

The Politics of Liberation: Marxism, Feminism, and Anti-Colonialism in the 20th C
(version taught in Summer 2020)

I. Content Overview

This course is a survey of Marxist and revolutionary left social and political philosophy in the 20th century, sometimes called the philosophy of liberation or critical theory. However, it studies such theories not just as academic inquiries, but as engaged attempts by those involved with leftist political struggle to think through their own situations. As such, we will make use of statements and records of political movements themselves in the 20th century, as well as more traditionally theoretical texts.

The philosophers covered in this course analyzed the social and economic order of capitalism as a global structure that subjects all human life the drive for profits, and works as an interlocking system with gender, racial, and colonial domination. Moreover, they thought that only a politics focused on democratic popular sovereignty—human beings collectively determining their own life—could overcome these forms of domination. The course will focus on the relationship between Marxism, feminism, Third World national liberation, and queer liberation, we'll read movement and political texts from all of these. It is arranged around three revolutionary moments in time: first, European Marxism before and following the Russian Revolution of 1917; second, global national liberation from the 50s through the 70s; and third, socialist feminism and gender liberation in the 70s and 80s. We'll cover figures such as Rosa Luxemburg, György Lukács, Antonio Gramsci, Frantz Fanon, Amílcar Cabral, Huey P. Newton, Angela Davis, Claudia Jones, Selma James, and Mariarosa Dalla Costa.

II. Format Overview & Learning Objectives

This course takes the format typical to those given in philosophy departments, which means that we will focus on reading selected texts very carefully in order to examine 1) the particular claims and viewpoints presented within each excerpt of text we read, and 2) the arguments given in support of these viewpoints. You may find that compared to some courses given in other disciplines, we cover somewhat less an amount of reading; however, we will read the texts we do more closely and carefully than sometimes happens in the courses for other disciplines.

Some texts will be denser and more difficult than others—sometimes because they come from a very different philosophical context than our own. Other times, these texts will include large amounts of information about and allusions to the concrete history and politics the author is concerned with—more here than in many other philosophy classes. You will need to read each text more than once in order to begin to understand it. If you do, you will find that these texts are immensely rich and rewarding, revealing new things to you each time you look at them.

You will not understand everything said—even those of us who study these texts for years do not understand everything, and I have many questions about these texts I hope we can explore together. If you attempt to chew on this dense material, you will find that the philosophical activity itself *is* the chewing and the difficulty—the activity of philosophy is

having new questions and ideas raised for you that you can't immediately make sense of. In this case, you might find it especially puzzling and rewarding given the topics focused on by the philosophers in this course are very much continuous with contemporary social and political questions.

It is crucial that you read each text *before* class, and you will also find it helpful to reread the texts after class in order to incorporate new understandings we develop during the class. When you read, you should write notes in the margins or on a separate document, trying to write down what you think the key ideas and arguments are, as well as what terms or arguments you don't understand. The focus is to get a sense of how the philosophers we read make the case for the viewpoints—not to merely get a summary of some of their key ideas, but rather to enter into their argumentative stance and see *why* they make the claims that they do.

By the end of the course students will:

1. Have a *historical* understanding of the way revolutionary Marxist, feminist, and anti-colonial movements both shaped and were shaped by social and political circumstances in the 20th century and how they represented not separate, siloed traditions but shared a critical vocabulary and set of concepts.
2. Have a *working familiarity* with key concepts in Marxist, feminist, and anti-colonial theory such that they could read further 20th and 21st century writings of critical theory and philosophy influenced by these traditions.
3. Have gained *significant practice* reading and interpreting difficult historical texts as both necessarily bound to their context, but also as connected historically to ideas from both before and after their own context.

III. Assignments and Grading

Reading Response Questions: Students will have to submit their answers to the reading response questions for each session by the start of each class. Please email the responses directly to me in .docx format. These reading responses will consist of several short questions about the text for that day to be answered by the student. The completion of these, *not* their correctness, will count towards the grade of the class, as shown in the breakdown below.

Papers: There will be three short papers. I will set prompts for the papers, or if you want to modify or propose a different topic, you must meet with me to discuss and create an appropriate prompt. Paper 1 is due Monday, June 8 at 11:59pm, Paper 2 is due Tuesday, June 23 at 11:59pm, and Paper 3 is due Sunday, July 5 at 11:59pm.

Grade Breakdown: I'll calculate all grades using a 4.0 scale. The final grade will be:

- 20% Reading Responses
- 20% Attendance and Participation
- 20% Paper 1
- 20% Paper 2
- 20% Paper 3

IV. Course Policies and Accommodations

Accommodations for students with disabilities: Academic accommodations are available to any students with a chronic, psychological, visual, mobility, learning disability, or is deaf or hard of hearing. Students should register with NYU's Henry and Lucy Moses Center for students with Disabilities, 726 Broadway, 2nd Floor, New York NY 10003-6675. Tel. 212-998-4980. Website: www.nyu.edu/csd

Remote Learning and Class-time: Because it makes it much easier to conversations to flow between us, rather than just directing attention towards me only, I will ask everyone to have their video on for the class. Please speak with me if you have questions or concerns about this.

