Social Thought and Political Economy 392H. Junior Seminar II: Theories and Narratives

University of Massachusetts Amherst
Spring Semester 2010
Tu/Th 11:15-12:30; F 12:20-1:10
Dickinson 206

James Fiorentino
Office: Herter 634
Email: jdfiore@history.umass.edu
Phone: (c) 413-387-5747
Office Hours: TuW 1:30-2:30

Brief description of course

This reading-intensive honors seminar is designed to meet two primary goals. The first goal is to acquaint students with the broad contours of twentieth-century global history through examinations of several “case studies” centered on pivotal events and processes: wars, revolutions, nation-building (or inventing), anti-colonial struggles, and the structural transformation of global capitalism over the past half-century. Popular strategies of resistance to domination and exploitation will be considered, as will struggles over the future of the biosphere.

The second goal is linked to the first. Besides surveying the historical landscape, so to speak, we will analyze various conceptual and theoretical frameworks that historians and activists have deployed to “make sense of the past,” often with an eye toward changing the present, and the future. For example, we will assess several competing (though occasionally complementary) interpretive approaches to the study of imperialism, postcolonialism, gender, and race, among others. History is more than a mere assemblage of facts, arranged in logical order by an impartial authority. We will learn through our reading that the production of history is a deeply complex and problematic enterprise, one that is fraught with contingency. In other words, this is a course about the history of ideas and structures of thought as much as it a course about events, personalities, and movements in history.

Course structure

This course is a seminar. Meetings will open with a brief (15 minute maximum) presentation of the issues at stake in the week’s readings. Afterwards, we will discuss the issues and the readings. If circumstances warrant, I may give occasional mini-lectures, but these will not be a regular feature of the course.

The seminar format places much of the burden of learning on you and your fellow students. Not preparing for discussions will harm them as well as you. A good instructor does not tell students what or how to think; he or she guides them in the process of education. Much of my work consists in preparing this syllabus carefully, and identifying issues for discussion.

Discussion serves several purposes. First, it helps clarify difficult or obscure points in the readings. Second, it helps you decide between conflicting positions or to reach a synthesis. Third, it allows me to observe how you approach readings and problems. Finally, it prepares you for thinking on your feet—an important part of academic life, as well as life outside the academy.
Any additional pertinent details regarding this course will be made available on the course mailing list throughout the semester.

**Requirements and grading**

Your grade for this course will be based on the following three requirements:

1. **Attendance and participation in discussion.** You may not miss *more than two classes*; if you exceed two absences, your final grade will drop by one half grade for each additional absence. *If you exceed five absences, I reserve the right to summarily drop you from the class.*

2. **In-class presentation(s).** Depending on the number of students enrolled in the course, each student will make one or two presentations introducing a seminar reading. These presentations will set out, briefly, the thesis, argument, and issues in each reading and raise general questions for discussion. They should be ten to fifteen minutes long.

3. **Written assignments.** Over the course of the semester, each student will be required to produce two brief (750-1000 word) book reviews (excluding the Hobsbawm assignment), a 2-3 page paper proposal, an annotated bibliography, and a final paper of *at least* 10 pages. Each assignment will be clearly explained in class well before due dates. I will provide access to writing resources as needed, though I highly recommend purchasing a copy of Kate Turabian’s writing guide (see below).

The final course grade will be balanced among these three elements. A rough breakdown is as follows:

- Attendance and Participation 60%
- Written Work 30%
- Presentation(s) 10%

If necessary, I will reweigh the elements *to your advantage.* I do not relish awarding sub-par grades.

**Due Dates for Written Assignments**

You will have the option of selecting which two texts you would like to review. The only caveat is that *one* of your reviews needs to be completed *before the midterm,* i.e., on or before Friday, March 5.

The assignments related to your final term paper are staggered. Your proposal (2-3 pages) is due Friday, February 26 in class. The topic of your final paper is subject to approval by the instructor (me).

The annotated bibliography is due Tuesday, March 23 (after Spring Break). The bibliography should include annotations of at least five primary sources and at least fifteen secondary sources, of which only five may be journal articles. We will review the mechanics of annotated bibliographies in class, well before the due date.

Your final term paper (10 or more pages; maximum 20) is due by Friday, May 7. Please plan accordingly; I do not accept electronic submissions.

Due dates are *not negotiable.*
Plagiarism Policy

As usual, this is simple. Do not plagiarize! Please refer to the University Student Handbook for a review of the university-wide policy. If I catch you plagiarizing, you will automatically fail the course. Whether I take further disciplinary action is contingent upon your degree of expressed remorse. I insist on a draconian policy for one reason: the student/instructor relationship is one built on mutual trust; if you violate my trust, I will make sure that your record of plagiarism follows you like an unwanted shadow throughout the remainder of your academic career. Do not plagiarize.

Books for the course

The following books are required. You should have arranged to buy or borrow these books over break; if you do not have all the titles yet, at least make sure that you have access to the first three books. The books are listed in the order they will be used in the course. Each text is on two hour reserve at the DuBois Library.


The following books are highly recommended. (Hint.)
Bennett, Grossberg, and Morris. New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society. London: Blackledge, 2005.

Reading Schedule

Imagined Communities, Global Empires
TH 1/21: Strategies for discussion; no reading.
F 1/22: Assess Hobsbawm; peer review of book reviews.

TH 1/28: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” [Handout]


F 2/5: No reading.


F 2/12: Discussion of IC. Finish Anderson for next Thursday.

T 2/16: No Class. (Monday Schedule.)

TH 2/18: Discussion of IC.

F 2/19: Wrap-up: Nationalism(s) in Context.

**War and Revolution**


F 2/26: Kevin Murphy, “Can We Write the History of the Russian Revolution?” (Deutscher Memorial Prize Lecture), in *International Socialism*, Issue 116 (Fall 2007)


F 3/5: No reading.

**The “Postcolonial Moment”**


TH 3/11: Continue Fanon.


T 3/23: Race and Gender in the postcolonial context. Reading TBD.


**Signs and Symptoms: Postmodernity and its Discontents**


TH 4/1: *The Origins of Postmodernity*, pp. 47-137.

F 4/2: Reading TBD (either Callinicos or Eagleton). Additional materials as necessary.
TH 4/8: *Stolen Harvest*, pp. 79-127.

**An Ambiguous Inheritance: Results and Prospects in the Neoliberal Era**

TH 4/15: Kiely, pp. 81-125.
F 4/16: Kiely, pp. 126-164.


TH 4/29: Discussion.

T 5/4: Last class; wrap-up.