

# CORE-UA 400.030: Texts and Ideas –“On Liberation”

## Spring 2014 Prof. J. K. Watson

**Lecture:** MW 12:30-1:45, 19 W. 4<sup>th</sup> St, Rm 101

**Recitations:**

Adam Spanos: F 8:00-9:15, SILV 515 and F 9:30-10:45, SILV 515.

Sonia Werner: F 9.30-10.45, SILV 500 and F 11.00-12.15, GCASL 384

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**Prof. Watson’s walk-in office hours:** Monday 2:15-4:45; 244 Greene St, room 707

### Course Description

What is liberation? How have the concepts of freedom, slavery and oppression been articulated by thinkers from Plato to Gandhi? This course examines these enduring questions through a wide historical and cultural lens, ranging from a founding text of Greek philosophy and the Bible to Shakespeare, Marx, and Martin Luther King. In this course, we aim to understand and map out competing ideas around the conditions for freedom—and unfreedom. We will read seminal works theorizing the relationship between the individual and the collective, ideas on sovereignty, slavery, the ideal state and the revolutionary nation, arguments for violence and non-violence. While the course provides a grounding in Western thought on the topic, we will also pay attention to the struggles and theorizations of the non-West (the Haitian Revolution, the Algerian and Indian independence struggles, postcolonialism and the Arab Spring) that have shaped our inquiry into the nature and promise of liberation.

### Goals of the course:

- to introduce you to major concepts in the history of thought regarding slavery, bondage, liberation and political organization
- to develop your skills in reading a wide variety of genres and literatures, analyzing various modes of argumentation, and writing clearly and effectively
- to develop a socially and historically informed understanding of the concept of liberation, that is, to see its development between and across historical moments, societies, cultures and power structures.

### **Textbooks available at NYU BookCenter \*\*hardcopies required**

Plato. *The Republic*. Trans. C.D.C. Reeve. (Hackett)

Olaudah Equiano. *The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings*. (Penguin)

William Shakespeare. *The Tempest*. (Norton Critical Edition)

Jean-Jacques Rousseau. *Discourse on Inequality*. (Penguin Classics)

Karl Marx. *Selected Writings*. Ed. Lawrence H. Simon. (Hackett)

C.L.R. James. *The Black Jacobins*. (Vintage)

Gandhi. *Hind Swaraj*. (Centenary edition, 2009)

\*\*Supplemental readings available on NYU Classes

# Course Requirements and Policies

## Assessment

### Close reading assignments (20%)

One of the major skills in conceptual learning is the ability to read a text closely for argument, mode, logic, style, and figurative language. These short papers increase in length, starting at 2 pages, then 3, then 4. They are your opportunity to show you can identify and evaluate ideas, and the mode they are presented in, within a context of other ideas. Since we are working with some very dense and difficult writers, these papers will help you develop clear reading, reflecting, and writing skills. No secondary sources are needed, and none should be consulted.

### Participation, Attendance (20%)

The first rule of university academics is that you cannot do well in a class if you do not come to it. Coming prepared to lectures and active participation in recitations are essential components of the course and are considered the norm. Recitations differ from lectures in that they are based around discussion and dialogue; they provide a forum for dealing with issues raised by the lectures and reading, as well as for preparing you for papers and exams. Many of the texts we are dealing with are difficult to read on one's own; make the most of the classroom as a space for respectful, cheerful, collective engagement with them. There will be short writing assignments incorporated into recitations, and your 1-page field trip report (see Week 12) is part of this grade.

### Pop Quizzes (5%)

There will be approximately 10 brief pop quizzes over the semester, which will occur in lecture no more frequently than once per week.

### Midterm exam (20%); Final exam (20%)

Exams are a useful and efficient way of assessing how you are absorbing and digesting the course material. In general, we are looking for your ability to identify textual material, reproduce the main arguments, respond to and analyze a set of ideas in a clear and relevant way. You may be examined on any material from the assigned readings, as well as on content from lectures and recitation. Terms presented with a "\*\*\*" (e.g. \*\*ontology) in lecture are especially important concepts that may be examined. Exams are cumulative. The exam is in three parts: 1) quotation identification and its significance (if you have not read the texts, you will not be able to do this!); 2) short answer questions and 3) short essay, chosen from two topics.

