

## Culture and Society in the Belle Epoque

History 740  
T 7:00-9:45

Fall 2008  
Sarah Curtis

This graduate seminar will focus on European cultural and social history in the decades leading up to the outbreak of the First World War. On the surface, the Belle Epoque was a period of unparalleled European power, prosperity, and cultural creativity; underneath, Europeans experienced a mounting sense of crisis. We will examine both sides of this paradox through readings and discussion on such topics as the social impact of modernization, the “culture wars” over religion, the rise of mass culture, changing patterns of city life, the beginnings of modernism, the Freudian revolution, art nouveau, feminism and the “new woman,” and the cultural anxiety caused by impending war. Methodologically, I am interested in the ways that cultural approaches to history can provide new insights in political, social, and intellectual history.

Readings will be located mainly in France with occasional excursions to Berlin and Vienna, but you will have an opportunity to pursue areas of particular interest through historiographical essays. In consultation with me, you may use this seminar to fulfill the field requirement in Gender in History instead of Europe Since 1500.

### Readings:

The following books are available for purchase at the bookstore (also marked with an asterix on the schedule). These books are also on reserve at the library.

Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France*

Ruth Harris, *Lourdes: Body and Spirit in a Secular Age*

Vanessa Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Siècle Paris*

Peter Fritzsche, *Reading Berlin 1900*

Carl Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*

Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918*

Debora Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style*

Mary Louise Roberts, *Disruptive Acts: The New Woman in Fin-de-Siècle France*

Christopher Forth, *The Dreyfus Affair and the Crisis of French Manhood*

Edward Berenson, *The Trial of Madame Caillaux*

### Electronic reserves:

Some of the readings are available on electronic reserves at the library. They can be accessed via the internet on campus or at home at the following address: <http://eres.sfsu.edu/> (or by the link on the library web page or my web page). The password for this course is Dreyfus. These readings are indicated on the schedule with the abbreviation ER. Journal articles are available on the library database JSTOR.

**Prerequisites:**

This is a graduate history seminar. Graduate standing in history or permission of the instructor is required for enrollment.

**Course requirements:**

Attendance at seminar sessions is required. If you have to miss a class, please inform me *in advance* of the meeting by telephone or e-mail. More than one absence will affect your grade. You should come to class prepared to discuss that week's reading, and I expect every student to participate in every class.

Each student will also be responsible for leading one seminar meeting with a partner, proposing questions for discussion and preparing additional background material as appropriate. Working together, the presenters should think about the central questions that the week's reading raises and their position within the historiography.

There will be three short (4-5 pp.) papers to allow you to expand on ideas from our discussions in several of the assigned readings. I will provide 2-3 "default" questions or you can propose one of your own. These papers will be due September 16, September 30, and October 21.

Late papers will be marked down one half grade if they are turned in by Thursday afternoon of the same week and one full grade if they are turned in the following Tuesday. Papers more than one week late will not be accepted.

The final project for the course will consist of a 15-20 page review essay and presentation on a selection of books and articles (approximately 5-8) on a topic of your choosing that falls within the scope of this class. The paper should include an annotated bibliography that will be distributed to the class at the time of your presentation. A proposal and (unannotated) bibliography for your final paper will be due November 18. The presentation will be scheduled for one of the last class sessions (December 2, 9, or 16), and the final paper will be due on December 16.

**Grading:**

Grades will be determined as follows: participation: 25 %; short papers: 30 %; review essay proposal: 2.5 %; presentation: 7.5 %; review essay: 35 %

**Office hours and contact information:**

Tuesday 3:30-5:00, Thursday, 12:30-2:00, and by appointment.

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## **Schedule:**

### **August 26 Introduction**

### **September 2 The Modernization of Rural Europe?**

#### Required reading:

\*Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen*  
Part I: chaps. 1-2, 4, 7, skim other chaps.  
Part II: assignments to be given in class  
Part III: 27-29, skim other chaps.

#### Further reading:

Charles Tilly, "Did the Cake of Custom Break?" in *Consciousness and Class Experience in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, ed. John Merriman  
Michael Burns, *Rural Society and French Politics*  
Pierre-Jakez Hélias, *The Horse of Pride* (memoir)  
Emile Guillaumin, *The Life of a Simple Man* (memoir)  
Martine Segalen, *Love and Power in the Peasant Family*  
Judith Devlin, *The Superstitious Mind*  
Barnett Singer, *Village Notables in Nineteenth-Century France*  
Stephen Harp, *Learning to be Loyal: Primary Schooling as Nation Building in Alsace and Lorraine, 1850-1940*  
Mary Jo Maynes, *Schooling for the People: A Comparative Local History of Schooling in France and Germany, 1750-1850*  
Leslie Page Moch, *Paths to the City: Regional Migration in Nineteenth-Century France*

### **September 9 Culture Wars**

#### Required reading:

Christopher Clark and Wolfram Kaiser, eds., *Culture Wars: Secular-Catholic Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, chaps. 1-2 (ER)  
\*Ruth Harris, *Lourdes: Body and Spirit in a Secular Age*, introduction, chaps. 1-2, chaps. 7-10, epilogue

#### Further reading:

David Blackbourn, *Marpingen: Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in a Nineteenth-Century German Village*  
Detmar Klein, "The Virgin with the Sword: Marian Apparitions, Religion and National Identity in Alsace in the 1870s," *French History* 2007.

