

History 347

The Age of Discoveries: Early Modern Europe, 1450–1789

Spring 2011 | Mondays and Wednesdays, 10:00–10:50 AM | Jones 100
https://blackboard.princeton.edu/pucourse/HIS347_S2011

Prof. David Bell
303 Dickinson Hall
OH: Mon. & Wed. 11:00–12:00
dabell@princeton.edu

Prof. Adam Beaver
G21 Dickinson Hall
OH: Mon. & Wed. 11:00–12:00
beaver@princeton.edu

Course Description

The early modern period in European history is often referred to as the “Age of Discovery” because of European encounters with the New World. In fact, the period can be characterized as one of multiple discoveries: not just of different parts of the globe (east as well as west), but of ancient texts and learning; of the laws of the physical universe; of the science of politics; of nations, both as objects of knowledge and as political actors; and of the idea of secular progress. This course will provide an introduction to the study this period, from the Renaissance to the eve of the French Revolution, by focusing on these different forms of “discovery.” Proceeding in roughly chronological order, it will introduce students to key texts of the period (including those of Machiavelli, Montaigne, Shakespeare, Bacon, Hobbes, Newton, Voltaire, and Montesquieu), and explore how historians think about its major themes.

Readings

This course has both a textbook and a Pequod packet; there are no other required readings. The textbook, by Anthony Grafton and David Bell, is available for free download on the course’s Blackboard site. The Pequod reader is available for sale at the Pequod store on University Place. In addition, nearly all of the Pequod readings are also available for download on Blackboard.

Schedule of Meetings and Readings

Unit 1. Ancient Texts

31 Jan. On Discovery
2 Feb. Print and Humanism

Eugene F. Rice, Jr. and Anthony Grafton, The Foundations of Early Modern Europe, 1460–1559, 2nd ed. (New York, 1994), chapters 3 & 5–6. [NB: LATE ADDITION. ONLINE ONLY.]
Polydore Vergil, On Discovery (1499; rev. 1521).

Lorenzo Valla, On the Donation of Constantine (1440).

7 Feb. Visualizing the Past
9 Feb. Religious Reformations

Giorgio Vasari, Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects (1550).

Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam, Preface to the Paraphrase on John (1523).

Martin Luther, Open Letter to Leo X and On Christian Liberty (1521).

Unit 2. New Worlds

14 Feb. The Prehistory of Exploration
16 Feb. First Encounters

Eugene F. Rice, Jr. and Anthony Grafton, The Foundations of Early Modern Europe, 1460–1559, 2nd ed. (New York, 1994), chapter 1. [NB: LATE ADDITION. ONLINE ONLY.]

Christopher Columbus, The Journal of Christopher Columbus (1492–1493).

Michel de Montaigne, “On Cannibals” (1580).

William Shakespeare, The Tempest (1623).

21 Feb. The First Globalization (NB: First paper due in class)
23 Feb. Empire Building

Ogier Ghislain de Busbecq, The Turkish Letters of Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq, Imperial Ambassador at Constantinople 1554–1562 (1581).

A selection of Jesuit Relations from seventeenth-century North America.

Unit 3. The Laws of Politics

28 Feb. The State as a Work of Art
2 Mar. The War of All Against All

Grafton and Bell textbook, chapter 2 (1600–1640)

Niccolò Machiavelli, The Discourses (1513–1517).

Niccolò Machiavelli, The Prince (1515).

7 Mar. Towards a Laws of Politics
9 Mar. Midterm Exam

Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan (1651).

Charles de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, The Spirit of the Laws (????).

14–16 Mar. Spring Break

Unit 4. The Physical Universe

21 Mar. Artisanal Science
23 Mar. Empiricism and Experimentation

Grafton and Bell textbook, chapter 3 (1640–1680)

Francis Bacon, New Atlantis (1626).

Galileo Galilei, Sidereus Nuncius, or, The Sidereal Messenger (1610).

Isaac Newton, Newton's Principia: The Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy (1687/1726).

28 Mar. Things in Motion
30 Mar. The Organic World

Voltaire, Philosophical Letters (1734).

William Harvey, On The Motion of the Heart and Blood in Animals (1628).

Carolus Linnaeus, The Families of Plants, with their Natural Characters (1737).

Alexander von Humboldt, Personal Narrative of Travels of the Equinocial Regions of the New Continent during Years 1799–1804 (1814).

Unit 5. Nations

4 Apr. Myths of Origins
6 Apr. The Information State

Grafton and Bell textbook, chapter 4 (1680–1740)

Polydore Vergil, English History (1534–1555).

Antonio de Nebrija, Preface to the Gramática castellana (1492).

Gregory King, Natural and Political Observations and Conclusions upon the State and Condition of England (1696).

William Petty, Political Arithmetic (1690).

11 Apr. National Pride, National Prejudice (NB: Second paper due in class)
13 Apr. The Idea of the Nation

Johann-Georg von Zimmermann, An Essay on National Pride (1771).

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Considerations on the Government of Poland (1768).

Robert-Martin Lesuire, The Savages of Europe (1764).

James Thomson, “Rule Britannia” and other eighteenth-century British patriotic poems.

Unit 6. The Future

18 Apr. The Birth of Utopia
20 Apr. History and Progress

Grafton and Bell textbook, chapter 5 (1740–1789)

Thomas More, Utopia (1516).

Adam Ferguson, Essay on the History of Civil Society (1767).

Louis-Sébastien Mercier, The Year 2440 (1771).

25 Apr. Civilization's Discontents

27 Apr. The Road to Revolution

Immanuel Kant, What is Enlightenment? (1784).

Nicolas de Condorcet, Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind (1795).

11–21 May Final Exam Period

Expectations

Attendance and participation: Lectures are the primary way for you to receive necessary background to the materials you will be reading; precepts are the main venue in which you will discuss your readings. Attendance—and *informed participation*—are both are, therefore, crucial to this course. Altogether, class participation will count for 20% of the final grade.

Examinations: There will be a midterm as well as a final exam. The midterm, which will take place in-class on Thursday, 9 March, will count for 15% of the final grade. The final exam, which will take place during the regular final exam period in May, will count for 30% of the final grade.

Written assignments: There are two papers required, each of approximately 5–7 pages. The first paper will be due in class on 21 February, and will count for 15% of the final grade. The second paper will be due in class on 11 April, and will count for 20% of the final grade.

Specific details regarding the examinations and written assignments will be distributed in class throughout the semester.