REVOLUTIONARY EUROPE, 1789-1989

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The nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Europe were a revolutionary age, not only because of the development of modern industrial society and the rise and fall of global empires, but also because political revolutions themselves proved during that period to be history’s locomotives. Analyzing why revolutions occur, how to start them, how to end them, and sometimes how to prevent them became a chief pursuit of thinkers like Edmund Burke, Karl Marx, and Hannah Arendt. But their theories of revolution didn’t always coincide with revolutionary practice. This gap between theory and practice is our general theme as we survey the intellectual and cultural history of the French Revolution, the Revolutions of 1830 and 1848, the Paris Commune of 1871, the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917, the failed revolutions of 1968, and finally the series of “velvet revolutions” that brought about the collapse of the Soviet bloc starting in 1989. Other themes include the construction of revolutionary narratives and catechisms; the formation of revolutionary subjects (e.g., the working class, oppressed minorities, dissidents); the writing of manifestos and programs; revolutionary tactics (e.g., conspiracy, propaganda, violence); and the relationship between vanguard parties and mass movements. Together we’ll read a graphic biography of the Polish revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg, look at radical avant-garde artwork, and listen to the militant songs that inspired past generations of revolutionary Europe.

Grading components:

– participation – 15%
– short paper #1 – 25% (due in Week II)
– short paper #2 – 25% (due in Week IV)
– final paper – 35% (due after Week V)

You must complete all components in order to pass the course.

Attendance and participation requirements:

You must attend lectures and discussion sections. Any unexcused absence from section will result in a failing grade for the course, per Summer Session policy. In addition, you should participate actively during class/section discussion. If you are unable or reluctant to do this in front of the class, then as an alternative please come to office hours on a regular basis to talk to me and/or your section leader.

Paper assignments:

Short papers should be 3 pages long (ca. 1,000 words) and formatted with 12 pt. serif font, 2.0 spacing, ≤1.25” margins, a unique title, and page numbers. Citations in any style can appear in parentheses or footnotes, but just be consistent.

The final paper should be 6 pages long (ca. 1,800 words) with the same formatting as above.

Please use Wikipedia and other outside sources sparingly. All the information that you need to write these papers is contained in the lecture material, required reading, and course website resources.

Late paper and plagiarism policies:

Each day late will result in a deduction of one-half letter grade. Extensions will be hard to come by, but if you need one, then please ask well in advance of the due date.
Neither the university nor I tolerate plagiarism, but many instances of it are unintentional. Be sure you know how to properly cite other people’s words and ideas. Inform and protect yourself: http://writing.yalecollege.yale.edu/advice-students/using-sources/understanding-and-avoiding-plagiarism

Required books:

– Kate Evans, Red Rosa: A Graphic Biography of Rosa Luxemburg (Verso, 2015)

Please only use these editions. The remainder of the assigned readings will be available as PDFs on the course website.

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**WEEK I: The French Revolution as Model**

The modern concept of revolution arose out of a specific political context, but we often attach it to non-political things: the Scientific Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, cultural revolution, etc. What makes the concept of revolution so versatile? What makes it modern? Also, why start this course with 1789 instead of 1688, 1640, or even 1517? After defining revolution as a modern phenomenon, we begin with the foundational event of this course’s history: the French Revolution. What was the old regime in Europe? How did the French revolutionaries imagine a new regime to replace it? Our themes include the significance of writing a new constitution, the establishment of democratic legitimacy, and the Revolution’s problem of reconciling the general will of the people with the particular will of the state. As the Revolution progressed, it became increasingly radical and violent. Foreign wars and domestic civil war complicated the political goals of the revolutionary elite. Attempts to purify the Revolution through popular tribunals led to dictatorship and state terrorism, which in turn bolstered counter-revolutionaries’ moral cause. Did the Revolution have a kind of logic that led inevitably to the Terror? How did the left-center-right political spectrum arise?

**Meeting 1**

*required:* Hannah Arendt, Ch. 4-5 of On Revolution (1963)

*in class:* La Marseillaise (song, 1792)
Jacques-Louis David, revolutionary paintings (late C18)

**Meeting 2**

“Law of Suspects” (1793)

*in class:* Ah! ça ira (song, 1790)
La Carmagnole (song & dance, 1792)

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**WEEK II: The Social Question & Revolutionary Traditions**

While in 1789 the emphasis of the revolutionary motto liberté, égalité, fraternité lay on liberty, the Revolutions of 1830 and 1848 turned increasingly toward the problem of social equality. These mid-19th-century upheavals served as the backdrop for Karl Marx’s theory of revolution, which synthesized German idealism, English economics, and French political savvy. How does Marx’s theory sound to us today? What lessons had he learned between writing The Communist Manifesto (1848) and The Eighteenth Brumaire (1852)? Marx was also attentive to the phenomenon of
revolutionary modeling. European militants explicitly drew on styles and traditions established by past revolutions. Fight songs, liberty caps, raised fists, red flags, barricades, banners, charging crowds: all of these popular symbols of revolution developed historically as concrete practices. How do such traditions survive in the collective unconscious even after the revolutionary event? Our chief example is the Paris Commune of 1871, with particular attention to the revolutionary transformation (and preservation) of gender roles.