Jonathan Sperber, *Popular Catholicism in Nineteenth-Century Germany*  
David I. Kertzer, *The Kidnapping of Edgardo Mortara*  
Thomas Kselman, *Miracles and Prophecies in Nineteenth-Century France*  
Richard Burton, *Holy Tears, Holy Blood: Women, Catholicism, and the Culture of Suffering in France, 1840-1970*  
Caroline Ford, *Creating the Nation in Provincial France: Religion and Political Identity in Brittany*  
Sarah Curtis, *Educating the Faithful: Religion, Schooling, and Society in Nineteenth-Century France*

## **September 16** **Mass Culture**

### **First short paper due**

#### Required reading:

\*Vanessa Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Siècle Paris*  
Eric Hobsbawm, "Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870-1914," in *The Invention of Tradition* (ER)

#### Further reading:

Charles Rearick, *The Pleasures of the Belle Epoque*  
Rosalind Williams, *Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth-Century France*  
W. Hamish Fraser, *The Coming of the Mass Market, 1850-1914*  
Scott Haine, *The World of the Paris Café*  
Richard Holt, *Sport and Society in Modern France*  
Douglas Mackaman, *Leisure Settings: Bourgeois Culture, Medicine, and the Spa in Modern France*  
Peter Jelavich, *Berlin Cabaret*  
Robert Sackett, *Popular Entertainment, Class and Politics in Munich, 1900- 1923*  
Susanna Barrows, *Distorting Mirrors: Visions of the Crowd in Late Nineteenth-Century France*  
Thomas Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle, 1851-1914*

## **September 23** **Urban Culture**

#### Required reading:

\*Peter Fritzsche, *Reading Berlin 1900*  
\*Carl Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*, chap. 2, "The Ringstrasse, Its Critics, and the Birth of Urban Modernism"

Further reading:

Michael Miller, *The Bon Marché: Bourgeois Culture and the Department Store, 1869-1920*

Emile Zola, *Ladies' Delight* (novel)

Geoffrey Crossick and Serge Jaumain, eds., *Cathedrals of Consumption: The European Department Store, 1850-1939*

Erika Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London's West End*

William Cohen, *Urban Government and the Rise of the French City*

Donald Olsen, *The City as a Work of Art: London, Paris, Vienna*

T.J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life*

Dean de la Motte and Jeannene Pryzblyski, eds., *Making the News: Modernity and the Mass Press in Nineteenth-Century France*

James Smith Allen, *In the Public Eye: A History of Reading in Modern France, 1800-1940*

Jeffrey Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read: Literacy and Popular Literature, 1861-1917*

**September 30**

**The Birth of Modernism**

**Second short paper due**

Required reading:

\*Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918*, chaps. 1-8

Further reading:

Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Disenchanted Night: The Industrialization of Light in the Nineteenth Century*

F. W. Hemmings, *Culture and Society in France, 1848-1898*

H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society: The Reorientation of European Social Thought*

**October 7**

**The Freudian Revolution**

Required reading:

Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, pp. 78-125, 160-69, 273-74 (ER)

\*Carl Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*, chap. 4, "Politics and Patricide in Freud's Interpretation of Dreams"

Sigmund Freud and Joseph Breuer, *Studies in Hysteria*, introduction, pp. 7-50 (ER)

Jan Goldstein, "The Hysteria Diagnosis and the Politics of Anticlericalism in Late Nineteenth-Century France," *Journal of Modern History* 54 (1982): 209-39 (JSTOR).

Further reading:

Sigmund Freud, *Five Lectures in Psycho-Analysis*

Jan Goldstein, *Console and Classify: The French Psychiatric Profession in the Nineteenth Century*

Robert Nye, *Crime, Madness, and Politics in Modern France: The Medical Concept of National Decline*

Ruth Harris, *Murders and Madness: Medicine, Law, and Society in the Fin-de-Siècle*

William McGrath, *Freud's Discovery of Psychoanalysis: The Politics of Hysteria*

Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady*

**October 14**

**The New Art**

Required reading:

\*Debora Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France*, introduction, chaps. 1-5, 8, 11, 15

\*Carl Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*, chap. 5, "Gustav Klimt: Painting and the Crisis of the Liberal Ego"

Further reading:

Peter Paret, *The Berlin Secession: Modernism and Its Enemies in Imperial Germany*

