In 1989, following the anti-Communist revolutions in Eastern bloc countries, Francis Fukuyama famously proclaimed “the end of history,” predicting the final victory of economic and political liberalism. Marxism was definitely defeated; the era of revolutions was over. Yet, in the last two decades, revolutions have spread with remarkable speed: from the color revolutions in the former Soviet and Balkan states, to the Arab Spring, to the widespread anti-globalization and anti-austerity protests around the world.

This course offers a comparative study of the history and theory of modern revolutions, from the American and French revolutions of the 18th century to the anti-colonial independence struggles of the postwar world. We will explore the causes and motivations of diverse revolutionary movements, with particular emphasis on the political ideas that inspired them, to attain a nuanced and contextualized understanding of today’s revolutions. Readings include texts by Paine, Rousseau, Robespierre, Sieyes, L’Ouverture, Marx, Tocqueville, Lenin, Luxembourg, Mao, and Fanon. The course is designed as an introduction; no previous knowledge of the history or political theory we will cover is required.