

## LAYERING THE INTRODUCTORY HISTORY OF EUROPE COURSE

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One of my students in the introductory "History of Europe since 1600" course recently entitled his paper "The Constitutional Relay Race." He was reacting to an image that I had developed to assist students in understanding the history of constitutional government in modern Europe. The British team started the relay race in the seventeenth century, passing the torch to their American colonist colleagues, who in turn handed the torch on to the French revolutionaries, who ran with it into the heart of Europe. Similarly, men started the race to full suffrage, passing the torch to women, who then handed it on to students in the late 1960s. With this image I try to illuminate the historical "flow" that we cover in the first "run-through" of our period. To energize my students' understanding of the connections flowing from the beginnings in 1600 through to the state of European society today, I have structured the course into three of these separate but interrelated run-throughs; each course section covers the entire period but with a different focus, and each culminates in a reiterative paper that retraces the analysis we have just pursued. After the first section I also become deliberately repetitive in reminding students of the data that we have already encountered in previous sections. My hope is that such repetition in meaningful contexts will help students to remember both data and meanings.

The first course section deals with political history, particularly the development of the constitutional "model" of government. Its most detailed coverage is, to be sure, concentrated on English and French history from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. However, we also trace the emergence of nineteenth-century conservative and liberal political philosophies as well as the extension of constitutional government to the emerging nations of Central and Eastern Europe, including later modifications to the original "model," such as proportional representation. We end with the history of universal suffrage as we have come to understand it today.

The second section builds on the first to examine "The Industrializing of Europe's Societies." To do this we return to the seventeenth century and discuss both preindustrial society and the development of the Atlantic Economy, again particularly in France and England. However, the bulk of the coverage is eighteenth and nineteenth century, as we look in detail at the Industrial Revolution and its social consequences, together with the range of political responses to the new urban society brought into being by industrialization. Despite this Atlantic focus, though, we can extend our coverage into the present and into the center of Europe by looking at the "Second" and "Third" Industrial Revolutions, variations on the Welfare State, and Communist and post-Communist societies.

In the final course section we turn our attention to "The Victory of the Nation-State" in Europe. Initially, I used Eric Hobsbawm's wonderful overview of this issue, but it



proved too difficult for entry-level students.<sup>1</sup> Instead, I am currently using the diary published by Zlata Filipovic that records her experiences in Sarajevo both before and during the early stages of the Bosnian conflict.<sup>2</sup> Her commentary first frames the section by raising our issue vividly from the perspective of Eastern Europe; later, it helps us to conclude our discussion of this final theme. The section requires one further foray back into (and beyond) the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to explore the early history of those dynastic states from which the "Atlantic" nation-states developed; we build on knowledge already garnered from the first two sections about their political and socio-economic development. However, the concentrated material of this section comes from the times after the French Revolution. We explore in detail the national and ethnic movements of the nineteenth century, neocolonialism, and the twentieth-century "Thirty Years War." We end with a look both at the history of the European Union and at reemerging national and ethnic priorities, especially those of Eastern Europe. In concluding the course with this national layer, I am attempting to leave students with a fresh awareness of what I am convinced will be the great issue of the early twenty-first century. As the Bosnians enter a precarious period of peacemaking, and as the Russians and Chechens continue to skirmish, while even the European Union teeters between centripetal and centrifugal impulses, my students need to be knowledgeable about the historical foundations of the national and ethnic commitments in today's Europe.

Why would I reconstruct the introductory course in this unorthodox fashion? It is, I must admit, very stressful for me to do this, because some of my students have been quite resistant to what for them is a nonchronological and therefore "disorganized" approach to history. Consequently, in the fall of 1994, as I was working to shape the sectional flows of analysis, I received many criticisms of the layered approach. An extreme version read: "I think that she is the most unorganized professor I have ever had here in three years. The class lacks any structure, she switches from topic to topic, and from time frame to time frame." Another student argued: "It was more analysis than anything else. She made it more complicated and confusing than it should have been." Lectures were also "confusing" to many, which is an instructive reaction since they were for the most part the old ones reorganized to fit the new format. (Each semester I develop my lectures to reflect the sectional arrangement more completely.) Fortunately, a repeat of the course in the spring of 1995 brought remarkably more positive responses overall: One student even found me "always well organized." Another student argued: "The approach of studying

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An earlier version of this paper was delivered at the Third Wisconsin Conference on the Teaching of History, April 1995.

