



Invité par l'assemblée du Collège de France
sur proposition du Pr Antoine LILT

Darrin M. McMAHON

PROFESSOR AND CHAIR
OF THE DEPARTMENT HISTORY AT DARTMOUTH

Mardi 4 novembre 2025

Equality: New Reflections on the History of an Elusive Ideal

Amphithéâtre Maurice Halbwachs de 17 h à 18 h

Historians have often designated the 18th century as a period of the “invention” of equality as a modern political ideal. There can be no doubt that the 18th century witnessed important innovations in collective thinking about equality. And yet what is clear when one takes into account the intellectual *longue-durée* is that equality was by no means a novel concept in the 18th century—either in the “West” or among many of the world’s major religious traditions. A consideration of equality’s long and complicated pre-eighteenth-century past forces us to contend with the many different uses to which understandings of equality have been put, and to see that those notions of equality have often co-existed comfortably with hierarchy and exclusion, and indeed have regularly served as their foundational premise. After expounding on aspects of that past, McMahon will then discuss how it was “disrupted” by the great 18th-century revolutions in America, France, and Saint-Domingue, only to fall back into familiar patterns in their aftermath.

A plaidoyer for the value of intellectual history conducted over the *longue-durée*, the talk will at the same time seek to emphasize that although history can be understood as a succession of evolution and change it is also the terrain of continuity and persistence.

Illustration : (détail) *Allegory of the Republic*, 1794. Antoine-Jean Gros, Museum of the History of France, Versailles..

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