

EUROPEAN HISTORY

Table of Contents

1. Introduction: European Modernity	3
1.2 Reasons to study history	3
1.2 The long 19 th Century (E.Hobsbawn)	3
1.3 Modernity – what’s in a name?	4
2. Interpreting the French Revolution	6
2.1 Context of the French Revolution (1789-1815)	6
2.2 A series of revolutions – three stages	11
2.3 Legacy of the French Revolution	14
3. The Restoration of Conservative Europe	16
a) EXPLAINING THE FRENCH REVOLUTION	16
b) A CONSERVATIVE BACKLASH to the french revolution	17
c) COLLAPSE OF THE CONSERVATIVE ORDER:	20
4. Peace and War: International Relations	22
4.1 Democratisation 2nd half of 19th C. (Pittaluga et al., 2015)	22
4.2 Congress of Vienna System of IR (1815-1850s)	24
4.3 Break-down of the “Vienna” System (1850s-1870s) - Final pushes	26
4.4 A “balancing of antagonisms” System (1870-1914)	28
5. Nationalism	29
5.1 Nationalism: what’s in a name?	29
5.2 An ancient or modern phenomenon?	30
5.3 A typology of nationalisms – 3 kinds	33
6. Industrialisation	37
6.1 The process of industrialisation (1750-1914)	37
6.2 Three big waves	37
• 1780s-1820s: Industrial take-off: British leader (and Belgium)	37
• 1840s-1870s: Acceleration and spread: follower economies France and Germany	37
• 1890s-1900s: Laggard* economies: Russia and Italy	37
6.2.1. Wave One: British leadership: Why?	38
Wave One: Belgium industrialisation	39
6.2.2 Wave Two: follower economies (1840-1870)	41
6.2.3 Wave three: lagging behind economies (1890-1900)	42
6.3 Impact of industrialisation	43
6.4 Conclusion	44
7. The age of mass migration	45
1846-1924:	46
48 million Europeans emigrated (12% of 1900 European population)	46
7.1 General theories on mass migration	46
Three-level explanations: macro – meso – micro	46
7.2 Mass migration in the 19th century	47
Trends and figures	47
7.3 Understanding 19th C mass migration	48
The 19th century = a mobility transition?	48
Scientific revision of mobility transition thesis	49
7.4 Conclusion	50
8. Secularisation	51
8.1 Secularisation (Swatos & Christiano article)	51

I. Modernity and the secular	51
II. Revisions to secularisation theory.....	54
III. Secularism as a political project.....	55
8.2 Cultural changes (Blanning textbook).....	56
I. Nationalism & the sacralisation of “the people”	56
II. Industrialisation & the commercialisation of arts	57
III. Birth of mass consumer culture	57
IV. A plurality of artistic styles	57
8.3 Conclusion	58
9. European expansionism and imperialism: The Scramble from Below – Guest Lecture Prof. Benoît Henriet.....	59
9.1 Colonial empires.....	59
9.1.1. Imperial self – representations.....	59
9.1.2 Imperial ignorance and the making of otherness.....	59
9.2 The Congo Free State.....	59
9.2.1 “Progress”, free trade and “freedom”: the making of a “personal colony”	59
9.2.2 Violence and profit-making: the story of a “global” scandal	60
To sum up: was the Congo Free State “worse” than other colonies?	61
10. Democratisation and the workers’ movement – Guest Lecture Prof. Samuel Hayat .Error! Bookmark not defined.	
11. The First World War.....	62
11.1 Intro to the First World War (1914-1918)	62
11.2 The Blame Question: causes and responsibilities for WWI.....	67
11.3 The “Short War Illusion”: trench warfare and attrition	68
11.5 Conclusion	71
12. The road to the Second World War Conclusion	72

Introduction: European Modernity

1. Introduction: European Modernity

1.2 Reasons to study history

To escape the present, nostalgia, a longing for “what is forever lost”

Risk: the “pastness of the past” and overstating rupture/discontinuity

To learn lessons from the past –how to deal with moral dilemma

Risk: biases in what counts as the “great men and women of history”

