CORE-UA 400.080: Texts and Ideas “On Liberation”
Fall 2020  Professor Jini Kim Watson

Lecture: Monday & Wednesday 2:00-3:15pm  Recitations: Friday, various times
Professor Watson (jkw1@nyu.edu)  Office hours: Mon 3:15-4:15 & Tues 4-5pm
Recitation Instructors:
Estefany Lopez, PhD candidate (el2906@nyu.edu)  Office hours: Wed 11am-12pm & by appointment
Dr. Sara Partridge, PhD (sfpartridge@nyu.edu)  Office hours:
Alex Ramos, PhD candidate (alex.ramos@nyu.edu)  Office hours: Mon 12:30-1:30pm & by appointment

Course Description
What is liberation? How have the concepts of freedom, slavery and oppression been articulated by thinkers from Plato to the Combahee River Collective? 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 Gandhi. 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, women’s liberation, arguments for violence and non-violence. While the course provides a grounding in European 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) that have shaped our inquiry into the nature and promise of liberation. How can understanding the struggles of the past help us make better futures out of our own moment?

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.

Required Textbooks
Plato, Republic. (Hackett)
Olaudah Equiano. The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings. (Penguin)
Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Discourse on Inequality. (Penguin)
C.L.R. James. Toussaint Louverture: The Story of the Only Successful Slave Revolt in History. (Duke)
**other readings on NYUClasse
Course Format

Lectures
The lectures will be delivered remotely as live Zoom sessions at the scheduled class times (links are posted in NYU Classes). The audio recording of the lecture will be posted, along with the powerpoint slides, in NYU Classes. You may choose to attend the lecture live or listen to the recordings, however, choosing the latter will mean missing out on in-lecture activities and the opportunity to participate in the Q&A.

Recitations
The recitations will be conducted via Zoom at the scheduled class time. Your recitation instructors will lead you through small group discussions and activities, paying close attention to developing your reading and writing skills. Recitations will not be recorded; synchronous attendance is expected.

NYU Zoom
You must be logged into your NYU Zoom account (nyu.zoom.us) to access live Zoom meetings.

Course Requirements and Policies

Assessment
Detailed assignment instructions will be made available on NYU Classes and discussed in recitation. If you are away the day it is discussed, please access it online. You are encouraged to read the assignment closely and ask for clarification early. Assignments are due on the days indicated on the syllabus (double-spaced, 12-pt font, Times New Roman or Cambria) via NYU Classes. Please note that submitting 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 may be penalized 5% per day. Although we are happy to discuss your work with you, it is our firm policy not to change grades after they are determined.

1. Participation, Attendance: 15%
Being prepared for lectures, reading the materials in advance, and actively participating in recitations are essential to being successful in this course. Many of the texts we are dealing with are difficult to read on one’s own: make the most of the (zoom) classroom as a space for respectful, cheerful, collective engagement with them. You will be expected to do one 5-minute class presentation during the semester; your brief Google form responses during lecture also count toward this grade. Additionally, there will be short writing assignments and group work incorporated into recitations.

2. Weekly discussion responses 10%
Each week, you will thoughtfully reflect on the readings and engage with your peers using the forums site
on NYUClasses, posting 200-250 words by midnight on Wednesday, and responding with a 100-word post to at least one other classmate by midnight on Thursday. You are expected to post 10 times over the semester, meaning you can skip three weekly posts. Your responses will also be used by the recitation instructors to initiate discussion in weekly recitations. More information on weekly posts will be distributed during recitation.

2. 3 x short papers: 40% (10% + 15% + 15%)
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 2-3 pages, then 3 pages, then 4 pages (double-spaced). They are your opportunity to demonstrate that 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; the third paper will be more creative in scope. More information will be provided in recitation. No secondary sources are needed, and none should be consulted.

3. Midterm 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 synthesize textual material, 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. The exam will be a take-home exam and consist of short essays.

4. Final paper/project (6pp or equivalent): 20%
The final paper or project will demonstrate your ability to synthesize and evaluate ideas at a more complex and sustained level. You may choose from a variety of formats or creative genres (analytical essay; non-fiction essay; song; video; zine; podcast etc.) More information will be distributed in class.

