

Core 152 - Challenges of Modernity

Spring 2017

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Office: Hascall 103
Office hours: TR 4:00–5:00, W 1:00–2:00, and by appointment

O: TR 1:20–2:35 Lawrence 109
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Course description

It's often said that we live in a “post-modern” world. But many of the things that concern us today originate in social changes that were taking hold around the turn of the 19th Century, which have been described expertly by writers and artists in the subsequent 150 years or so—eras we like to think we've moved well beyond. This course is a seminar-style approach to a small (and by no means exhaustive) collection of works from this period that diagnose challenges of the present day. In particular, we'll explore the theme of *precarity*: the idea that the modern world *feels* very precarious, in spite of advances in many areas of life.

To quote the catalogue description, the mission of the class is to prompt students to “think broadly and critically about the world that they inhabit, asking them to see their contemporary concerns in the perspective of the long-standing discourses of modernity.” Your job is to engage honestly with this mission through (a) careful reading and preparation for class, (b) in-class discussions, (c) unorthodox writing assignments, and (d) traditional written exams.

Please note that this syllabus is subject to change. Updates will be announced and posted to Moodle.

Books

- Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*. Grove/ATL, ISBN 978-0802144423
- DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*. Dover, ISBN 978-0486280417
- Marx, *The Communist Manifesto* (Gaspar, ed.). Haymarket, ISBN 978-1931859257
- Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*. Hackett, ISBN 978-0915144945
- Nietzsche (Clark & Swenson eds.), *On the Genealogy of Morality*. Hackett, ISBN 978-0872202832

These are available at the bookstore. *Please use only these specific editions of the texts.*

Assessment

Your *entire* grade for this course is determined your performance on the mid-term and final exams and how far you get through the series of writing assignments. Be aware that *nothing else* is a formal part of your grade, such as attendance and participation (see policies below).

The midterm and final are take-home and in short answer format. Deadlines are on the course schedule and detailed instructions will be posted to Moodle.

Writing assignments will be aimed at exploring how our texts diagnose contemporary issues, while also improving your abilities to (a) state and argue for things clearly, and (b) engage with ideas responsibly. Be aware that these

assignments will be *structured*, in that you must complete each assignment to our mutual satisfaction before submitting work for the next one. Consequently, this part of your grade is determined by how many assignments you pass through, rather than by adding up your performance on each one. This includes the mid-term and final, although they are not structured in the same way (i.e. you don't need to pass the mid-term to take the final). Details and instructions are on Moodle.

Your grade for the course is calculated as follows:

Each writing assignment you pass is worth 1 point (with no partial credit), and there are a total of 6 assignments. The midterm and final exams are worth 2 points apiece (partial credit possible). Thus there are 10 possible points. At the end of the semester we add up your points and assign a grade according to this scale:

1/F, 2/D, 3/C-, 4/C, 5/C+, 6/B-, 7/B, 8/B+, 9/A-, 10/A

Note that A+ is not on this list, although I am willing to give A+ grades in rare and exceptional circumstances. What that means for this course is that you can get an A+ if you get one of your papers for the course published in a high-quality magazine like Boston Review. This will take a fair amount of work and planning, so if you want to pursue this option, you need to let me know ASAP.

Basic schedule

We will tackle our main texts in the order listed below. A complete and up-to-date reading schedule will be kept through Google Docs and linked from Moodle. This schedule will include supplementary readings and links to other materials.

- Darwin's *Descent of Man*
- *Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*
- *Genealogy of Morality*
- *Waiting for Godot*
- *Communist Manifesto*
- Hip-Hop with Duane Lee Holland
- *The Souls of Black Folk*
- Speeches by Malcolm X
- Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers*

Course Policies

• Attendance & Participation

You'll note that attendance and participation do not figure directly in your overall grade. But don't let that fool you into thinking they don't make a difference. *They do, in a number of indirect ways.* I expect you to be a full-fledged participant in every class, which means (a) being prepared to do so by reading carefully and making detailed notes about what you've read, (b) involving yourself in the conversation every day, and (c) doing so in a way that makes it easy for others to be involved too. The more you do this, the more I know about you, and the more I can give you the benefit of the doubt when evaluating your work. Additionally, the following policy exists to ensure your preparation and participation:

Snacks — You must be prepared to give *reasonable, textually supported answers* when called upon in class. If your name comes up and you cannot do so, you will be responsible for bringing snacks for the class on our next meeting. This is the case even if you're not in class that day (unless your academic dean or coach has notified me in advance—an email from you is not enough).

In general, it's OK to miss a class or two for mundane reasons if they're spread out over the term, and you're willing to risk having to buy snacks. If you're experiencing a problem that presents a genuine reason for not being in class (e.g. you've got the flu), or not being involved with the discussion board (e.g. you have a concussion), be sure to get your academic dean involved as soon as you realize there's an issue.

- **Meeting outside of class**

Given our structured assignments, it's imperative that you talk with me *regularly* outside of class. My usual office hours are best for that, unless you have an *inescapable commitment* during them. If you do, you can make an appointment for a mutually convenient time, provided we can arrange it a few days in advance. My office is in Hascall Hall, opposite the Chapel. It's on your left as you come in from the chapel side.

- **Email etiquette**

I'm happy to take questions over email, provided they can be answered in a sentence or two (email is a huge time-sink for faculty). Otherwise, it's easier for both of us if we speak in person. I generally don't check email more than once a day or outside of business hours.

- **Academic Honesty**

I expect each of you to uphold the letter and spirit of the Honor Code. If you have any questions about what that means in the context of any part of this class, *please talk to me before you do it*. I strongly encourage you to talk about the class and your writing with others. But your work must be yours alone. There is a blanket prohibition on even consulting outside sources that haven't been approved by me in advance. Making use of such a source, with or without proper citation, will constitute cheating and not merely plagiarism.

- **Inclusion Policy**

It is my goal and responsibility to make this course and our classroom as accessible to and inclusive of every student, as possible. I understand that students have different ways and paces of learning and accessing information, and that each student comes with their own, and sometimes difficult, experiences with learning. I aim to make the classroom environment comfortable and respectful without undermining the importance of discussing and disagreeing about ideas. I encourage all students to see me if they want to discuss their learning process or needs.

University Policies

- The Writing and Speaking Center offers confidential one-on-one peer assistance with writing projects from any course, at any level. A big chunk of their business comes from Core 152. No referral is necessary, and you may visit at any stage of the composing process. See <http://www.colgate.edu/centers-and-institutes/writing-and-speaking-center> for more information or to schedule an appointment. You can 'browse' consultants and make an appointment with someone whose academic background and interests make him or her a good fit for your needs.

- The Center for Teaching, Learning, and Research is a hub for information and resources. Drop in or contact the coordinator, Renée Chapin (x7375) to discuss finding an extra-quiet study space, a peer tutor, or some tips on time management.

- **Specific Learning Accommodations and Support**

I incorporate a variety of assignments, materials, and teaching approaches to appeal to students' diverse learning strengths. To assist me in taking this, please notify me privately *at the start of the course* if you require specific learning accommodations or support. This information will remain confidential. In many cases, students requesting accommodations will also need to contact the Director of Academic Support and

Disability Services to receive help determining and coordinating a specific accommodation on the basis of disability/medical documentation. Contact info as follows:

Lynn Waldman, Director of Academic Support and Disability Service

Center for Learning, Teaching, and Research

Tel: (315) 228-7375; TTY: (315) 228-6001

Email: lwaldman@colgate.edu