

**University of Wisconsin-Madison
Department of History
Spring 2008**

**HISTORY 223
French Intellectuals in the 20th Century: Ideology and Identity**

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Lectures: MWF 12:05-12:55
1217 Humanities

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

In the course of the 20th century, few countries in Europe experienced so prolonged a period of open intellectual debate and vitality as France. France's unique social and cultural landscape helped transform intellectuals into highly visible public figures, and facilitated the dissemination of their theories to a broad segment of the population. This transmission of knowledge and values played a significant role in defining how French people justified their actions in politics and society. Thus, intellectuals—as both keen observers and active participants in the shaping of French civic life—afford an excellent window into the country's recent past.

This course approaches the history of intellectuals as a means to explore and analyze the development of key movements and institutions that shaped French society, politics, and culture in the 20th century. It focuses on debates pertaining to issues of *ideology* and *identity* (political, national, religious, ethnic, and sexual), paying special attention to the interplay between the world of ideas and the events taking place in society contemporaneously. The class charts the trajectories of major schools of thought (existentialism, structuralism, and postmodernism) as well as ideological currents (Marxism, fascism, and Gaullism), which deeply impacted the ways in which French people understood the world around them and how they acted in society. In this regard, the course analyzes the origins and evolution of debates pertaining to the nature and imperative of socio-political “engagement”. We will also examine the ways in which ideology and ideas about identity were transmitted within society (through print culture, the mass media, and higher education).

The first two-thirds of the course follow a broadly chronological progression, tracing major events in French and European history. The last third of the semester will be devoted to considering major thematic topics that garnered significant attention from intellectuals across the period: the Jewish question, the United States and Americanization, immigration, gender and sexuality, and popular culture. Approaching the history of French intellectuals from these multiple perspectives allows us to shed light on both the specific debates and broader trends that shaped this period.

REQUIREMENTS:

This course will be reading intensive, placing an emphasis on primary sources of a variegated nature (theoretical essays, press polemics, novels, plays, and memoirs), though we will also explore selected secondary sources that have helped define the study of French intellectuals. At the end of each week, we will step back from the normal lecture sequence in order to pursue an in-depth group discussion of the course readings.

All students will write two 5-6 page papers in the course of the semester, two 1-sentence assignments, and take a final exam. Each of the 5-6 page papers will count for 30% and the final exam for 25% of your grade. The final 15% of your grade will be determined by the 1-sentence assignments as well as your attendance and participation in the course throughout the semester.

REQUIRED BOOKS:

Julien Benda, *Treason of the Intellectuals* (New York: Transaction Publishers, 2006).
Tony Judt, *The Burden of Responsibility: Blum, Camus, Aron, and the French Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).
Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001)
Kristin Ross, *May '68 and Its Afterlives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).
Bernard-Henri Lévy, *American Vertigo* (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2007).
Alain Finkielkraut, *The Defeat of the Mind* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

All required books will be available for purchase at the University Book Store. They will be available on 3-hour reserve at H.C. White Library as well. There will also be a course packet containing the other readings (indicated as “reader” on syllabus), which can be purchased at the Humanities Copy Center or borrowed from the reserve collection at H.C. White.

SYLLABUS AND WEEKLY READINGS:

Week 1 (Jan. 23-25), Origins and Identity of the Modern French Intellectual

Reading:

Michael Burns, France and the Dreyfus Affair (reader)

Emile Zola: “*J'accuse!*” (93-102); *Le Siècle*, “Call to Women” (112-113); Gyp “*Les Izolâtres*” (115-116); Charles Maurras, “First Blood” (122-123); Jacques Chirac, “Letter on the Centenary of ‘*J'accuse!*’” (191-192).

Jeremy Jennings, “Introduction: Mandarins and Samurais: The Intellectual in Modern France,” in Jeremy Jennings, ed., *Intellectuals in Twentieth-Century France: Mandarins and Samurais*, 1-32 (reader).

Week 2 (Jan. 28-Feb. 1), Intellectuals at Home and Abroad in the Interwar Period (Pacifism, Republicanism, and Fascism)

Reading:

Julien Benda, *Treason of the Intellectuals*, 43-78, 98-101, 158-166, 175-177, 181-186 (top), & 191-203.