Policies & Resources

Attendance
Attendance is taken in recitation and the in-lecture activities indicate engagement with the lectures. We know this may be a challenging semester; we hope you will lean into the intellectual community of the course as a way to connect to others. Missing many class meetings will make it difficult to do well in the course. Missing 6 lectures or sections (total) or more will severely jeopardize your ability to pass the class. We recognize this is unusual semester and exceptions may be made on a case by case basis; please contact your instructors immediately if you anticipate missing a lot of class.

Zoom etiquette
Please make every effort to join
meetings on time. To avoid background noise for others, mute your microphone unless speaking. To help create community in recitations, we would ask you to have your camera on if possible (we understand that if you may sometimes need to turn it off if you have a weak internet connection or for other reasons). Camera on is completely optional for lectures. Turning off other apps and devices will help to focus your attention on classwork.

NYU Classes Website
This is your go-to resource for the course. Lecture recordings, course materials, links to the Zoom sessions and assignment details will be posted on the NYU Classes site. You will have a separate NYUClasses for your recitation, where your recitation instructor may also post reading and discussion forum questions.

NYU Writing Center
The Writing Center can offer one-on-one assistance with essays and writing assignments. They are offering online appointments:
https://cas.nyu.edu/content/nyu-as/cas/ewp/writing-center.html

University Learning Center
The ULC offers one-to-one and group learning sessions. For more information see:
https://www.nyu.edu/students/academic-services/undergraduate-advisement/academic-resource-center/tutoring-and-learning.html

Accessibility
All students have the right to request accommodations from the Moses Center for Student Accessibility (mosescsa@nyu.edu; 726 Broadway, 2nd Floor; tel. 212.998.4980), which can arrange for things like extra time for assignments. Please notify your instructors at the beginning of semester for special accommodations.

Health and Wellness
The Student Health center is offering most services remotely this term. The Wellness Exchange 24/7 Hotline: (212) 443-9999. Please also see:
https://www.nyu.edu/students/health-and-wellness.html

The NYU Immigrant Defense Initiative
The IDI offers free and confidential legal services to NYU students and employees, and their immediate family members, on their immigration cases. IDI can assist with DACA, TPS, asylum, legal permanent residency, citizenship, employment authorization, representation in immigration court, humanitarian visas, and consultations for those who have had contact with the criminal system or have violated their visa. Contact IDI at immigrant.defense@law.nyu.edu or 212-998-6435. More information at:
https://www.law.nyu.edu/immigrant-rightsclinic/IDI

Academic Integrity
See NYU’s full statement on academic integrity:
https://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-
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. Remember that plagiarism is a matter of fact, not intention. Know what it is, and don’t do it.

Grading
See the Core Curriculum statement on grading guidelines: https://cas.nyu.edu/content/dam/nyu-as/casCore/documents/GradingGuidelines.pdf

---

**Reading and Lecture Schedule**

**Note: All readings except for Plato, Equiano, Rousseau, CLR James can be found on NYUClasses under the Resources tab.**

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

---

**UNIT 1: Classical thought on freedom and liberation**

“The best and most just is . . .

the one who rules like a king over himself”

--we examine early texts on freedom: ask how the ideal political community and the 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**
Wed Sept 2
- Introduction
- Join: Live Zoom session via link in NYUClasses Zoom tab (after first day, join at 2:50pm EST)

---

**Trigger Warnings**
By necessity, many texts we read in this class contain traumatic events – enslavement, death, and violence. Instructors will not be able to flag every instance in advance; please talk to us if you have concerns.

**NYU Votes**
And don’t forget to vote this Nov 3rd, if you’re eligible! https://www.nyu.edu/students/student-information-and-resources/nyu-votes.html
Week 2
Mon Sept 7
• Labor Day: NO CLASS

Wed Sept 9
• Read: Plato. *The Republic.* “Synopsis” (pp. xxx-xxxiii) and Book 2 (pp. 36-65).
• Watch lecture materials (posted on Media Gallery on NYUClasses)
• Post response on NYUClasses by Wed midnight

Week 3
Mon Sept 14
• Read: Plato. *The Republic.* Book 4 (pp. 103-135) and section on The Cave in Book 7 (pp. 208-213).
• Watch lecture materials

Wed Sept 16
• Read: Plato. *The Republic.* Books 8 and 9 (pp. 238-296)
• Watch lecture materials
• Post response on NYUClasses by Wed midnight

Week 4
Mon Sept 21

UNIT 2: New World Encounters and Slavery

“For I am all the subjects that you have, Which first was mine own king”

--we address essential questions and debates arising in relation to the New World enslavement of Native Americans 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 Sept 23
• Read: Extract from Bartolomé de Las Casas. *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*.
• Post response on NYUClasses by Wed midnight

