, and file systematically in sequential order for ease of later reference. Bring this file to classes and exams.

Objectives

My principal objective is to prepare you to make your own informed judgments on the French Revolution, especially in two crucial periods, 1789, the year of the idealistic Declaration, and 1793-94, the year of avowed governmental Terror. That objective explains my selection of both right- and left-leaning texts and my definition of papers and the final. Let me begin with a confession of sorts: I tend to sympathize with the revolutionaries who destroyed the institutions of the Old Regime, without quite sharing the suspiciousness with which they regarded the former beneficiaries of those institutions or the enthusiasm with which they attempted to ‘regenerate France’ or even Mankind itself. Go figure . . .

I like to think of this sympathy as a perfectly logical consequence of my rejection of the truly archaic principles of the Old Regime: first, political obedience to a hereditary monarch who reigned by divine right and ruled most of the Kingdom by royal decree without representative law-making institutions; second, social subordination to a privileged nobility that was defined more by fiscal privileges than either personal merit or public service; third, unquestioning allegiance to an established Church that was supported by ecclesiastical taxation, the suppression of other forms of worship, and the censorship of works deemed threatening to faith or morals. One, two, three, and they’re out.

The contrary ideals of 1789 and 1793, principally Liberty and Equality, still inspire men and women of all creeds, classes, races, and orientations. Although eighteenth-century Frenchman hardly realized all such extensions or agreed on the meaning of their own Revolution, they did establish the first constitutional regime in French history and the first democratic republic in European history, making unprecedented progress toward a liberal, egalitarian, secular state. In principle, the ideals of ‘liberty’ and ‘equality’ sound pretty good, but the bloody fact of state-sponsored Terror in the context of internal and external war looks pretty bad. Part of the fascination of the subject is to relate these ideals to this fact.



The Fine Print

Expectations You can expect me to commit myself to this course and your success in it; if I have to miss a class, I will let you know as soon as possible. I expect regular attendance and preparation from you, too, and would appreciate similar courtesy with respect to foreseeable absences. If I were king and this were *my* course in some absolute sense, I would command attendance and punish absences. However, it is *our* course on a democratic Revolution made in the name of Liberty and Equality, and I won't impose arbitrary penalties for missed classes. That said, let me add that Fraternity is third to Liberty and Equality; cuts, especially if too numerous on any one day or too frequent for any one person, wound the morale of the entire class, professor included, while unpreparedness or unresponsiveness limits pedagogical possibilities. The course is 'front-loaded' with respect to assigned readings, scheduled classes, and the first essay, but 'back-loaded' with respect to exams and other papers: For the first six weeks, in January and February, when other obligations are fewer and nights are longer, I will ask you to read-read-read and to meet three times a week, but there will be only one short essay. For the last six, in March and April, when the sun will be higher and the reading lighter, we will meet twice a week (no Fridays), but exams, essays, and papers will loom larger.

Requirements

Two 4-6 page essays on specified topics due in Week #3 on **Friday, January 30**, and in Week #10 on **Friday, March 27**. I do not accept the electronic submission of papers as emailed attachments. The **midsemester exam** will be held on **Monday, March 2**, and the final exam will be scheduled by the Registrar. See below under Optional Term Paper for the way to make the final itself optional.

Pre-submissions, rewrites, extensions, grace periods, lateness penalties, and exam dates

I can comment on any draft pre-submitted two full days before the posted due date. For the first essay (January 30), not the second, I will also permit re-submission of revised work within one week of its return to you, averaging the two grades if there is improvement. Seniors writing theses and all ESL students may request alternative deadlines for essays (not term paper or exams). I regard an undergraduate education as a self-taught course in time management, its lessons repeated but its terms defined, and I do not extend deadlines for individuals on the basis of overwork or competing academic, athletic, or other obligations. I do allow a grace period until the class hour on the weekday following the due date (Friday to Monday), then deduct one full grade for additional lateness. Deans can authorize penalty-free extensions on personal or medical grounds; without that, I will not accept any paper after the last day of classes. Finally, I reserve the right to consider an unexcused absence from an exam as a zero-grade failure.

Course grading

The essays, the midsemester, and the final exam or term paper together make up 80% of the course-grade (20% each); thus, *assessments of written work* are the preponderant factor. My more impressionistic assessment of your engagement in the work of the course adds the last 20%. You've got to show me, but I will allow you great latitude in deciding how best to do so, extending even to the term paper and the final exam itself. I would not presume to 'grade a mind,' much less, a person, and I will never give *you yourself* an A, a C, or, for that matter, an F. Promise.