Meeting 3

required:
*Hannah Arendt, Ch. 2 of On Revolution (1963)

in class:
Eugène Delacroix, revolutionary paintings (mid-C19)
barricade scene from Les Misérables (BBC, 2018)

Meeting 4

required:

in class:
L’Internationale (song, 1871/88)

--- short paper #1 due ---

**WEEK III: The Russian Revolution as a New Model**

The Russian Revolution of 1905 proved to many Europeans that the 19th century’s authoritarian order was crumbling. World War I removed any doubts, and the October Revolution of 1917 replaced 1789 as the world’s revolutionary model par excellence. Furthermore, these events divided the international labor movement and thus unlocked (if not quite opened) the door to fascism in the 1920s and 30s. Did the revolutionary events of 1917 follow the model of the French Revolution 130 years before? Could the new Russian model in turn work for the rest of Europe? Our readings focus on the life of Rosa Luxemburg, a Polish-German intellectual who worked tirelessly for workers’ emancipation and world revolution. Her career involved underground resistance, disputes with Lenin and other leading communists, imprisonment, and a tragic death at the hands of reactionary vigilantes. As an indirect consequence of the Russian Revolution, the Spanish Civil War in the mid-1930s seemed to confirm for European militants the sad necessity of “playing dirty” with violence, conspiracy, and deceit. But debate over proper behavior and tactics spanned the entire history of Revolutionary Europe. Are any means, including violence, justified in pursuit of revolutionary ends?

Meeting 5

required:
Kate Evans, 1st half of Red Rosa (2015)

in class:
scenes from Battleship Potemkin, dir. Sergei Eisenstein (1925)
scenes from Rosa Luxemburg, dir. Margarethe von Trotta (1986)
El Lissitzky, Kazimir Malevich, et al., avant-garde artwork (1917-20s)

Meeting 6

required:
Kate Evans, 2nd half of Red Rosa (2015)

in class:
scenes from Earth, dir. Alexander Dovzhenko (1930)
“A las barricadas,” “¡Ay Carmela!,” and other songs of the Spanish Civil War (1936-39)
Diego Rivera, revolutionary murals (1930s)

WEEK IV: The Global Sixties

In the 1960s, extra-parliamentary opposition groups in the West consolidated into a large movement that pushed for radical reforms. In May 1968, French students and workers took to the streets in the country’s largest general strike ever. Meanwhile, reformists in Prague around Alexander Dubček peacefully displaced the hardline communist government and tried to steer Czechoslovakia toward democratic socialism. Anti-authoritarian slogans, revolutionary hopes, and utopian dreams filled the air everywhere until tear gas and tanks brought an abrupt end to it all. What are we to make of the hopes (political, cultural, aesthetic) and profound disillusionment of 1968 and its aftermath? A major component of the 1960s in Western Europe was a fascination with anticolonial struggles in the Third World. Guerrilla movements in Latin America, Africa, and Asia made Che and Mao into household names. What role did Third Worldism play in the revolutionary imagination of European militants in the late ’60s? How did conditions differ in the metropoles versus the former colonial periphery? We also discuss the long-term legacy of Sixties counterculture.

Meeting 7

Ulrike Meinhof, “From Protest to Resistance,” konkret (May 1968)

in class: The Beatles, “Revolution” (song, 1968)
The Rolling Stones, “Street Fighting Man” (song, 1968)
scenes from The Legend of Rita, dir. Volker Schlöndorff (2000)

--- short paper #2 due ---

Meeting 8

required: Frantz Fanon, “Concerning Violence,” The Wretched of the Earth (1961), plus preface by Jean-Paul Sartre

in class: scenes from The Battle of Algiers, dir. Gillo Pontecorvo (1966)
scenes from La Chinoise, dir. Jean-Luc Godard (1968)

--- field trip to the Beinecke Library to view French revolutionary art from May 1968 ---

WEEK V: The Fall of Communism & the Future of Revolutionary Europe

As the West prospered, the Soviet Union tried to adjust to the new economic and geopolitical situation of the late 1980s. And then, suddenly, the people of the East rose up in peaceful protest and open revolt against communism. The most symbolic image of 1989 was the tearing down of the Berlin Wall, which had divided the city for almost thirty years. Buried under that graffiti-stained concrete rubble, however, lay many unanswered questions. Could Soviet communism have reformed itself in the 1970s and 80s? What did the end of the communist experiment in Europe mean for the history of Revolutionary Europe as a whole? We now revolve back to our discussion of definitions and chronologies of Revolutionary Europe during our first meeting. What does an examination of our own standpoint in the 21st century tell us about how we’ve understood revolution over the past two centuries? Do the Indignados, Occupy, Arab Spring, Euromaidan, and the Gilets Jaunes fit into the
historical category of revolution? What’s different? Might future “regime change” occur outside the framework of revolution?

Meeting 9

- **required**: *Timothy Garton Ash, The Magic Lantern* (1990)
- **in class**: Nena, “99 Luftballons” (1983)

Meeting 10

- **in class**: news footage of Arab Spring, Indignados, Gilets Jaunes, etc.

--- final paper due (date TBD) ---