### Final paper (5-6pp; 15%)

For the final paper, you will build on one of your short close reading assignments. This paper will demonstrate your ability to synthesize and

evaluate ideas at a more complex and sustained level. More information will be distributed in recitation.

## **Policies**

### **Assignments**

Detailed assignment instructions will be distributed in lecture or recitation and made available on NYU Classes. If you are away the day it is distributed, please access it online. You are encouraged to read the assignment closely and ask for clarification early. Assignments are due *printed and stapled* on the days indicated on the syllabus (double-spaced, 12-pt font, Times New Roman or Cambria). Handing in assignments late prevents your instructors from giving your work timely attention and feedback; please be respectful of our work schedules and hand them in on time. Late assignments will be penalized 5% per day. Although we will give you feedback on each submitted piece and are happy to discuss it with you, it is our firm policy not to change grades after they are determined.

### **Exams**

The mid-term exam will be taken as scheduled on the syllabus; the final exam will be on the designated exam day. Because a whole new exam would have to be written for each absent student, please note that exams cannot be administered in advance or made up afterwards, except in cases of documented medical emergencies.

### **Attendance**

Two absences from lecture, and two absences from recitation are granted with no questions asked. Use these judiciously for unexpected minor illnesses, employment commitments, hangovers, parents-visiting-from-out-of-town weeks, etc. We do not need to be informed of the details. It is your responsibility to catch up what you missed by asking a classmate for his/her notes.

For further absences, you will need to show formal documentation (a doctor's certificate, a notice of jury duty, for example). In other words, auto-excuses (those you give yourself) will not excuse more than 4 absences. Going over 4 absences without documentation will result in the lowering of your final grade 2% points per absence. *Missing 6 lectures or sections (total) or more will severely jeopardize your ability to pass the class.*

Late arrivals are disruptive to the professor and your fellow classmates; two late arrivals will count as one absence.

### **Electronics**

Unfortunately, due to increasing evidence of the false ability to "multitask", no electronic devices are permitted in lecture or recitation. These include laptops, cell phones, iphones, ipads, blackberries, kindles etc. Please be respectful of your classmates and teachers and turn them off on entering the classroom. Bring print copies of all readings to lecture and recitation.

**NYU Classes Website**

Power point lecture notes and assignment details will be posted on the NYU Classes site. Your recitation instructor may also post reading and discussion questions here.

**Communication**

For questions about course content, assignments, assessment and special situations, stopping by our office hours is usually the most efficient thing to do. If emailing, we will try our best to respond within 24-48 hours.

**Disabilities**

Students with disabilities should register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (mosescsd@nyu.edu; 726 Broadway, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor; tel. 212.998.4980), which can arrange for things like extra time for assignments. The instructor must also be notified at the beginning of semester for special accommodations regarding exams and assignments.

**Academic Integrity**

See NYU's full statement on academic integrity at the end of the syllabus. Any instance of academic dishonesty—either on an assignment or an exam—will result in an F and will be reported to the relevant dean for disciplinary action.

**Grading**

See the Core Curriculum statement on grading guidelines at the end of the syllabus.

# Reading and Lecture Schedule

Note: "NYUC" means NYUClasses

The reading listed for each date is to be completed before coming to lecture

## 1. Classical thought on freedom and liberation

--we examine early texts on **freedom**; ask how the **ideal political community** and relationship between state, individual and ruler have been articulated (Plato); and why the **exodus** of the Israelites from Egypt remains a powerful example of liberation (Old Testament)

### Week 1

Mon 1.27

- Introduction

Wed 1.29

- Plato. *The Republic*. "Synopsis" (p. xxx-xxxiii) and Book 2 (pp. 36-65).

### Week 2

Mon 2.3

- Plato. *The Republic*. Book 4 (pp. 103-135) and section on The Cave in Book 7 (pp. 208-213).

Wed 2.5

- Plato. *The Republic*. Books 8 and 9 (pp. 238-296)

### Week 3

Mon 2.10

- Old Testament. *Exodus*. (NYUC)

## 2. On slavery

--we address essential questions and debates arising in relation to the **New World slavery** of Indians and Africans; examine early modern ideas of **slavery, bondage** and **racial difference** (Shakespeare); and look in depth at a seminal **autobiographical narrative** of slavery and freedom (Equiano)

Wed 2.12

- Extract from Bartolomé de Las Casas. *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*. (NYUC)
- William Shakespeare. *The Tempest*. Acts I and II (pp. 3-41)

**\*\*2p close reading paper  
due in recitation**

#### Week 4

Mon 2.17      PRESIDENTS DAY: NO CLASS

Wed 2.19

- William Shakespeare. *The Tempest*. Acts III, IV and V (pp. 42-77)

#### Week 5

Mon 2.24

- Olaudah Equiano. *The Interesting Narrative*. Chs. 1, 3, 5 (Ch. 4 optional).

