Overview:

The eighteenth century can be regarded either as an era of stability or as an age of violent social and ideological change, depending upon your point of view. This course will examine the variety of perspectives from which we can appreciate the century between the death of Louis XIV and the defeat of Napoleon. We will begin by examining the ancien régime, paying particular attention to the ways in which the eighteenth century was still very much part of the early-modern world. Then we will focus on change, spending considerable time on the Enlightenment and then on the Revolutionary and Napoleonic periods. In keeping with historiographical tradition, this course will focus primarily on France and Britain, but we will also draw comparisons with the Netherlands, Prussia, the Habsburg monarchy and Russia.

Required Textbooks (available in the bookstore):


Grading and Assignments:

*Short essay: 25%  Due October 8
*Topic proposal: 5%. Due no later than October 29
*Research essay: 35%  Due November 14
*Final examination: 35% (to be scheduled by registrar)
The first short essay (no more than 1500 words or 6 typed pages) is based on Montesquieu’s *Persian Letters*. This is a work of imaginative fiction, but it highlights many of the leading intellectual and moral concerns of the Enlightenment. Your task will be to discuss the historical (rather than the literary) significance of this primary source. First, identify one significant theme from the book (e.g., women, law, government, religion, population, etc.) and then discuss how Montesquieu developed this theme over the course of the novel. What was Montesquieu trying to accomplish? Why did he choose to write in this fictional style? What does this source tell modern historians about the values, attitudes, preoccupations and problems of the eighteenth century? You do not have to go beyond the primary text for this essay, but if you do, make sure you cite any additional sources that you use.

The research essay (no more than 2500 words or 10 typed pages) requires you to examine a historiographical issue or controversy concerning some aspect of the Enlightenment discussed in recent scholarly works (i.e., of the last 30 or 40 years). You can start with your Goodman and Wellman reader, which contains, in addition to the dozen or so primary sources, more than 20 extracts from secondary sources published in the last few decades. You can choose to write on one of the topics discussed in these scholarly articles, OR you can develop your own historiographical topic based on an Enlightenment issue or figure that you’ve read or heard about elsewhere. What has the scholarly community said about your topic over the last several decades? What are the major issues and disagreements? (Focus on one.) Who are the major participants in the debate and what questions about the Enlightenment are they trying to answer? How have new techniques or types of evidence changed the focus or terms of the debate? If you are in doubt about what constitutes a good historiographical topic, talk to me.

Historiography is a conceptually difficult form of research, requiring a great deal of thoughtful analysis and reflection. To do well, you need to begin early. To make sure of this, you will submit a 2 page topic proposal and bibliography no later than October 29. Include a BRIEF statement of the historiographical debate or issue you will address (NOT a summary of your argument or thesis) and a preliminary bibliography of at least 4-6 substantial books and articles on your topic. Also include a list of scholarly search-engines that you have used to find your sources. This will ensure that you pick a topic that is appropriate to the course, limited in scope, and doable in the few weeks that you have to work on it.

Papers are due in class on the day indicated; late papers will be penalized 5% per working day (up to 25% per week). No electronic submissions. Your essays should conform to the standards described in the History Department’s “Guide to Essay Preparation” (available in the bookstore or online). Papers should be submitted to the instructor in person (or deposited in the Red Box by the history office before 4:30 on the due date). Make sure your paper includes a title page—your name must not appear anywhere inside the paper.

The final exam will consist of both identification and essay questions.

Weekly Topics and Readings: (this schedule is only approximate)
September 8-12: Introduction; Society during the Ancien Régime
(read Darnton, introduction and chap. 1)
September 15-19: **Eighteenth-Century Government**  
(read Darnton, chap. 2; start reading Montesquieu)

September 22-26: **Empires, Diplomacy, and War**  
(read Darnton, chap. 3)

Sept. 29-Oct. 3: **The Eighteenth-Century Economy and Urban Society**  
(read Darnton, chaps. 4 and 5)

October 6-10: **Consumer Society and Polite Culture; Art and Music**  
(read Darnton, chap. 6 and conclusion)  
*Short essay due October 8*

[October 13: Thanksgiving—no class]

October 15-22: **The Origins and Premises of Enlightenment:**  
*Newton, Locke, Deism, and Voltaire*  
(read Goodman and Wellman, introduction and parts I and II)

October 24-29: **The High Enlightenment in France:**  
*Montesquieu, Diderot, the *Encyclopédie*, and Rousseau*  
(read Goodman and Wellman, parts III and IV)  
*Topic proposal due October 29*

Oct. 31-Nov. 5: **The Enlightenment in Scotland; Enlightenments High and Low**  
(read Goodman and Wellman, part V)

[November 8-11: “Reading Days” and Remembrance Day—no classes]

November 7-14: **The Revolutionary Background: The Seven Years War, American Revolution, and the Crumbling of the French Monarchy**  
(read Goodman and Wellman, part VI)  
*Research essay due November 14*

November 17-21: **The French Revolution: The Liberal and Radical Phases**  
(begin reading Doyle)

November 24-28: **The Rise and Fall of Napoleon**  
(finish Doyle)

December 1-5: **Europe in 1815; Conclusion and Review**