Comparative Revolutions: From 1688 to the Arab Spring
Hist 72100/PSC 71909
3 credits, Thursdays, 2:00 PM – 4:00 PM
Professor Helena Rosenblatt
hrosenblatt@gc.cuny.edu
Office Hours: Skype/Zoom or in person by appointment

Course Description

What makes a revolution a revolution? Scholarship has recently moved away from social-scientific, Marxist-inspired explanations to approaches that explore how revolutionaries themselves understood what they were doing, how they interpreted their contexts, and how their ideas shaped their actions. With such questions in mind, we will look at and compare a number of revolutions, including the so-called “Glorious Revolution” of 1688, the American, French and Haitian Revolutions, the Revolutions of 1848, the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the recent Arab Spring. What characteristics did these revolutions share? What might they have learned and borrowed from each other? Is there something we can call a revolutionary “script”?

Learning Objectives:

Upon successful completion of this course, students should be able to

- Display a grasp of the key theoretical questions involved in comparing “revolutions”
- Read texts critically and effectively
- Identify and summarize ideas in texts in an articulate and persuasive manner, verbally and in writing
- Display a grasp of the history of the revolutions studied over the course of the term.

Requirements:

- Regular class participation demonstrating careful reading of all assigned texts: 30%
- One to two paragraph summaries of the weekly readings, paying particular attention to the argument of the authors. Paragraphs must be submitted to the instructor via email before 8 pm on the Tuesday before class (TEN times over the course of the term)—your grade will be outstanding, very good, good, deficient. You may get two “deficients” without penalty if you re-write the summaries: 20%
- A 10 minute class presentation on a week’s reading—a virtual appointment with the instructor to discuss your presentation ahead of time is highly recommended: 20%
- Final paper: A 10 page paper (12 pt double-spaced Times Roman) comparing three revolutions, on the theme “Is there something we can call a revolutionary “script”?—a virtual appointment with the instructor to discuss your paper before you begin writing it is highly recommended: 30%

PLEASE ASK ME IF YOU HAVE DIFFICULTY FINDING THE READINGS
1. Introduction to the Course: Comparative History and Theories of Revolution (1/26)

The scholarship analyzing “revolution” from a theoretical perspective is vast. I will introduce some of what I regard as the most important perspectives at this, our first meeting. For those interested in pursuing the topic further, there is a selection of recommended readings at the end of this syllabus.

2. The Glorious Revolution, 1688 (2/2)

Steve Pincus, 1688 The First Modern Revolution, Yale University Press, 2011.

3. The Age of Democratic Revolutions (2/9)

The foreword by David Armitage, the preface as well as chapters I-XIII

4. The American Revolution (2/16)

Jack Rakove, Revolutionaries, Mariner Books, 2010
or

5. Impact of the American Revolution (2/23)


6. The French Revolution (3/2)

Georges Lefebvre, The Coming of the French Revolution Princeton University Press, 2019

7. The Terror (3/9)

Timothy Tackett, The Coming of the Terror, Harvard University Press, 2015

8. The Haitian Revolution (3/16)

C.L.R James, The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution.
(Pages to be determined)
Alyssa Sepinwall, “Beyond the Black Jacobins. Haitian Revolutionary Historiography Comes of Age,” in *Journal of Haitian Studies*, vol 23, no 1 (Spring 2017) 4-34.


Each student should read four of the following.


David Brion Davis, “Impact of the French and Haitian Revolutions”
Seymour Drescher, “The Limits of Example”
Robin Blackburn “The Force of Example”
Laurent Dubois, “The Promise of Revolution: Saint-Domingue and the Struggle for Autonomy in Guadeloupe, 1797-1802”
Matt Childs, “A Black French General Arrived to Conquer the Island”: Images of the Haitian Revolution in Cuba’s 1812 Aponte Rebellion.”
Simon Newman, “American Political Culture and the French and Haitian Revolutions: Nathaniel Cutting and the Jeffersonian Republicans”;


**10. The Revolutions of 1848 (3/30)**


**SPRING BREAK**

**11. The Russian Revolution (4/20)**


12. **The French Revolution in Russia (4/27)**

Albert Mathiez “Bolshevism and Jacobinism” (1920), available at https://www.marxists.org/history/france/revolution/mathiez/1920/bolshevism-jacobinism.htm#n1


13. **The Arab Spring (5/4)**

Recommended: Documentary: “The Square” available on Netflix and free download on Tuby

14. **1789 and 1848 in the Arab Spring (5/11)**

Koert Debeuf, “The Arab Spring is far from over. Like the French Revolution, it could play out over decades and reshape the region.”
https://www.politico.eu/article/arab-spring-not-over-repercussions-for-middle-east-region-unrest/

Koert Debeuf, “The Arab Spring seven years on”
https://www.hurriyetedailynews.com/opinion/koert-debeuf/the-arab-spring-seven-years-on-125371_yes. compares


15. Concluding Thoughts


Rebecca Spang “How Revolutions Happen” (on Black Lives matter--and the possibility of revolution today in America):

More Readings on Theories of Revolution:

**Hannah Arendt**, *On Revolution* (Viking, 1965)


**Crane Brinton**, *Anatomy of Revolution*


E.J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution. Europe 1789-1848*


**Martin Malia**, *History’s Locomotives*, Yale University Press, 2006


**Noel Parker**, *Revolutions and History* Polity, 1999.


Perez Zagorin, “Theories of Revolution in Contemporary Historiography,” *Political Science Quarterly* 88, no. 1 (1973); pp. 23-52.