Wed 2.26

- Olaudah Equiano. *The Interesting Narrative*. Chs. 6, 7, 9, 11, 12. (Chs. 8, 10 optional).

### 3. Liberty and society

--we engage with major 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century thought on **freedom**, **sovereignty** and the **individual-society** relationship, and ask: what are "natural" freedoms? (Rousseau); how is the issue of **women's liberation** figured? (Wollstonecraft); how does Marx articulate freedom from alienated **labor** and **class oppression**?

#### Week 6

Mon 3.3

- Jean-Jacques Rousseau. *Discourse on Inequality*. pp. 57-107.

Wed 3.5

- Jean-Jacques Rousseau. *Discourse on Inequality*. pp. 109-137.

**\*\*review session in  
recitation  
\*\*3p close reading paper  
due in recitation**

#### Week 7

Mon 3.10

- Mary Wollstonecraft. Extract from *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. (NYUC)

Wed 3.12

- MIDTERM EXAM in lecture

**no recitations**

#### Week 8

**\*\*SPRING BREAK\*\***

#### Week 9

Mon 3.24

- Karl Marx. Extracts from *The German Ideology*. pp. 105-132.  
\*\*Refer to reading notes posted on NYUC

Wed 3.26

- Karl Marx. *Capital* Ch. 1 (The Commodity Chapter). pp. 220-243.

## **Week 10**

Mon 3.31

- Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. *The Communist Manifesto*. pp. 157-186.

## **4. Colonialism and national liberation**

--we will gain an understanding of non-Western struggles of liberation in the context of the **anti-colonial movements**: in particular, the role of Haiti as the first successful **slave revolt** (James); the thought of Fanon and Gandhi in relation **to anti-imperialism**.

Wed 4.2

- C.L.R. James. *The Black Jacobins*. Prologue, Chs. I, II, and III.

## **Week 11**

Mon 4.7

- C.L.R. James. *The Black Jacobins*. Chs. IV and VI.

Wed 4.9

- C.L.R. James. *The Black Jacobins*. Chs. X and XI.

**\*\*4p close reading paper  
due in recitation**

## **Week 12**

Mon 4.14

- (no lecture to allow you to complete field trip and assignment)

Wed 4.16

- C.L.R. James. *The Black Jacobins*. Chs. XII and XIII.

**\*\*1-page field trip report  
due in recitation**

## **Week 13**

Mon 4.21

- Frantz Fanon. "Concerning Violence." *The Wretched of the Earth*. 35-69.  
(NYUC)

Wed 4.23

- Frantz Fanon. "On Violence." *The Wretched of the Earth*. 70-106. (NYUC)
- In-class clips of Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers*.

## Week 14

Mon 4.28

- Gandhi. *Hind Swaraj*. pp. 9-11; 25-28; 33-48; 56-59.  
 \*\*Guest lecture by Global Distinguished Professor Rajeswari Sunder Rajan

Wed 4.30

- Gandhi. *Hind Swaraj*. pp. 70-72; 77-117.

**\*\*1-paragraph  
description of final paper  
due in recitation  
(optional)**

## 5. Post-colonial liberations

--finally, we examine imperialism and Third World liberation going beyond the immediate historical event of decolonization; we will read MLK and Che Guevara on **Vietnam**; and examine recent writings on **the Arab Spring**.

## Week 15

Mon 5.5

- Martin Luther King, Jr. "Beyond Vietnam." [http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/documentsentry/doc\\_beyond\\_vietnam/](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/documentsentry/doc_beyond_vietnam/) (\*\*link on NYUC—print & bring to class)
- Che Guevara. "Create Two, Three, Many Vietnams." Message to the Tricontinental, 1967. (NYUC)

Wed 5.7

- Readings on the Arab Spring; tba

**\*\*review session in  
recitation**

## Week 16

Mon 5.12

- Class wrap-up and review

**\*\*final paper due in  
lecture**

**\*\*Final exam: Wed 5.14, 12:00-1:50\*\***