History 347  
The Age of Discoveries: Early Modern Europe, 1450–1789  

Prof. Adam Beaver  
Mondays and Wednesdays  
G21 Dickinson Hall  
11:00–12:20  
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Blackboard site: https://blackboard.princeton.edu/pucourse/HIS347_S2014  
Office hours: https://wass.princeton.edu/pages/viewcalendar.page.php?cal_id=656  

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, Bacon, Hobbes, Newton, Voltaire, and Montesquieu), and explore how historians think about its major themes.  

Readings  

All of the readings for this course are available as free downloads on Blackboard; there are no other items to be purchased. Please note that the best feature of free online readings—the fact that you can read them for free on your laptop or tablet—is also their worst feature. Because you can read them on a screen, you may be less likely to take notes on interesting or confusing passages, and you will have a hard time scrolling to the passages we are discussing in class. So I strongly urge you to print them out and bring them with you in hard copy. I know that this is less friendly to the environment and to your wallet; but you are still coming out ahead of buying an overpriced and wasteful Pequod packet, and you will learn much more.
Expectations

Attendance and participation: We will meet twice a week for 80 minutes at a time. Prof. Beaver will use the first half of the period to lecture on the context which informs the day’s assigned text; the second half of the period will be dedicated to a precept-like discussion of the text itself. Attendance—and informed participation—are crucial to this course: the lectures offer the necessary background to the materials you will be reading, and the discussions are your opportunity to engage the documents. Class participation will count for 20% of the final grade.

Examinations: There will be a midterm as well as a final exam. The midterm (in-class on Thursday, 12 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 24 February, and will count for 15% of the final grade. The second paper will be due in class on 14 April, and will count for 20% of the final grade.

Schedule of Meetings and Readings, Spring 2014

Unit 1. Ancient Texts

3 Feb. On Discovery
Polydore Vergil, On Discovery (1499; rev. 1521).

5 Feb. Print and Humanism
Lorenzo Valla, On the Donation of Constantine (1440).

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

12 Feb. Religious Reformations
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

17 Feb. The Prehistory of Exploration
Juan de Abréu Galindo, The History of the Discovery and Conquest of the Canary Islands (1630).
19 Feb.  First Encounters
Christopher Columbus, The Journal of Christopher Columbus (1492–1493).

24 Feb.  The First Globalization (NB: First paper due in class)
Ogier Ghislain de Busbecq, The Turkish Letters of Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq, Imperial
Ambassador at Constantinople 1554–1562 (1581).

26 Feb.  Empire Building
A selection of Jesuit Relations from seventeenth-century North America.

Unit 3. The Laws of Politics

3 Mar.  The State as a Work of Art
Niccolò Machiavelli, The Discourses (1513–1517).

5 Mar.  The War of All Against All
Niccolò Machiavelli, The Prince (1515).

10 Mar.  Towards a Laws of Politics
Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan (1651).

12 Mar.  Midterm Exam

15–23 Mar.  Spring Break

Unit 4. The Physical Universe

24 Mar.  Artisanal Science
Francis Bacon, New Atlantis (1626).

26 Mar.  Empiricism and Experimentation
Galileo Galilei, Sidereus Nuncius, or, The Sidereal Messenger (1610).
Isaac Newton, Newton’s Principia: The Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy
(1687/1726).

31 Mar.  Things in Motion
Voltaire, Philosophical Letters (1734).
2 Apr.  The Organic World
William Harvey, *On The Motion of the Heart and Blood in Animals* (1628).
Carolus Linnaeus, *The Families of Plants, with their Natural Characters* (1737).

Unit 5. Nations

7 Apr.  Myths of Origins
Antonio de Nebrija, Preface to the *Gramática castellana* (1492).

9 Apr.  The Information State
Gregory King, *Natural and Political Observations and Conclusions upon the State and Condition of England* (1696).

14 Apr.  National Pride, National Prejudice (NB: Second paper due in class)
James Thomson, “Rule Britannia” and other eighteenth-century British patriotic poems.

16 Apr.  The Idea of the Nation

Unit 6. The Future

21 Apr.  The Birth of Utopia

23 Apr.  History and Progress
Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *The Year 2440* (1771).

28 Apr.  Civilization’s Discontents
Nicolas de Condorcet, *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind* (1795).

30 Apr.  The First day of the Rest of Your Life? (Final class meeting)