<sup>1</sup>Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

<sup>2</sup>Zlata Filipovic, *Zlata's Diary: A Child's Life in Sarajevo*, translated by Christina Pribichevich-zoric (New York: Penguin, 1994).



a topic from beginning to end and then retracing back to start the next topic helped and increased my understanding of the issues surrounding the topics."

I had persisted with the layering approach, despite negative student responses, because of increasing frustration with the traditional introductory format. I found my frustration bolstered by research into students' lack of retention from traditional teaching tools, such as the lecture, and I did not want my students to remain highly porous "vessels." Indeed, in upper-division courses, including the senior seminar, I had to ask myself if my students were not sieves rather than fired pots.

In exploring the reasons why students were retaining so little of the class material, I focused on their inability to pursue study habits that embedded the multiplicity of data into meaningful themes. Instead, many were failing what I call the "Charles I test." I would spend much time discussing the development of the constitutional "model" of government in seventeenth-century Britain, stressing the negative role of divine-right monarchy in this process. As context I would explore the French case, centering on the colorful Louis XIV, including reading and acting out key scenes from *Tartuffe*. An entire lecture on "Patriarchy and the Divine Right of Kings," bolstered with a handout about divine right theory, also contextualized my emphasis on Charles's execution in 1649 as a crucial moment in the forging of our "model," when claims to divine right monarchy in Britain died with the King. I would then give students advance notice about the possible "identifications" to appear on the test, asking them to consider not "all they knew about" each item but rather "why it was important to our course's themes." Quite a few students would still respond to the identification "Charles I" with a chronicle of events from early in his reign that they had gleaned from the textbook, many times failing to reach even the Civil War, let alone his all-important execution and the slaying of divine right theory.

In the same vein, at the end of the semester I would ask students to prepare an examination essay about the major developments in the political history of Europe since 1600. Yet two weeks' worth of lectures about the French Revolution, including a reinforcing slide overview and a similarly reiterative documentary overview, failed for some to translate into any recognition that the Revolution was worthy of mention. They had failed to grasp the historical flow from 1600 onward for which this all-important political milestone was an essential component.

The present sectional structure of the course is intended to solve this problem, but at the same time I have worked to ameliorate the shock of the flow format. This involves developing ploys like my relay-race image for the political section, which I have combined with a flow chart to lead students through the developments that we are tracing. I have also completed a handout full of British documents, covering in particular Charles I's clash with Parliament and his execution; his Death Warrant, a lively account of the execution, and a wonderful illustration of the execution itself that highlights the King's dripping head all dramatize the story. I also include excerpts from John Evelyn's vivid diary, focusing on his pungent comments about James II's bid at absolutism, the new court's "Popery," Louis XIV's persecution of the Huguenots, and the highlights of the Glorious Revolution. My handout thus emphasizes the two most crucial historical



moments in the creation of the British constitutional "model." I add some American documents—notably key sections of the Constitution: on voting, on the Presidency and the balance of powers, and the Bill of Rights—together with the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, which allows me to develop our analysis of the "model's" subsequent history after 1689. This collection supplements documents provided by the text that I use to add a primary source component to the course, *Discovering the Western Past* by Merry Wiesner, Julius Ruff, and William Wheeler;<sup>3</sup> they contribute vivid chapters about Louis XIV and the Bastille uprising. I end this section with female and student efforts at gaining suffrage rights. I have found that suffrage struggles appeal to students; illustrations from the British suffrage movement in particular bring color and drama to this story. Wiesner, Ruff, and Wheeler contribute chapters about Russian women's struggles for political rights and student uprisings in the France of 1968. Of course, constitutional history can be dry and abstract if not peopled with colorful actors and actresses, and I am working hard to do just that with this first section of the course.

