Unit 1 – Introduction to the Medieval World

- Dealing with politics and society in England and France in the 1500s
- Approaching critically the history of the Middle Ages
- A chronology to a degree is helpful but A200 is about understanding societies in the context of their time and not through the viewfinder of today
- History is a written narrative of continuous chronological record
- The past – gone by in time
- History – is an account of the past
- Discourse – the language, figures of speech and imagery people of the time used to talk about things
- Historiography – the history of writing
- The Whig interpretation states that there was an orderly progress of society over time
- States that every aspect of society is better now than it was 100 years ago
- Society bad 100 years ago, it was even worse 600 years ago
- Medieval is often used now as a derogatory term
- Vasari termed the phrase Renaissance as a compliment (p7)
- Middle Age – medium aevum – Latin led to us getting medieval
- No agreed period where things begin and end – Hannam (p8)
- Loosely speaking the middle ages covers 500 – 1500 AD
- The Middle Ages still have some explanatory value
- Medieval Western Europe shared:
  - Influences from the Roman Empire (Language – Latin, Law Code etc.)
  - Christian (primarily Catholic) Heritage
  - Germanic roots – military orientated society, landholding aristocracy etc.
- No social mobility was to be expected
- There were three estates:
  - The Clergy
  - Secular Elite (Knights, Lords etc.)
  - The Workers
- Reciprocal estates – all needed each other e.g. the labourers worked for the knights who gave them protection
- However, this was an idealised vision of society – those at the bottom weren’t particularly valued by those at the top.
- Serfs/Villiens could negotiate if unpaid work (e.g. in return for land)
- 13th/14th Century landowners were cash poor but land rich, so were prepared to negotiate

Black Death & Peasant’s Revolt

- Black Death arrived in Europe in 1347
- Horrifying short term – agent of historical change long term
- Up to 1/3 of the population were killed
- Difficult to obtain specific figures
- Led to a shortage of labour, prices of food rose as well as agricultural wages
- Large areas of land went from crops to sheep which needed little manpower
- Some land went to freemen which led to a new generation of landowning families
- Population continued to decline for decades because of the effects it had on kids
- Mid 15th Century population dipped from 6m to 2.5m