

Syllabus, Workshop, 2nd semester (3 credits)

The Construction of the French Republican Model

Hélène Marineau

Workshop Description:

Often discussed in the national and international medias, the French model tends to be reduced to its social and economic perspectives. At its best, presented on the international stage as a creative alternative to American economic neo-liberalism, it is also associated within France to the concept of “cultural exception.” From these two examples, among many others, it is clear that the French model can only be approached as a complex network of keystone concepts embedded in French culture.

In this workshop, we are less interested in defining a French contemporary model, whether political, economic or social, than in unearthing the construction of a cultural identity that has been shaped over the last two centuries. We will demonstrate that this cultural identity is the result of various attempts (and failures) at constructing a Republic through a set of values flexible though strong enough to adapt to the past and the present.

Through a two-century survey of French political and social history, we will trace the evolution of concepts at the heart of contemporary French culture. From the Napoleonic heritage up to the creation of the Vth Republic, and its recent constitutional changes, we will broach concepts such as the “grandeur” of France, secularism, centralization of powers, social benefits, etc. at the crossroads of which the French Republican model can eventually be contemplated and understood.

Workshop Objectives:

Applying a socio-discursive, interdisciplinary approach, combining history and culture, we shall look at the birth and rise of the French model. Through a reading of journalistic criticism, theoretical, political and sociological works, plus a close “visual analysis” of television shows, film and documentaries excerpts, video clips and the inevitable incursion into cyberspace and the internet, we will examine a series of case studies. Thus we intend to provide you with the necessary tools, the values at the heart of the Republican model, to understand contemporary French political issues from the “insider’s” point of view.

Bibliography:

Julie Barlow and Jean-Benoît Nadeau, *Sixty million Frenchmen Can't Be Wrong*, London, Robson Books, 2005.

Raymonde Carroll, *Cultural Misunderstandings, The French-American Experience*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1990.

Geneviève Brame, *Chez vous en France*, Paris, La Documentation française, 2007.

Polly Platt, *French or Foe?*, Laval, Canada, Culture Crossings, 2003.

Agnes-Catherine Poirier, *Touché, Why Britain and France Are So Different*, London, Orion Books, 2007.

Ted Stanger, *Sacrés Français! Un Américain nous regarde*, Paris Folio documents, 2003.

The Cambridge Companion to Modern French Culture, ed. Nicholas Hewitt, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003.

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