

Spring Semester 1982-83

History 378

The French Revolution  
Prof. Goldberg

1. The course will be about that vast, convulsive, ever-astonishing human enterprise called the French Revolution. Calling upon rich detail and all the analytic strength we can muster, we will be concerned to explain: how it was possible for the popular classes of a semi-caste society to shatter not only the framework of social deference but the everyday routine of submission; how it came about that two revolutions developed simultaneously: the triumphant and elitist one which imposed order, the defeated and convulsively-democratic one which then passed (through innumerable channels) into the radical movements of the 19th and 20th centuries; why it was that the impact of this French upheaval vibrated far out into the world, catalyzing the first liberation movements in the colonized lands; why it was that the uncompromising dialogue between Marat and Sade (as the playwright Peter Weiss portrayed it) came to a stand-off: implying the oscillation in revolutions between the ultimate in freedom and un-freedom. All of this belongs to the 18th and 19th centuries, but no less to our times and our battered consciousness.
2. Three lectures a week. Two exams, a mid-term and a final (in each case "open book", since we're looking for reflective essays not exercises in memorization. No paper.
3. Seven excellent paperbacks as the reading.