The second section is also full of appealing material despite its emphasis on economic history, usually a real killer of student interest. We include a vivid Wiesner, Ruff, and Wheeler chapter about the hard lives of poor Europeans before industrialization, complemented with my own slides about "unenlightened" popular culture: carnival, charivari, miracle stories, and pilgrimages. This sets up our discussion of the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment, for which Wiesner, Ruff, and Wheeler provide an illuminative range of documents responding to the Lisbon earthquake. I have found that using slides to lecture about the Industrial Revolution softens the blow. I was lucky to visit a large textile factory near Manchester, England, from which I garnered a series of slides, bolstered with items like a miner at the coalface and other such images from the heavy industries, culminating with Joseph Turner's famous painting of a train in the mist.<sup>4</sup> Then I emphasize the social consequences of the Revolution for workers, both in terms of working and living conditions. In turning to the critics of industrial society, I factor in documents from the Romantic movement as background for reading excerpts from Charles Dickens, Friedrich Engels, and Karl Marx. Wiesner, Ruff, and Wheeler then contribute a chapter about the modern transformation of Paris and Vienna full of maps, housing plans, and photographs of both the old and new urban environments.

The third section of the course benefits in the dimension of personal experience by our consulting Zlata rather than Hobsbawm; my students are highly impressed with her ability to capture the realities of the Bosnian struggle. First, we trace the development of dynastic states into the nations of nineteenth-century Europe as well as the history of the Eastern Empires. Here I use many maps and return to my handout on Romanticism, which

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<sup>3</sup>Merry E. Wiesner, Julius R. Ruff, and William Bruce Wheeler, eds., *Discovering the Western Past: A Look at the Evidence*, Second Edition (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993).

<sup>4</sup>Joseph Turner, "Rain, Steam, and Speed: The Great Western Railway" (1844).



includes some Mazzini. I am beginning to work on a new handout to capture the centralizing and particularist forces at work in the creation of nation-states. Wiesner, Ruff, and Wheeler provide us with stimulating documentary evidence about the neo-colonial mentality, the experience of World War I, both in the trenches and on the home front; and the intent and effects of Nazi propaganda. I add a handout about the reasons for the successful Nazi seizure of power in 1933. We use the movie *Genocide* to explore the multiple issues of the Holocaust, and Zlata helps us to analyze the reemergence of nationalism in post-Communist Europe with a vengeance, as does a recent movie about Bosnia entitled *We Are All Neighbors*.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to reconstructing the analytical flow of this introductory course into the three interrelated sections, I have designed all of the course's assignments to reinforce the new layering approach. Using the Wiesner, Ruff, and Wheeler text allows me to schedule regular discussion sessions based on individual chapters, as the documents they contain become useful for deepening the students' comprehension of each section's issues. I require every student to lead two of these discussion sessions by raising questions that link the primary data in the chapters to the lecture material. Handing in graded reports ensures that the leaders have an investment in the success of the analytical process. Moreover, the students will use this material later as documentary evidence for the writing of the course's three papers, making the discussions additionally valuable for all group members. As one student summarized the benefits of the group work, "I believe the use of documents help the class 'come to life.' If students are dealing with real sources (statistics, letters, etc.), the material is more beneficial than a regular classroom."

Finally, I require students to write three culminating papers that retrace the flow of analysis developed in each of the three course sections. They use only the material provided for them by my lectures and our textbook<sup>6</sup> (but with strict injunctions against undue dependence on its wording, storytelling approach, and structure); by the Wiesner, Ruff, and Wheeler primary documents; by *Zlata's Diary*; and by my own documentary handouts. Students work from a mandated introductory paragraph to answer a series of questions that lead them back through the section's major developments. For example, in one semester the final paper assignment encouraged students to explore the consequences of nation-state building in modern Europe by requiring the following introductory paragraph:

Zlata Filipovic wrote in her diary on November 19, 1992:

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<sup>5</sup>*Genocide* was put out by the Simon Wiesenthal Center in 1981; *We Are All Neighbors: Bosnia* was made by Tone Bringa in 1993 in the "Disappearing World: War Trilogy" series by Films Incorporated Video, 5547 N. Ravenswood Avenue, Chicago, IL 60640-1199.

<sup>6</sup>John P. McKay, Bennett D. Hill, and John Buckler, eds., *A History of Western Society: Volume II: From Absolutism to the Present*, Fifth Edition (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1995).