To identify structural laws – Teleology (Marx/Fukuyama)

Risk: causality and the risk of overdetermination

For political or ideological purposes

Examples: a selection mechanism in higher education; nationalist projects; Post-colonial “reclaiming of the past”

Risk: conflation science and politics

1. To understand change and how “the present” came to be
- Understand continuity and change
 - Understand institutionalisation and revolution/transformation

“For every institution or value that disappears or is changed, another remains the same” – T.C.W. Blanning (2001)

2. Put the present day into perspective, to dismantle its “for granted” (obvious, or natural) character
- To acknowledge the power struggles that are the basis of today’s institutions, ways of life, etc.
 - To question uniformity of European experience
 - To “provincialise” Europe; to account for multiple paths/meanings of “modernity”
 - Dipesh Chakrabarty (2008): critique on “**historicism**”
 - **Historicism** = the idea that “to understand anything, it has to be seen both as a unity and in its historical development”
- As if there is a singular, linear trajectory to modern civilisation*

Limitations of linear and singular conceptions of history: **imaginary waiting rooms**: one man’s present becomes another man’s future.

Example: **John Stuart Mill** (1806-1873): On Liberty / On Representative Government

- Proclaimed self-rule as the highest form of government and yet argued against giving Indians or Africans self-rule.
- According to Mill, Indians or Africans were *not yet* civilised enough to rule themselves. Some historical time of development and civilisation (colonial rule and education, to be precise) had to elapse before they could be considered prepared for such a task.
- Mill’s historicist argument thus consigned Indians, Africans and other ‘rude’ nations to an imaginary waiting-room of history.

Of particular relevance for the 19th century – “the birth of modern Europe”

- A tendency to mask the heterogeneity of the “European” experience
- A tendency to attribute a singular meaning to “modernity” and a singular trajectory to “modernity”

1.2 The long 19th Century (E.Hobsbawn)

1789 the collapse of French absolutist monarch ——— the eruption of the First World War in 1914

- From a *society of orders* (“estates”) to a *society of classes*
- Popular sovereignty and new modes of political legitimation
- Economic and social transformation
- Demographic explosion and mass migration

- Dramatic changes in the political landscape
Birth of new European powers: unification of Italy and Germany
The consolidation of nation-states and imperialism
The incorporation of the masses in politics

The normative pulse of Europe's narrative of "modernity"

The 19th century is often conceived as the era that put the "Enlightenment ideals" into practice.

"What is the Enlightenment? There is no official answer, because the era named by Kant's essay was never demarcated by opening and closing ceremonies like the Olympics, nor are its tenets stipulated in an oath or creed."

- Steven Pinker (2018)

18th century Enlightenment as a bridge-head between

- 17th century: scientific revolutions and the age of Reason
- 19th century political, socio-economic and cultural changes (industrialisation, urbanisation, secularisation, democratisation,...)

Associated with core values; linked to the "modern condition":

- Reason: as opposed to divine conditions and imperatives
- Science: evidence-based judgments
- Humanism: universal ideals, such as equality, liberty that apply to all humans
- Progress: human-made systems (government, market, international institutions) for the betterment of the human condition
- Peace: belief in our ability to design peaceful cohabitation

On either side of the Atlantic, groups of public intellectuals have issued a call to arms. The besieged citadel in need of defending, they say, is the one that safeguards science, facts and evidence-based policy. The white knights of progress – such as the psychologist Steven Pinker and the neuroscientist Sam Harris – condemn the apparent resurgence of passion, emotion and superstition in politics. The bedrock of modernity, they tell us, is the human capacity to curb disruptive forces with cool-headed reason. What we need is a reboot of the Enlightenment, now".