**Submit 2-3-page close reading paper by Fri Sept 25, midnight (texts: either *Plato* or *Exodus*)

**Week 5**
Mon Sept 28

Wed Sept 30
• Read: Olaudah Equiano. *The Interesting Narrative*. Chs. 1, 2, 3, 5 (Ch. 4 optional).
• Post response on NYUClasses by Wed midnight

**Week 6**
Mon Oct 5
• Read: Olaudah Equiano. *The Interesting Narrative*. Chs. 6, 7, 9, 11, 12 (Chs. 8, 10 optional).
• Read: Angela Davis. “Reflections on the Black Woman’s Role in the Community of Slaves.”

UNIT 3. Liberty and society

“All ran toward their chains believing that they were securing their liberty.”

--we engage with major 18th and 19th 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 theorize freedom in terms of alienated labor and class oppression?

Wed Oct 7
• Post response on NYUClasses by Wed midnight

**Week 7**
Mon Oct 12   NO CLASS

Wed Oct 14
• **Guest interview** with Professor Cristina Beltrán
• Post response on NYUClasses by Wed midnight

**Week 8**
Mon Oct 19
• Read: Mary Wollstonecraft. Extract from *A Vindication of the Rights of Women.*

**Submit: 3-page close reading paper by Mon Oct 19, midnight (texts: either Shakespeare, Equiano or Davis)**

Wed Oct 21
• Read: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. *The Communist Manifesto.*
• Post response on NYUClasses by Wed midnight

**Week 9**
Mon Oct 26

**UNIT 4. Colonialism, revolution and national liberation**

“The last shall be the first.”
--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 revolution (James); the thought of Fanon and Gandhi in relation to anti-imperialism.

Wed Oct 28
• Read: C.L.R. James. Toussaint Louverture: The Story of the Only Successful Slave Revolt in History. Act I (pp. 49-80).
• Post response on NYUClasses by Wed midnight

Week 10
Mon Nov 2
• No lecture

**Take-home exam: distributed 5pm Friday 30th, due by 11:59pm Monday Nov 2**

Wed Nov 4
• Read: C.L.R. James. Toussaint Louverture. Acts II & III (pp. 80-133).
• Post response on NYUClasses by Wed midnight

Week 11
Mon Nov 9

Wed Nov 11
• Read: Frantz Fanon. “Concerning Violence.” The Wretched of the Earth. pp 70-106.
• Watch clips of Pontecorvo’s The Battle of Algiers *before* lecture: https://nyu.kanopy.com/playlist/10766406
• **Guest interview** with Professor Robert Young during lecture
• Post response on NYUClasses by Wed midnight
Week 12
Mon Nov 16
• Watch: clips from Richard Attenborough’s *Gandhi* in lecture.

Wed Nov 18
• Read: Gandhi. *Hind Swaraj*. pp. 70-72; 77-117.
• **Guest interview** by Global Distinguished Professor Rajeswari Sunder Rajan
• Post response on NYUClasses by Wed midnight

**Submit: 4-page play script paper by Fri Nov 20, midnight**

UNIT 5: Contemporary issues and freedom

“If Black women were free, it would mean everyone else would have to be free.”

--finally, we touch on three issues central to liberation today: women of color feminism in the U.S.; race, criminal justice and BLM; and the challenge of climate change

Week 13
Mon Nov 23
• Read: The Combahee River Collective Statement
• Read: Anzaldúa, *La conciencia de La mestiza / Towards a New Consciousness.*

****Thanksgiving Break: No classes Wed Nov 25 - Fri 27th ****

Week 14
Mon Nov 30
• Read: Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor. “From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation.”
Wed Dec 2
• Watch: *13th*, by Ava DuVernay (NO LECTURE)
  available on Youtube: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=krfcq5pF8u8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=krfcq5pF8u8)
**Complete Google response form on film** [https://forms.gle/FmJzvuzsUrRcq8vM7](https://forms.gle/FmJzvuzsUrRcq8vM7)
• Post response on NYUClasses by Wed midnight

** 1-paragraph description of final project due in recitation, Fri Dec 4, for peer-review workshop**

Week 15
Mon Dec 7
• Read: Amitav Ghosh. “Politics,” in *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable.*

(Final recitations: Friday Dec 11)

**Submit final assignment by Thurs Dec 17th, midnight**