Normally I don't allow laptops in class, except for if someone has particular circumstances. Due to remote learning we'll all of course be on some kind of device, but I ask that you please close out of all other windows besides Zoom and the class readings since I know (from first-hand experience with myself!) how distracting other things on your device can be when you're on Zoom.

V. Office Hours

I will hold regular office hours from 2-3 on Wednesdays.

VI. Schedule

Below is a schedule for the course describing what readings we will cover.

Again, you will need to read each text more than once in order to begin to understand it. It is crucial that you read each text *before* class, and you will also find it helpful to reread the texts after class in order to incorporate new understandings we develop during the class. When you read, you should write notes in the margins or on a separate document, trying to write down what you think the key ideas and arguments are, as well as what terms or arguments you don't understand.

The 'further readings' listed are entirely optional; they are there in case you wanted a recommendation for how to further explore that day's topic.

Part 1 – Marxism at the height of European revolutionary working-class movements

Reading 1 – Marx's analysis of capitalism

Required reading:

Marx, excerpts from *Wage Labor and Capital* (1849)

Further reading:

League of Revolutionary Black Workers, *Finally Got the News* (1970) (film available on Kanopy)

Reading 2 – Marx's understanding of revolutionary theory

Required reading:

Daniel Brinkerhoff Young

Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848)

Marx, Preface to *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859)

Further reading:

Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach”

Marx, excerpts from *The German Ideology*

Reading 3 – Working-class strategy and the unity of economic and political struggle

Required reading:

Rosa Luxemburg, excerpts from *The Mass Strike, the Political Parties, and the Trade Unions* (1906)
(the introduction is optional although you may find it helpful)

Further reading:

Sergei Eisenstein, *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) (film available on Kanopy)

Reading 4 – What is the Marxist approach to theorizing the working-class struggle?

Required reading:

György Lukács, “What is Orthodox Marxism?” from *History and Class Consciousness* (1923)

Reading 5 – The relationship between struggles over class and gender

Required reading:

Alexandra Kollontai, excerpts from *On the Social Basis of the Woman Question* (1909) and
“Sexual Relations and the Class Struggle” (1921)

Reading 6 – The relationship between capitalism and colonialism—and their opponents

Required reading:

Vladimir I. Lenin, excerpts from *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1917)

Ho Chi Minh and Nguyen Ai Quoc, “Report on the National and Colonial Questions at the
Fifth Congress of the Communist International” (1924)

Further reading:

Utsa Patnaik and Prabhat Patnaik, excerpts from *A Theory of Imperialism* (2017) with foreword
by Akeel Bilgrami

Reading 7 – Addressing the failures of the working-class revolution in Europe

Required reading:

Antonio Gramsci, excerpts from his *Prison Notebooks* (1929-1935)

(I’ve put the excerpts in three chunks; I recommend you read first the chunk on “the state,”
second the chunk on “economism,” and lastly read the chunk on “revolutionary strategy”)

Further reading:

Stuart Hall, “Gramsci and Us” (1988)

Antonio Gramsci, excerpts from his *Prison Notebooks* on the war of maneuver and the war of
position

Part 2 – National liberation and the struggle against colonialism and racism

Reading 8 – Peasants, land, and indigenous peoples in Latin America

Required reading:

José Carlos Mariátegui, “The Problem of the Indian” and “The Problem of Land” from
Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality (1928)

Reading 9 – The structure of colonial society

Required reading:

Frantz Fanon, first half of “On Violence” (through page 31) from *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961)

Reading 10 – The structure of anti-colonial revolution

Required reading:

Frantz Fanon, second half of “On Violence” (after page 31) from *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961)

Further reading:

Göran Olsson, *Concerning Violence: Nine Scenes from the Anti-Imperialistic Self-Defense* (2014) (film available on Kanopy)

Reading 11 – Popular mobilization and strategy in national liberation

Required reading:

Frantz Fanon, “Grandeur and Weakness of Spontaneity” from *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961)

Further reading:

Gillo Pontecorvo, *The Battle of Algiers* (1966) (film available on Kanopy)

Reading 12– Case study: theory of the Palestinian revolution

Required reading:

Fateh (The Palestinian National Liberation Movement), “The Structure of Revolutionary Construction” (1958)

Fateh, “The Liberation of Occupied Countries and the Method of Struggle Against Direct Colonialism” (1967)

(both are taken from <http://learnpalestine.politics.ox.ac.uk/teach>, an online resource and curriculum with many documents from the Palestinian revolution)

Further reading:

Mustafa Abu Ali and the PLO Film Unit, *They Do Not Exist* (1974) (film available on Youtube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2WZ_7Z6vbsg)