- Henry Martyn Lloyd (2018)

- "White knights" present a selective reading of the Enlightenment
- Enlightenment thinkers, especially French intellectuals, placed a high value on the role of sensibility, feeling and desire.
- **Hegel** (1770-1831): emphasis on rationality produces citizens who are alienated, dispassionate and estranged from nature
- **David Hume** (1711-1776): morality is grounded in sense-experience: we judge the good/beautiful directly and without need of reason
- 19th century romanticism, nationalism and fascism
"science can explain everything, but understands nothing"

1.3 Modernity – what's in a name?

a) A category of historical periodisation

The modernisation paradigm (sociology, 1960s)

Modernisation = the transformation from a traditional, rural, agrarian society to a secular, urban, industrial society

Macro-structural changes:

- Rationalisation, industrialisation and urbanisation (from feudalism to capitalism)
- Birth of nation-states and institutions of democratisation (representative democracy, modern bureaucracy, public education)

Micro-individual changes – birth of "modern man"

- Reason-giving rather than tradition and habit

Introduction: European Modernity

- Individualism, freedom and formal equality, meritocracy
- Faith in social, scientific and technological progress and human perfectability and rationality

b) A quality of social experience – a heightened sensitivity to what is unique about the present

Modernity = the self-definition of a generation about its own technological innovations, governance, and socio-economics

= a particular relationship to time, characterised by intense historical discontinuity or rupture, openness to the novelty of the future, and a heightened sensitivity to what is unique about the present

“We are weighted down, every moment, by the conception and sensation of Time.”

– Charles Baudelaire

Modernus: “of today” (as opposed to something that has past)

Reinhart Koselleck (1979) *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*

- “der Moderne”, “les temps modernes”, “Neuzeit”, “Nieuwe tijd”: a temporal distinction, yet one claiming a distinctive breach with the past
- A historical consciousness about the radical newness of the times and its transformation into a general model of social experience
 - An ability to conceive of a future as distinct from the present and past
- 18th C. Enlightenment: a qualitative claim about the newness of the times; valorising substantive changes

c) An (incomplete) project

Modernity = a paradoxical form of temporality as in a sociohistorical sense, *all modernities grow old*

To remain “off today”, modernity needs to constantly re-establish itself in relation to an ever-expanding past.

As a result of such “updates”, modernity becomes less of a concept to describe a historical period and more of a qualitative criterion to express a desired present/future

“Modernity is a qualitative, not a chronological, category”

Theodor Adorno (1903-1969)

As part of the project of “updating” our relationship to the past:

There is a tendency to:

- Associate meanings of “modernity”, “modern man” with *normative values*, ideals and beliefs
- Re-interpret the past as a logical and orderly path to a cherished present (*linear account of history*)
- Define modernity in terms of “progress” or “development”
 - “Progress” = defined in terms of the projection of certain people’s present as other people’s futures (*singular account of history*)

European History is an attempt to:

- Describe the factual specificity of 19th Century Europe
- Account for the diversity of European experiences
- Showcase the limitations of determinist accounts of “modernisation”
- Acknowledge the non-linear character of key evolutions and trends

Questions to help you study:

- Can we have objective historical knowledge?
- Is modernity a chronological or a qualitative category?
- What do we mean by modernity?

- Why do we speak of multiple modernities?
- Why study modern European history?

2. Interpreting the French Revolution

2.1 Context of the French Revolution (1789-1815)

Period that is defining for the development of modernity in Europe.

Not the first revolution in its kind

- **Glorious Revolution** (1688-1689, England): Abdication of Catholic king and replacement by Protestant king
- **The American Revolution** (1775-1783): American independence from Great-Britain (No taxation without representation, want for independence)

Impact of these revolutions:

- England: breach with tradition of “divine right to rule” of kings – switch is crucial! Pope as representative of god and earth – shares power with king or royal family. Kings as a spokespersons and representative of god – devine right to rule. Within the protestant church and tradition there is a greater emphasis on every religious person – completely different hierarchies. No more absolute devine right to rule! For the first time he is being held accountable. If no Roman Catholic could be king, then no kingship could be unconditional.
- USA: rights of representation and revolt against “unjust” rule

John Locke (1689) **Two Treatises of Government**

Intended to clarify position of british monarchy – case for constitutional monarchy

Writtend before and during the glorious revolution – not only an afterthought.