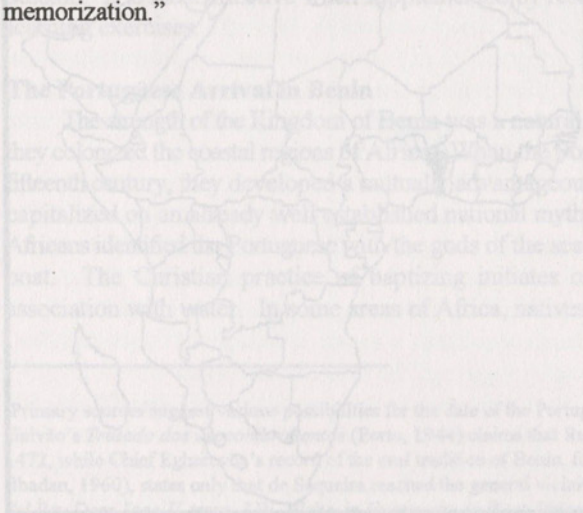


Among my girlfriends, among our friends, in our family, there are Serbs and Croats and Muslims. It's a mixed group and I never knew who was a Serb, a Croat, or a Muslim. Now politics has started meddling around. It has put an "S" on Serbs, an "M" on Muslims and a "C" on Croats; it wants to separate them. And to do so it has chosen the worst, blackest pencil of all--the pencil of war which spells only misery and death. Why is politics making us unhappy, separating us, when we ourselves know who is good and who isn't?

She was experiencing firsthand the ethnic hostilities that had emerged from the construction of Yugoslavia as a nation-state in 1919. The concept of nation-state building developed in Western Europe as the successful model for political power in the modern world. French troops then spread the idea east into the heart of Europe, resulting in the successful German and Italian unification movements. What were the major centralizing factors that contributed to the making of a nation-state like Germany, and what "particularist" local loyalties resisted this process? How did romanticism and later the neocolonial mentality heighten nationalist sentiments in the Western powers? How did their example stimulate the desire of Eastern European minority populations to attain national status in their turn? Why, then, did the "successor" nations forged out of the Eastern Empires in the 1919 Treaties of Paris face a new round of minority problems? Racist nationalism in Germany took strength from the German experience of World War I, their harsh treatment in the Treaty of Versailles, and the series of postwar crises culminating in the Depression. How did the Nazis build on German despair to win power in 1933? And how did they turn the Second World War into a viciously racial war, particularly in Eastern Europe? Why did the history of nationalism in Europe make the emergence from Communist control of Eastern European states like Bosnia so problematic?"

For some students to complete the three reiterative papers successfully, they need to consult closely with me about the writing process. I have found that withholding the grade until a struggling student comes in for a consultation session is a very successful strategy. Not only does it add a personal dimension to the teacher-student relationship beyond my contributions to the group discussions, but it also encourages such students to discuss their rough drafts of subsequent papers, enhancing their understanding of the historical flows. A negative comment from fall 1994 captured some of the potential problems that these meetings can manage successfully. "Papers are broad and very detailed, and are graded on writing 'style,' as well as on content." The difficulties of writing this type of paper led another student to argue that I taught "this class as if each student is already a Ph.D. student." Consultation can help to turn the challenge into a positive experience. As one student commented: "I felt that the papers were very challenging but forced me to think critically." Yet another had "enjoyed doing papers instead of tests because it allowed me to understand the information rather than memorizing it." A similar comment from spring 1995 read: "The three papers were difficult but a good way to achieve a good grasp of the material."

The layering that I am pursuing in the "History of Europe since 1600" course is a very challenging experience for both professor and students. Some students continue to find it difficult to overcome their previous understanding of history as "story" and "facts" rather than as a series of analytical flows into which the data lodge in a variety of meaningful ways. Others have responded positively to the new approach, showing an imaginative grasp of its intentions. Moreover, student papers reflect an ever greater control over the marshaling of evidence from primary documents to illuminate the historical flows. This is because, as one student commented about the layering approach after writing the culminating papers, "it allows for deep learning without rote memorization."



Primary sources regarding the slave trade for the late 16th and early 17th centuries are available in the *Journal of the Royal African Society* (London, 1904-1905), and the *Journal of the Royal African Society* (London, 1904-1905), and the *Journal of the Royal African Society* (London, 1904-1905). The *Journal of the Royal African Society* (London, 1904-1905) provides a detailed account of the slave trade in West Africa, and the *Journal of the Royal African Society* (London, 1904-1905) provides a detailed account of the slave trade in West Africa.

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