Optional term paper

Due **Friday, April 10**, but do-able at any earlier, less stressful time. January is a long month ; February includes a long recess; **Friday, March 13**, is the absolute deadline for an informal but required prospectus (a page or two), stating your problem and intended line of inquiry and listing a working bibliography that, ideally, should include both primary and secondary sources: Think 'term paper,' not two-day wonder. If it is not required, why bother? This is the best way to extend your knowledge of the subject and to deepen your understanding of the discipline. It is good preparation for thesis work. Looking further ahead, it could greatly strengthen a future recommendation. Institutional grading patterns have become so skewed that, while there is less risk of a low grade, there is also less distinction in your As and Bs. I can write a better letter for you, if you have written the optional paper for me, kept the annotated copy, and given me another look when asking for a letter. It's one thing for me to have to say 'I held up the hoops, and Student B jumped dutifully through,' quite another, to be able to say 'Student A *took the initiative* to hold up an *additional hoop* and, *going beyond the requirements*, jumped neatly through.' Another thing: Give me a term paper, and the final is optional. Of course, if an Ace-student were to want show me A+ effort . . .

Calendar of Assigned Readings, Projected Classes, Written Obligations

Week #1 Making All Things Simple: Anglo-Saxon Prejudices
Read Dickens, *Tale*, focusing on the causes and nature of the Revolution.

01/12 Mon. Introduction to the Course

01/14 Wed. Dickens's Nightmarish Vision of the Old Regime

01/16 Fri. Historians and the *droit du seigneur*, *lettres de cachet*, and the Bastille

Week #2 Making Some Things More Complex I: Throne and Altar
Read Doyle, *Oxford History*, 1-85; begin Schama, *Citizens* (see Week #3).

[01/19 MLK How Sweet It Wasn't: Sugar, Slaves, Courts, Crown, and Church]

01/21 Wed. Absolute Monarchy: The Institutions of State Inherited by Louis XVI

01/23 Fri. The French Church, the Anti-Christian Enlightenment, and Popular Culture

Week #3 Making Some Things More Complex II: Nobles and Commoners
Read Schama, *Citizens*, xiii-287.

01/26 Mon. Nobles: Wealth, Status, Power, and Possibilities of Ennoblement

01/28 Wed. Darnton's "Workers Revolt," Contat's *Anecdotes*, and Menetra's *Journal*

01/30 Fri. Arthur Young's *Travels in France* and Putting Food on the Table, Then and Now

4-6 pp. essay due Friday, Jan. 30; grace period to Monday, Feb. 2. See above, page 2, under Pre-Submissions. Please respect the following stipulations: entitle the paper, paginate, double-space, 12-point font, 1.25" margins on all sides, proofread. MLA-style parenthetical documentation with works cited or Chicago-style notes with bibliography. Criteria for assessment: 1.) conceptual grasp of the historians; 2.) knowledge of Dickens; 3.) structured argument; 4.) sufficient and formally correct documentation; 5.) writing.

Prescribed topic: Causes of Revolution and *A Tale of Two Cities*. Charles Dickens's romantic imagination and moral vision are powerful, and his assumptions about the causes of the French Revolution are close to what many of us are culturally prepared to believe about the past and future alike: "Crush humanity out of shape once more, under similar hammers, and it will twist itself into the same tortured forms. Sow the same seeds of rapacious license and oppression over again, and it will surely yield the same fruit of its kind" (362). This is true to Dickens's story but simplistic as history. **Use Doyle's *Oxford History* as the most respected academic textbook, Schama's *Citizens* as the most learned narrative for a general readership, or both to complicate a historical fiction of impoverished and oppressed commoners rising up against opulent and wickedly exploitative aristocrats. If not that, then what? What factors do historians now consider to have been most salient as causes of the Revolution?**

Week #4 The Estates General and the Parliamentary Revolution through June 1789
Read Doyle, *History*, 86-107; Schama, *Citizens*, 288-368.

02/02 Mon. Relative Deprivation and the Politicization of Discontent in the Cahiers
02/04 Wed. The Usurpation of Sovereignty by the Assembly and the Tennis Court Oath
02/06 Fri. The Abortive Reaffirmation of Royal Authority and of the Society of Orders

Week #5 The National Assembly and the Popular Revolution, July-August 1789
Read Doyle, *Oxford History*, 108-15; Schama, *Citizens*, 369-437.

02/09 Mon. Paris: Bread Prices, Political Anxieties, Military Threats, and the Bastille
02/11 Wed. The Countryside: Rural Riots, Agrarian Rebellion, and the Great Fear
02/13 Fri. The Night of August 4 and the Decrees of August 10 and August 11

Week #6 Revolutionary Ideals, Women's Action, and Turning Point I (October 1789)
Read Doyle, *Oxford History*, 116-23; Schama, *Citizens*, 437-71.

02/23 Mon. The Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, August 26, 1789
02/25 Wed. The October Days I: Women Leading Men, for Once?
02/27 Fri. The October Days II: Men Using Women?

Week #7 Great Essays or Good Enough to Get By? Inspired Genius or Silly Woman?
No new textbook reading.

03/02 Mon. **Midsemester examination** (unexcused absence risks zero-grade failure)
03/04 Wed. Olympe de Gouges and *The Rights of Woman* (1791)

Week #8 Turning Points II and III: 1790 and 1791
Read Doyle, *Oxford History*, 123-83; Schama, *Citizens*, 472-609.
Required prospectus for optional term paper; see above, page 2.

