

HISTORY OF FRANCE THROUGH PARISIAN FOOTPRINTS

Professor: **Lea Gekle**

Session: **July 2025**

Language of instruction: **English**

Number of hours of class: **24h**

Format: **On campus & Sites visits**



Objective of the Course

This course aims to introduce learners to the history of contemporary France through readings that present the session's themes and provides an opportunity for learners to extract key dates and exercise their critical analysis skills.

Readings will be discussed, often in pair and groupwork during the classes.



Summary

This course explores key periods in French history from 1789 to the present. Using Paris as a base, it interactively engages learners with the city's landscape to examine themes such as the fall of the French monarchy, the rise of empire, and the transition to industrial capitalism that have all visibly shaped both Paris and the world. We will discover Paris and French history through articles about historical events, but also through Parisian intellectual history. During our class sessions we will discuss themes like the French Revolution and the Paris Commune as well as delve into Paris's Arcades and understanding the deep connections between Paris' architecture, industrial capitalism and literature movements such as Surrealism that engaged with these subjects.

The aim of this class is to show that the artistic, intellectual, and political movements that blossomed in their wake have long made France an incubator for political, social, and cultural transformation. With four sessions outside the classroom, learners also tour two sites and two museums to demonstrate why Paris has been and continues to be a nexus for global change.



Organization of the course

Session 1: Paris revolts: the fall of the French monarchy & the rise of the first French Empire (1789-1798)

Reading: Maurice Agulhon, "Paris, A Traversal from East to West" in *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past*, vol. 3, (Columbia University Press, 1998), 523-553.

Session 2: Restoring a dynasty: the Bourbons & the July Monarchy (1815-1848)

Reading: J Weintraub, "The Paris Night: A Flâneur in Post-Revolutionary Paris." *French History* 35/2 (July 2021), 266–86.

Site visit: Palais Royale & Palais de Louvre. Meeting point: Palais Royal metro station (line 1)

Session 3: Paris takes its form: Hausmann & the Second French Empire (1848-1871)

Reading: Victoria E. Thompson, "Urban Renovation, Moral Regeneration: Domesticating the Halles in Second Empire Paris" *French Historical Studies* 20/1 (1998), 87-109.

Session 4: From the Commune to the Expo of the Century: Paris as spectacle and Paris as the "Capital of the 19th century" (1870-1914)

Reading: Walter Benjamin, "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century Expose of 1939 » in *The Arcades Project* (Harvard University Press 2002), 14-26.

Site visit : Musée Carnevalet. Meeting point: TBA

Session 5: Water and disaster in the bustling metropole (1880-1914)

Reading: Jeffrey H. Jackson, "Envisioning Disaster in the 1910 Paris Flood," *Journal of Urban History* 37/2 (2011), 176–207.

Walking tour: Montmartre, La Seine, & the Paris sewers museum. Meeting point: TBA

Session 6: Speaking and writing about war: Parisian artistic movements & the World Wars (1914-1945)

Reading: André Breton: Manifesto of Surrealism (1924) in *Manifestos of Surrealism* (University of Michigan Press), 3-47.

Session 7: Paris the crucible: France and decolonization (1945-1980)

Reading: Rosemary Wakeman, “Public Space and Confrontation,” in *The Heroic City: Paris, 1945-1958* (University of Chicago Press, 2009), 1–38.

Museum visit: Porte Dorée - Musée de l’immigration. Meeting point: Entrance to Palais de la Porte Dorée, 293 Avenue Daumesnil, 75012

Session 8: May 68, Paris, and modern times (1968-2023)

Reading: Guy Debord, “Report on the Construction of Situations and on the International Situationist Tendency's Conditions of Organization and Action” in the *Situationist International Anthology*, 2006, 25-43.



Bibliography

See the readings indicated for the sessions.



Requirements for validation

We will discuss the readings in class. Pair or larger group discussions will be a common activity throughout this course. Active participation is essential to the success of this course. The goal of this seminar is to create an open, respectful space where we can exchange ideas, critique one another constructively, and share experiences. In addition to your class participation, the main requirement is a final essay or creative project on a topic of your choice, related to the course material.



Professor's Biography



Lea Gekle is a lecturer in German studies at the university Paris 12 and teaches philosophy at the University of Picardie Jules Verne. She holds the agrégation in German studies and a PhD in social and political philosophy. Specialized in critical theory, she is particularly interested in social theory and works on the interconnection between literature, sociology, philosophy and history.