Two main premises (at the time revolutionary)

- No government can be justified by one’s appeal to *the divine right* of Kings
- Legitimate government needs to be founded on the *consent of the governed*

Social contract theorist –justification for the “state”:

- Alternative, new view on mans behaviour: State of Nature – rational man (peaceful view on humanity) as a liberal philosphers **Locke** attached great value to humans peace keeping ability – very different to **Hobbes** state of nature (conflict, constant warfare with each orther, enabling absolutism)
- Civil government founded on popular sovereignty (transferral of soverignty from personal to public) – governmnet is needed for facilitating

Run-up to the French Revolution

1. Economics – Financial Bankruptcy

- Louis XIV (“Sun King”) mass expenditures – Palace of Versailles
- French campaign (financial) in support of the American Revolution
- Seven Year War (England/France): loss of many colonies (North-America, Louisiana, Carribean Islands, trading posts Indian subcontinent, Senegal...)
- Timing on continent: Poor harvests, famine, and already harsh taxes and income inequalities

2. Politics: struggle with provincial courts: “parlements”

2. Interpreting the French Revolution

- Louis XVI: inherited struggle with provincial courts who held the right to appeal to the King's edicts¹
- The dismissal of **Jacques Necker**, controller-general of Finance
 - Necker was critical of tax exemptions for nobility and clergy
 - Favours borrowing money abroad; rather than increasing (already high) taxes on commoners (would decrease international power)
 - Public sharing of these ideas were not looked at happily by aristocracy
- The gamble of **Louis XVI** (1787-88)
 - Proposes a "land tax" on all land-holders (including nobility), directly targets aristocracy
 - "Assembly of Notables" called together by the king in the assumption that they would support him - rejects the King's proposal - "not something to decide for us"
 - King attempts to bypass them; by calling for a meeting of the *Estates-General* (*hadnt met in more 150 years*)
 - Instigates discussions on institutional design (how to organize parliament?,...)...leading to French Revolution

a) *Ancien regime system – economic system of france*

- Demographic growth
 - 1700: 20 million — 1780: approaching 25 to 28 million (population growth)
 - An agricultural nation with 80% of the French people live on the countryside
 - 20% live in urban areas (Paris); only eight cities with a mass - population over 50.000 people
 - Paris: 650.000 people
- Non-industrialised
 - Agriculture = 75% of all production
 - But low in productivity and efficiency (labour intensive, out-dated methods)
 - Small estates (inheritance laws)
 - Only large-scale farming around Paris
 - Failed to keep up with demographic growth
- Geography
 - A jigsaw of land; result of previous conquests
 - 1664: Saint-Domingue (today's Haiti)
 - 1770: Corsica
- Famine
 - 1780s: Poor harvests
 - 1788: harsh winter (57 straight days of frost in Paris); followed by floods
 - Food shortages in cities
 - Ban on food exports, import of 148,000 tonnes of cereal and grain
 - Rising bread prices: 70-90% of the daily wage of an unskilled worker

"The [French] country is a heap of ashes. Grass is scarcely to be seen and all sorts of grain is short, thin, pale and feeble, while the flax is quite dead... I pity this people from my soul... No green peas, no salad, no vegetables to be had upon the road, and the sky is still as clear, dry and cold as ever. The flocks of sheep and herds of cattle stalk about the fields like droves (herds) of walking skeletons."

John Adams, US diplomat², 1775

= conditions for discontent are given by economics and are fuelled by politics

Politics

¹ an official order or proclamation issued by a person in authority.

² and 2nd US president (1797-1801)

- King ruled by divine right
 - Some restrictions on King's power via moral and divine laws, customs, principles of administration
 - Decision-making with King's³ council (consultative prerogatives)
- Absolutist rule = absence of a constitution
 - Precise codes and rules varied across regional courts (legal pluralism) (written in the north, oral in the south) – unpredictable and arbitrary legal system – heightening discontent
- An intendency system
 - Great centralisation of power via system of provincial *intendants* (non-hereditary⁴)
 - Supervision & enforcement of the King's will (no interest communication)
 - Power over policing, financing, justice

King wants to raise taxes, meets resistance from aristocracy.