*****Note: There will be a reading day on Friday, Feb. 1 in lieu of lecture*****

Week 3 (Feb. 4-8), On Behalf of “True France” – Intellectuals Examine their Consciences in the 1930’s and 1940’s

Reading:

Tony Judt, *The Burden of Responsibility*: Chapter 1, “The Prophet Spurned: Léon Blum and the Price of Compromise”, 29-85.

Vercors, *The Silence of the Sea*, 71-97 (reader).

Week 4 (Feb. 11-15), From the Ivory Tower to the Underground, and out onto the Street – Intellectuals and the Liberation of France

Reading:

Jean-Paul Sartre, “Existentialism is a Humanism”, in Walter Kaufmann, ed., *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, 345-369 (reader).

Jean-Paul Sartre, “The Wall”, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, 281-299 (reader).

Albert Camus, “The Myth of Sisyphus”, in *The Myth of Sisyphus and other essays*, 119-123 (reader).

Albert Camus, “The Guest”, in *Exile and the Kingdom*, 85-109 (reader).

*****One sentence assignment due Friday, 02/15*****

Week 5 (Feb. 18-22), Arguing Revolution – The Rise of Communism and the Decline of France’s Colonial Empire in the 1950’s

Reading:

Tony Judt, *The Burden of Responsibility*: Chapter 2, “The Reluctant Moralist: Albert Camus and the Discomforts of Ambivalence”, 87-135.

Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 29-53.

Week 6 (Feb. 25-29), Anti-Colonialists and Gaullists – A Precarious Ideological Balance?

Reading:

Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 54-78.

Henri Alleg, *The Question*, 39-102 & 113-122 (reader).

*****Six page paper due Monday, 02/25*****

Week 7 (Mar. 3-7), Institutions of Intellectual Culture

Reading:

Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, eds., “Postmodernism and the Crisis of Modernity”, in *Telling the Truth About History*, 198-237 (reader).

Michel Foucault, "The Archaeology of Knowledge: Introduction," in Jacques Revel and Lynn Hunt, eds., *Histories: French Constructions of the Past, Postwar French Thought, Volume I*, 202-216 (reader).

Week 8 (Mar. 10-14), From Postmodernism to Paving Stones – A New Model of Engagement and May 1968

Reading:

François Furet, "French Intellectuals: From Marxism to Structuralism", *Histories: French Constructions of the Past*, 217-230 (reader).

Kristin Ross, *May '68 and It's Afterlives*, 1-18 & 65-137.

Week 9, SPRING BREAK

No classes

Week 10 (Mar. 24-28), Dawn of the "Media Intellectual"

Reading:

Kristin Ross, *May '68 and It's Afterlives*, 138-215.

Week 11 (Mar. 31-Apr. 4), Cold War Antipathies – Anti-Totalitarianism and Anti-Americanism

Reading:

Bernard-Henri Lévy, *Barbarism with a Human Face*, 151-159 & 168-197 (reader).

François Mauriac, *De Gaulle*, 169-192 (reader).

*****One sentence assignment due Friday, 04/04*****

Week 12 (Apr. 7-11), Religion and the Republic

Reading:

François Mauriac, *De Gaulle*, 193-229 (reader).

Tony Judt, *The Burden of Responsibility*: Chapter 3, "The Peripheral Insider: Raymond Aron and the Wages of Reason", 137-182.

Week 13 (Apr. 14-18), Multiculturalism versus *La France profonde*

Reading:

Alain Finkielkraut, *The Defeat of the Mind*, 1, 51-86 & 111-135.

Week 14 (Apr. 21-25), Crossing Borders – Rethinking National and Sexual Identities

Reading:

Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 404-424, 679-715 & 716-732 (reader).

Week 15 (Apr. 28-May 2), The French Intellectual as Expert, "Expat", and Export

Reading:

Bernard-Henri Lévy, *American Vertigo*, 3-18, 106-117, 216-222, 237-256 & 275-308.

*****Six page paper due on Monday 04/28*****

Week 16 (May 5-9), A Eulogy for French Intellectuals?

Reading:

Pierre Nora, "About Intellectuals," *Intellectuals in Twentieth-Century France*, 187-198
(reader).

*****Optional review session – date/time TBA*****

*****Final exam – Tues (05/13), 10:05 am*****