Reading 13 – The relationship between anti-colonial struggle and culture

Required reading:

Amilcar Cabral, “National Liberation and Culture” (1970)

Reading 14 – Women and the anti-colonial struggle

Required reading:

‘Issam ‘Abd al-Hadi, interviewed by al-Bira: Palestinian Women’s Research and Documentation Centre (2006)

Rosemary Sayigh, “Women in Struggle: Palestine” (1983)

Reading 15 – Anti-imperialism from within the United States

Required reading:

Huey P. Newton, “Intercommunalism” (1974)

Further reading:

Daniel Brinkerhoff Young

Ho Chi Minh, “The Imperialist Aggressors Can Never Enslave The Heroic Vietnamese People” (1952)

Cedric J. Robinson, excerpts on racial capitalism from *Black Marxism* (1983)

Part 3 – Liberation in the field of sex and gender; struggles against capitalist patriarchy

Reading 16 – Black women in the United States and the matrix of race, gender, and class

Required reading:

Claudia Jones, “An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman!” (1949)

Reading 17 – Gay liberation and its relationship to other liberation struggles

Required reading:

Carl Wittman, “A Gay Manifesto,” and Response from the Red Butterfly Collective (1970)

Huey P. Newton, “The Women's Liberation and Gay Liberation Movements” (1970)

Further reading:

M. E. O'Brien, “Fifty Years of Queer Insurgency” (2019)

Reading 18 – Unpaid, gendered labor in capitalism

Required reading:

Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, “Women and the Subversion of the Community” (1972) (foreword and introduction optional)

Reading 19 – A critique of wages for housework

Required reading:

Angela Davis, “The Approaching Obsolescence of Housework: A Working-Class Perspective” (1981)

Reading 20 – Political strategy in addressing the entanglement of race, gender, and class

Required reading:

Selma James, “Sex, Race, and Class” (1974)

Combahee River Collective Statement (1977)

VII. Readings and Texts

Required Texts: All required readings will be posted on NYU Classes. These are listed in the schedule below by date. Feel free to ask me if you want to know what edition of a book we're using.

Optional, Background and Secondary Texts: The following are some recommendations of reading that will provide either helpful background for the material in this course, or analysis of some of it, just in case you are interested.

Background Primary Texts:

1. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *On the Social Contract* (1762)
2. G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (1820)
3. Karl Marx, “On the Jewish Question, Pt. 1” (1843)
4. Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (especially the manuscript on alienated/estranged labor)

5. Karl Marx, *Capital, Vol. 1* (1867) (especially chapters 1, 4, 6, 7, 10, 12, 26, 27, 31)
6. Karl Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Program" (1875)
7. Sojourner Truth, "Ain't I a Woman?" (1851)
8. Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884)
9. Karl Kautsky, *The Class Struggle (Erfurt Program)* (1892)
10. Rosa Luxemburg, *Reform or Revolution?* (1899)
11. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903)
12. August Bebel, *Woman and Socialism* (1904)
13. Vladimir I. Lenin, *State and Revolution* (1917)
14. C. L. R. James, *Black Jacobins* (1938)
15. Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (1950)
16. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952)

Secondary texts and resources:

17. Lectures on Marxism, Raymond Geuss, University of Cambridge (Youtube: <https://youtu.be/tFW6EjxP2K8>)
18. Lectures on Marxist social science, Erik Olin Wright, University of Wisconsin, Madison (<https://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~wright/sociology621-2011.htm>)
19. "Race, the Floating Signifier," lecture documentary by Stuart Hall (<https://kanopy.com/video/race-floating-signifier-stuart-hall>)

VIII. Further Resources

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Website: www.nyu.edu/csd

University Learning Center: The University Learning Center's mission is to assist students in developing the knowledge base, skills, and strategies that will help them to become confident, independent, and active learners. Its various academic support services are intended to help students meet the challenge of NYU's rigorous academic standards.

Website: <https://www.nyu.edu/students/academic-services/university-learning-centers.html>

Writing Center: The Writing Center is a place where any NYU student can get help with his or her writing. It is a place where one-on-one teaching and learning occur, as students work closely with faculty and experienced peer tutors at every stage of the writing process and on any piece of. Website: <https://cas.nyu.edu/content/nyu-as/cas/ewp/writing-center.html>

Wellness Exchange: The Wellness Exchange is your greatest mental health resource at NYU. Call the 24-hour hotline at (212) 443-9999, chat via the Wellness Exchange app anytime, speak with a certified counselor about any day-to-day challenges or health concerns, including medical issues, stress, depression, sexual assault, anxiety, etc. No concern is too big or too small. Website: <https://www.nyu.edu/students/health-and-wellness/wellness-exchange.html>

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NYU Immigrant Defense Initiative: The NYU Immigrant Defense Initiative (IDI) offers free and confidential legal services to NYU students and employees, and their immediate family members, on their immigration cases. Contact IDI at immigrant.defense@law.nyu.edu or (212) 998-6435.