"Parlements" = source of resistance against absolutist rule

- = provincial courts of appeal (judiciary power)
- Historical origin: King's council – former advisory body
 - "droit de remontrance": power to appeal to royal edicts
 - From 15th century onwards: election of three deputies/town (a noble, an ecclesiastic, a burgess)
 - 13 parlements but very uneven districts (size and population)
 - Paris court approx. 1/3 of France + very critical of King's edicts (very big powerhouse) biggest source of protest

Timeline: growing challenge to the King's divine rights

1667: **Louis XIV** weakens right to appeal; later bans all "unrespectful appeals"

1766: **Louis XV** "flagellation" speech in Paris Parliament:

Reminds parliaments of his divine right to rule

Reduces practice to a one time appeal + only short delay of royal edicts

1771 "**coup de Majesté**": reform of justice system; strictly defined system of appeals

Louis XVI restores right to appeal – quest for popularity; but rising use challenges King's authority

Louis XV : **Flagellation speech** to Parliament of Paris (1766)

"In my person alone lies that sovereign power whose very nature is the spirit of counsel, justice, and reason. From me alone the courts receive their existence and their authority. The fullness of this authority, which they exercise in my name only, remains permanently vested in me, and its use can never be turned against me. Legislative power is mine alone, without subordination or division. It is by my sole authority that the officers of my courts effect, not the creation of the law, but its registration, promulgation and execution, and that they have the right of remonstrance, as is the duty of good and faithful counsellors. Public order in its entirety emanates from me. I am its supreme guardian. My people are one with me, and the rights and interests of the nation – which some dare to make into a body separate from the monarch – are of necessity united with my own and rest entirely in my hands."

People can't be separated from the king. No distinction between the sovereign, the ruler and the people. No one like the king has the same relationship to the people, no one can speak for him. References the ideas of Thomas Hobbes, without him, society is lost. Revolutionaries rely on John Locke: right to rule should be given by the people.

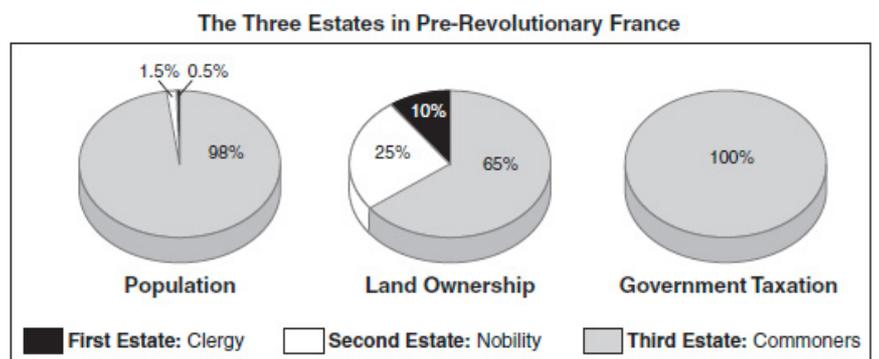
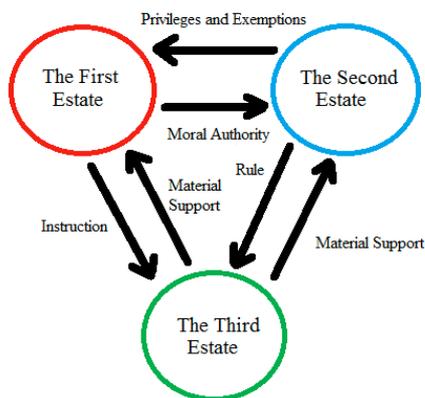
Estates-General	legislative body (parliament like) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The legislative or consultative assembly of the three estates, linked to different functions in society
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³ Flagellation = whipping, lashing; whipping parliaments back into shape.

