

FIRST CONSERVATIVE, WORST RADICALS:

Edmund Burke, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Thomas Paine

In his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) and in related speeches and writings against the Revolution, Edmund Burke virtually invented modern conservatism as a political philosophy. This was a truly impressive achievement by an aging MP. Mary Wollstonecraft and Thomas Paine responded immediately, defending democratic principles in her *Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790) and in his *Rights of Man* (1791). From the perspective of good conservatives, worse followed, the radical extension of these principles in her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), a foundation text for modern feminism, and in his *Rights of Man, Part Second* (1792), a similar reference point for working-class radicalism. A French Revolution was bad enough; it was much worse, even ‘worst,’ to be confronted with cogent arguments for democratization in British gender relations and the social order and well as in the sacrosanct institutions of Church and State.

Objectives and Prerequisites

I am at once an intellectual historian, as interested in past thought and the books that presented it as in the thinkers and their personal experience, and a French historian, better informed about the Revolution in France than about the Irishman it enraged or the Englishmen and –women it inspired. I hope to serve interests, including political interests, of non-majors as well as majors, although my own passions are apt to be those of the eighteenth century, not the twenty-first:

A first goal, in a college-wide curriculum that is widely perceived as being imbalanced toward liberalism, is to give Burke something like his due as the first great modern conservative. Whether that has made me or will make you a doctrinaire conservative is another matter. I have definite ideas about the Revolution and the British controversialists, both pro and con, and would be disappointed if you didn’t have ideas of your own and feel free to express them.

A second goal is to reconsider these classic texts in their real-world context, giving the history of the Revolution its due. It’s a heady subject, and some of you will have had a head start on it in History 100 (Modern Europe) or History 224 (French Revolution). Everyone gets to enjoy a pass/fail opportunity to show me what you have been able to learn from William Doyle’s *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, pp. 1-173, by the second week of the semester. Details in class.

A third goal is to provide a seminar structure within which upperclassmen and –women can undertake individual research and writing projects on related problems with professorial guidance. One great virtue of focusing on these few prominent writers is that the historian can work from well-edited and easily accessible primary sources, while also considering related scholarship on the controversial figures. This is a writing-attentive course for purposes of General Education (‘W-2’).

Books for Purchase

- Doyle, William. *The Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 2nd ed.
Oxford University Press. ISBN 978 01992 52985
- Burke, Edmund. *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. J. C. D. Clark.
Stanford University Press. ISBN 978 08047 42054
- _____, *Further Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. D. E. Ritchie.
Liberty Fund. ISBN 978 08659 70991
- Wollstonecraft, Mary. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. Miriam Brody.
Penguin. ISBN 978 01414 41252
- Paine, Thomas. *Rights of Man*, intro. Eric Foner.
Penguin. ISBN 978 01403 90155

Requirements and Course Grading

- 25% grade for 6-page analytical essay on Burke (February 17)
- 25% grade for 4-page essays on Wollstonecraft (March 20) and Paine (April 3)
- 25% grade for 12-15-page research paper on any related problem (April 13)
- 25% grade for attendance, participation, conferences, presentations, prospectus

Schedule of Readings and Classes

Burke

- Week #1 The French Revolution
Read/review Doyle, Ch. 1-7 carefully, Ch. 8-13 more summarily.
- 01/13 Tues. Our course and Doyle's history of the French Revolution through 1791,
01/15 Thurs. The Foreign War, the Regicide Republic, Civil War, and the Jacobin Terror
- Week #2 The Glorious Revolution, British Celebration, and the French Revolution
Read Price, *Discourse*; Clark, "Introduction" to Burke's *Reflections*.
- 01/20 Tues. The Glorious Revolution, the Declaration of Rights, and the Toleration Act
01/22 Thurs. Anniversary Sermons to the Revolution Society, Kippis 1788 and Price 1789
- Week #3 Burke Condemns the French Revolution
Read Burke, *Reflections*, pp. 141-256.
- 01/27 Tues. Burke's *Reflections*, Price's *Discourse*, and the Rights of Man
01/29 Thurs. Burke's October Days as History and as Pamphleteering

Week #4 'The Spirit of a Gentleman'
Read Burke, *Reflections*, pp. 256-415.

Required Friday group conferences before presentations, this week or next.

02/03 Tues. Professor on Burke and Aristocracy in France
02/05 Thurs. **Students** on Burke and Aristocracy in Britain

Week #5 'The Spirit of Religion'
No further assigned reading.

Draft of analytical essay on a Burke topic of your choice due Friday, Feb. 13.

02/10 Tues. Professor on Burke, Religion, and Irreligion in France
02/12 Thurs. **Students** on Burke and Religion in Britain

Week #6 Monarchical Government
No further assigned reading.

6-page analytical essay on Burke due Friday, Feb. 27; grace until Monday noon.
Double-space; 12-point font; 1.25 margins; title; formal documentation.

02/24 Tues. Professor on Monarchy in France and Britain
02/26 Thurs. Bibliographical Session in the Ladd Library

Wollstonecraft

Week #7 Wollstonecraft-I
Read Wollstonecraft, selected letters and *Vindication of the Rights of Men*.

2-page prospectus of hypothetical Burke research project, stating problem and suggesting lines of inquiry, due Friday, March 06; individual conferences.

03/03 Tues. Wollstonecraft and *Mary: A Fiction*: A Pre-Revolutionary, Non-Feminist Mind-set
03/05 Thurs. The *First Vindication* as a First Radical Response to Burke

Week #8 Wollstonecraft-II
Read Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.

03/10 Tues. **Students** on what must be/may be said for the *Second Vindication*
03/12 Thurs. **Students** on what must be/may be said against the *Second Vindication*

Week #9 Wollstonecraft-III
Read Godwin, *Memoirs of Wollstonecraft*.

Wollstonecraft essay due Friday, March 20, grace until Monday noon; double-space; 12-point font; 1.25 margins; number pages; title; formal documentation. For commentary before grading, pre-submit draft by Tuesday class, March 17.

03/17 Tues. MW's Life: What must/may be said for the liberated woman—and her husband

03/19 Thurs. MW's Critics: What was said against the liberated woman—and her husband

Paine

Week #10 Paine-I
Read Paine, *Rights of Man*, Part I; Burke, *Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs*.

03/24 Tues. *Rights of Man*, Part I: The Common Sense of the French Revolution

03/26 Thurs. Burke's *Appeal*

Week #11 Paine-II
Read Paine, *Rights*, Part II

Paine essay due Friday, April 03; grace until Monday noon; double-space; 12-point font; 1.25 margins; number pages; title; formal documentation. For commentary before grading, pre-submit draft by Tuesday, March 31.

03/31 Tues. Beyond Common Sense toward a Radical Vision: *Rights of Man*, Part II

04/02 Thurs. The Prosecution of Paine and the Defense of British Liberties

Week #12 Paine-III
No further reading assignment.

04/07 Tues. Paine's *Age of Reason*, Revolutionary Dechristianization, and ad hominem Attacks

04/09 Thurs. Burke and British Caricaturists

Finals Week **Term papers due Monday, April 13**, grace until Tuesday noon; double-space; 12-point font; 1.25 margins; number pages; title; formal documentation. For commentary before grading, pre-submit draft by Thursday, April 9. I will not accept or credit papers submitted after Friday noon, April 17. Research and writing projects may develop your own ideas from previous essays and presentations or may explore problems from classes and reading; all must be based substantially on primary sources and must also use some relevant scholarship.