

# French Connections



Osher at JHU, Columbia  
Spring 2025, Wednesday Afternoons

# French Connections

THE INFLUENCE OF FRENCH CULTURE can be seen everywhere in America and Britain, the differences in each country reflecting major differences in their shared history. But this is not a history course. Instead, we examine the cultural legacy of such events in terms of art, music, literature, and style—things we can show in class, enjoy, and discuss.

Yet French culture did not generate itself. The French Renaissance, for example, resulted from the deliberate recruitment of Italian artists; French Romanticism drew heavily on trends in England and Germany. The course is about equally divided between foreign influences within France itself and French influence on the culture of other countries: French *imports* and (later) French *exports*. *rb.*



## 1. Lisa and Liberty (February 19)

Mona Lisa and Lady Liberty, two icons linked to France, examples respectively of the *import* and *export* aspects of French culture, themes that we tease out in this preview of the full course.

## 2. Cultural Crossroads (February 26)

Medieval France was a group of duchies with feudal links to the French king—a decentralization that made some areas quite open to foreign influence, and in some cases significant players abroad.



## 3. Conquest and Quarrels (March 5)

Frenchmen invaded England in 1066. Though the two cultures eventually assimilated, the family history gave later English Kings a claim to France, and triggered the first of two 100 Years' Wars.

#### 4. A Place in the Country (March 12)

The palace and park at Versailles became a model for such buildings everywhere, even at Blenheim which celebrated a victory over the French. But soon *English* gardens would be all the range.

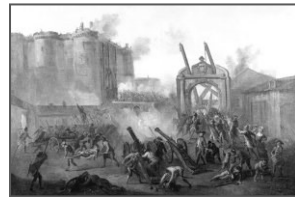


#### 5. To Russia with Reason (March 19)

The first great export of French culture was to Russia, where Catherine the Great maintained a lifelong interest in *philosophes* like Diderot and Voltaire, and French was the language of the court.

#### 6. Two Revolutions (March 26)

The American Revolution could not have succeeded without French help. Its success may well have encouraged the French Revolution a decade later—indeed a whole string of them.



#### 7. Romance and Reality (April 2)

France was home to two movements in the first half of the 19th century: Romanticism, which called on British and German influences, and Realism, which soon exerted influence elsewhere.

#### 8. A Night at the Opéra (April 9)

Two musical art-forms that filled opera houses all over the world were essentially French inventions: the spectacle of *grand opéra* and the virtuoso poetry of *ballet*.



#### 9. Scent of the South (April 16)

From the Romantic era into the 20th century, the arts in France took inspiration from exotic cultures to its south: think Delacroix with *Algiers*, Bizet with *Carmen*, or Gauguin with the South Pacific.

#### 10. A Studio in Paris (April 23)

From the 1870s through the 1930s, Impressionism through Surrealism, Paris was the epicenter of artistic innovation, and artists from America and the rest of Europe would flock to drink it in.



#### 11. French Taste, French Grit (April 30)

We look at the worldwide spread of two other aspects of French taste: fashion and *cuisine*. The postwar cinema of the *nouvelle vague*, however, would replace high taste with gritty realism.

#### 12. The Firewalls Fall (May 7)

For centuries, the *Académie Française* waged a campaign to exclude foreign influence and keep French culture pure. But in an era of globalization and commerce, even the strongest firewalls fall.



For more detail, color illustrations, artist bios, and suggestions for further reading, see the class website:

<http://www.brunyate.com/FrenchConnections/>

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**Illustrations:** Cover: Statue of Liberty; 1. New York Harbor; 2. *Les très riches heures du Duc de Berry*; 3. The Bayeux Tapestry; 4. Versailles; 5. Catherine the Great; 6. Siegmund L'Allemand: *The Storming of the Bastille*; 7. Watercolor by Victor Hugo; 8. Perrot & Coralli: *Giselle*, Act II; 9. Delacroix: sketch for *Women of Algiers*; 10. Mary Cassatt: *Little Girl in a Blue Armchair*; 11. The *couturier* Coco Chanel; 12. McDonald's shop near the Arc de Triomphe.