⁴ Not enabling power centers as children are not automatically the followers

2. Interpreting the French Revolution

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advisory body to the King; presenting petitions (“cahiers”) from the three estates (especially on fiscal policies) Late 15th Century: elective character (third estate) incompatible with the divine right of kings Met only intermittently, on the King’s initiative <p>Last meeting = 1614...and then, in 1789</p>
PRAYER	<p>First estate = Catholic clergy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All property (5-10% of the land) was tax exempted
MILITARY	<p>Second estate = Nobility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sheer monopoly over higher administrative, military functions, higher church offices, etc. Exempted from most taxes
WORK	<p>Third estate = Commoners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Great diversity: capitalist bourgeoisie (merchants, royal administration), skilled workers/craftsmen, city workers (servants, cooks, drivers, etc.), peasants 80% of the French population were farmers Tax duties (but often, exemptions for bourgeoisie)



How is it different from a class-system?

Rigid socio-economic and political structures but:

Estates cannot be equated to distinct socio-economic groups

- Some bourgeois were wealthier than nobility
- Some nobles were capitalists (traders, commerce)

Opportunities for social mobility

- Nobility for purchase: Nobles of the robe (functionaries) vs. nobles of the sword (traditional, hereditary, nobility)
- When bourgeois acquired funds, they often quit commerce, bought land and a hereditary office; qualifying for noble status
- Inter-marriage between classes

Grey area between bourgeois and aristocracy: bourgeois lacked a shared class consciousness; wished to become nobles (rather than overthrow the system)

b) Meeting of the Estates-General

First meeting of the Estates-General since 1614: provides opportunities for:

- Widespread political participation: all male tax-payers over 25yrs are invited to elect their deputies
- Representation: deputies present *Cahiers de doléances* (lists of grievances)
- The majority of the people is in favour of the King

Yet, the debate quickly turns to organisation of the estates-general and the source of sovereign power

- Sovereignty from “above”: King’s divine right to rule
- Sovereignty from “below”: popular sovereignty

Discussion on fair representation within the estates-general:

- Parliament of Paris decision: same organisation and proceedings as in 1614: vote by estate (not by numerical strength): 2 to 1 logic
- “Doubling of the Third Estate” as counterbalance
 1. 610 deputies for Third Estate
 2. 303 deputies for the First Estate; 291 deputies for the Second Estate
- Continued critique by the Third Estate
 1. 1st and 2nd estates want to convene in three separate meetings
 2. 3rd estate does not accept “vote by estate” and wants a collective deliberation (a “people’s assembly”)

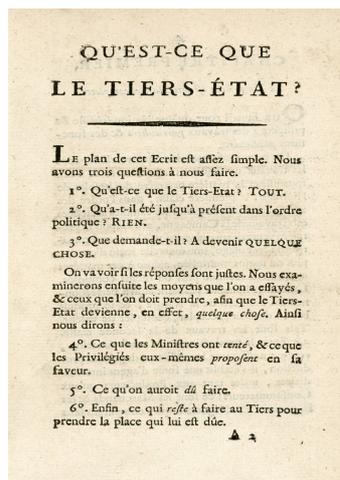
Pamphlets: What is the third estate? (feb 1789)

- **Abbé Sieyès (Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès): What is the Third Estate?**
 - A plea for a **numerical count**: majority decision rule
 - Conception of **popular sovereignty** (Rousseau): Third estate is “the people” (= community of equals)
 - **Equality**: clergy/nobility can only join the nation when abandoning their privileges

“1° What is the Third Estate? EVERYTHING.

2° What has it hitherto meant in the political order?
NOTHING.

3° What are its demands? To become SOMETHING.”



Tennis Court Oath (20.06.1789)

- 3rd Estate declares itself the *Nationalist Assembly of People* (17.06.1789)
- Tennis Court Oath: 3rd Estate members constitute themselves as a legitimate authority equal to that of the King. They vow:
 - "not to separate, and to reassemble wherever circumstances require, until the constitution of the new parliament is established"
 - "we are here by the will of the people and we shall leave only by the force of the bayonets"
- 27.06.1789: support across the country, royal party gives in
- 9.07.1789: reconstitution as the National Constituent Assembly

From elites to the masses – timeline

Storming of the Bastille (14 July 1789)

- Political unrest (placement of troops outside Versailles)
- Bastille represented the power of the king
- Accompanied by mobs, riots, support of French Guard (only 7 prisoners – symbolic movement)
- Rise of republican, anti-royal sentiment