Robert Shattuck, *The Banquet Years: The Arts in France, 1885-1918*

Richard Mandel, *Paris 1900: The Great World's Fair*

Jerrold Seigel, *Bohemian Paris: Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1830-1930*

Janet Wolff and John Seed, eds., *The Culture of Capital: Art, Power and the Nineteenth-Century Middle Class*

**October 21**

**The New Woman**

**Third short paper due**

Required reading:

Karen Offen, "Depopulation, Nationalism, and Feminism in Fin-de-Siècle France," *American Historical Review* 89 (June 1984): 648-76 (JSTOR)

\*Mary Louise Roberts, *Disruptive Acts: The New Woman in Fin-de-Siècle France*

Further reading:

Peter Gay, *The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud*

Steven Hause, *Women's Suffrage and Social Politics in the Third French Republic*

James F. McMillan, *Housewife or Harlot? The Woman Question in France under the Third Republic*

Jo Burr Margadant, *Madame le Professeur: Women Educators in the Third Republic*

Jo Burr Margadant, *The New Biography: Performing Femininity in Nineteenth-Century France*

Alain Corbin, *Women for Hire: Prostitution and Sexuality in France after 1850*

Ruth Brandon, *The New Women and the Old Men: Love, Sex and the Woman Question*

Joshua Cole, *The Power of Large Numbers*

## **October 28**

### **Gender Anxieties**

#### Required reading:

\*Christopher Forth, *The Dreyfus Affair and the Crisis of French Manhood*

#### Further reading:

Eric Cahm, *The Dreyfus Affair in French Society and Politics*

Nancy Fitch, "Mass Culture, Mass Parliamentary Politics, and Modern Anti-Semitism: The Dreyfus Affair in Rural France," *American Historical Review* 97, 1 (February 1992): 55-95

Ruth Harris, "The Assumptionists and the Dreyfus Affair," *Past and Present* 194 (February 2007): 175-211

Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late Victorian London*

Michael Foldy, *The Trials of Oscar Wilde: Deviance, Morality, and Late-Victorian Society*

Seth Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London*

Deborah Epstein Nord, *Walking the Victorian Streets: Women, Representation, and the City*

Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle*

## **November 4**

### **Election Night**

Class cancelled

Students should make individual appointments with the instructor to discuss review essays.

## **November 11**

### **Veterans' Day**

No class

**November 18**  
**The Coming of the Great War**

**Review essay proposal and bibliography due**

Required reading:

\*Edward Berenson, *The Trial of Madame Caillaux*

\*Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space*, chaps. 9-11

Further reading:

Robert Nye, *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor*

Kevin McAleer, *Dueling: The Cult of Honor in Fin-de-Siècle Germany*

Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age*

Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*

George Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars*

Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*

**November 25**  
**Thanksgiving week**  
No class

**December 2**  
**Student presentations**

**December 9**  
**Student presentations**

**December 16**  
**Student presentations (if needed)**  
**Review essay due in class**

France's Belle Époque was the 'Beautiful Age', the moment when the industrial revolution produced modern consumerism and a change in culture. The lower classes did not benefit in the same way, or to anywhere near the same extent. The Age equates loosely to the 'Gilded Age' of the US and can be used in reference to other western and central European countries for the same period and reasons (e.g. Germany). Defeat in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71 brought down the French Second Empire of Napoleon III, leading to the declaration of the Third Republic. The Belle Époque or La Belle Époque (French: [bɛ̃lepɔk]; French for "Beautiful Epoch") is the term often given to a period of French history, usually dated to between 1880 and the outbreak of World War I in 1914. Occurring during the era of the French Third Republic, it was a period characterised by optimism, regional peace, economic prosperity, colonial expansion, and technological, scientific, and cultural innovations. In this era of France's cultural and artistic climate (particularly within Paris) Ensor grew up above a curio shop in the cold, coastal town of Ostend, where his mother sold trinkets, costumes and grotesque carnival masks to tourists. At first Ensor painted in a loosely Impressionist style, but he retained his childhood fascination with these masks and was soon incorporating them into his work. His favourite motif became that of the surging crowd, where ossified faces are leering, threatening masks that overwhelm the whole picture. For Ensor these props seemed to provide the perfect metaphor for the hypocrisies of polite society. Ensor's faces are leering, threatening masks Fashion in the Belle Époque era was the peak of luxury living for a select few. Not only did this era bring in new trends to fashion, they also kept trends from the Edwardian trends. The Belle Époque was very different from the Edwardian era even though they used the styles because the garments were not influenced by the English King or the Prince of Wales. A number of French inventors patented products with a lasting impact on modern society. After the telephone joined the telegraph as a vehicle for rapid communication, French inventor Édouard Belin developed the Belinograph, or Wirephoto, to transmit photos by telephone. The electric light began to supersede gas lighting, and neon lights were invented in France.