03/09 Mon. Revolutionary Legislation, the Catholic Church, and Religious Schism
03/11 Wed. The Flight to Varennes, the King's Declaration, and the Constitutional Monarchy

Week #9 Turning Points IV and V: 1792 and 1793
Read Doyle, *History*, 183-202; Schama, *Citizens*, 609-805.

03/16 Mon. Drinking, Dancing, and Marching Songs: The War and the Fall of the Monarchy
03/18 Wed. The September Massacres and the Trials of the King and of the Queen

Week #10 Hard Realities: Foreign and Domestic Enemies and the Terror as a Response
Read Doyle, *Oxford History*, 202-71, 297-317; Schama, *Citizens*, 805-47.

03/23 Mon. WWW (What Went Wrong) I: A Top-Ten List of Imperious Circumstances

03/25 Wed. Calculating the Repression of Domestic Enemies and Winning the Foreign War

4-6 pp. essay due Friday, March 27; grace period to Monday, March 30. See above, page 2, under Pre-Submissions. Stipulations: entitle the paper, paginate, double-space, 12-point font, 1.25" margins on all sides, proofread. MLA-style parenthetical documentation with works cited or Chicago-style notes with bibliography. Criteria for assessment: 1.) critical grasp of analytical problem; 2.) knowledge of Schama's chapters; 3.) structured argument; 4.) sufficient and formally correct documentation; 5.) writing.

Prescribed topic: Schama condemns the Revolution for its horrific political violence. He introduces this theme in his Preface (xv) and repeats it often in the course of his narrative. **This relentless attack culminates in his last four chapters (677-847)** and dies out only in the Epilogue with the ravings of a madwoman, a radical who had been "beaten senseless" by the yet-more-radical sisterhood of the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women (873-75). In contrast, **Doyle's "Revolution in Retrospect"** offers a potentially effective defense: **"It was resistance that made the Revolution violent"** (396). **Reconsider the specified chapters from *Citizens* in light of this proposition, Doyle's account of the period, and any relevant documentary handouts. From the execution of the King to that of Robespierre, did Republicans kill indiscriminately or did they respond violently to others? "resistance" to their Revolution?**

Week #11 Fuzzy Ideals? Trying to Make Sense of the Arch-Terrorist's Mentality
Read Doyle, *Oxford History*, 272-96, 318-68.

03/30 Mon. WWW II: Robespierre's Apocalyptic Morality and a Reign of Terror *and Virtue*

04/02 Wed. The Making of a Terrorist: Psychology, Philosophy, and History

Week #12 Coming Full Circle: Afterthoughts in the Guise of a Conclusion
Read Schama, *Citizens*, 850-75; Doyle, *Oxford History*, 391-425.

04/06 Mon. A Response to Schama's Indictment of the Revolutionaries as Hypocrites

04/08 Wed. French Assemblies and the Democratic Revolution on Saint Domingue (Haiti)

Optional term paper, due Friday, April 10. "*De l'audace, encore de l'audace, toujours de l'audace, et la France est sauvée!* Courage! More courage! Always courage, and France is saved" (Danton)! See above, p. 2, for the Fine Print. Begin early; consult frequently. Even the best projects in the best hands could take a month or longer; it would be rash, not courageous, to try to do something worthwhile in a few heroic days-and-nights on your way to the exam week. 10-15 documented pages.

The Oxford History and *Citizens* are bad models for your essays and papers in at least this way: Neither Doyle nor Schama attempts a systematic citation of documentary sources and scholarly authorities. Doyle does provide a few endnotes, but Schama does not. Because *The Oxford History* is a textbook that sets out to provide a comprehensible exposition of a complex subject without obvious pretensions of adding new knowledge or challenging received interpretations, professional historians would give Doyle a bye on further documentation. Exhaustive footnoting, if possible, would have been cumbersome and beside the point for most readers. Schama relies so much more on relatively obscure primary materials and is so much more argumentative that he has been faulted for not having provided notes; on the other hand, his practice can be defended, insofar as he is trying to bring written history out of the classroom and study, and he does append twenty-five or thirty pages on his sources. Good enough? Not for us: Meticulous documentation is essential. You must show readers the evidence that supports your argument, even if prescribed essay topics do not ask you to go beyond the assigned texts. It's that simple and that imperative.

CHICAGO-STYLE foot- or endnotes (preferred in most academic writing on history)

First note to the book in question (full name, full title, full publication data, and page or pages):

¹Simon Schama, *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution* (New York: Vintage/Random, 1989), 287.

Subsequent note, sequential or not, to this book in the same paper (surname and page(s) only):

²Schama, 8-9, 88-99.

Bibliographical entry (alpha order by author's last name):

Schama, Simon. *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution*. New York: Vintage/Random, 1989.

MLA-STYLE in-text citation (literature and humanities; efficient for our informal essays)

Parenthetical citation: If the author and the title are both explicit in your text or if the author is obvious and you list only one book by him or her, then simply do it parenthetically, like this, after any quotation marks but before the punctuation that ends the relevant sentence (287).

If author and title are not textually obvious, author's name can identify both (Schama 8-9, 88-99).

List of works cited (alpha order, as above):

Schama, Simon. *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution*. New York: Vintage/Random, 1989.