In Cameroon women farmers defecate before state officials to protest endemic corruption. In India villagers forced to relocate to make way for dams risk death by squatting on slowly-flooding lands. In Venezuela men jailed for years before seeing trial sew shut their lips to demand justice. As international development agendas peg the spread of democracy to the rise of global ‘civil society,’ how do we make sense of these ‘uncivil’ acts? This course examines the function of incivility in modern political thought and practice, drawing from the works of Machiavelli and Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau, Thoreau and Tocqueville, Putnam and Fukuyama, Chartejee and Žižek. The goal is to trace how ‘civil society’ has come to define what constitutes legitimate political action in democracy, in the process marginalizing as illegitimate forms of action that appear uncivil. Then, by examining contemporary case studies, we will assess how culture and history blur the boundaries between civility and incivility in the pursuit of effective government, asking: What currents of social capital underlay the exercise of incivility, and how might they be incorporated into a common language of democratization for the twenty first century? Is there a place for incivility in modern democracy, or has irreverence become irrelevant?

Requirements

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<td>Assignment One</td>
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<td>Discussion Section</td>
<td>varies per student</td>
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<td>Assignment Two</td>
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Participation/Attendance

Being part of a class means being part of a community of peers, one that builds from the contributions of each member to arrive at collective (if rarely unanimous!) understandings of difficult topics and concepts. This is especially true for a course that is comprised only of your fellow first year students, and that is designed to build from one week’s materials to the next as we piece together the intellectual lineage of “civil society” and its relationship to civility and incivility. As such I will expect you to be present and on time at each of our class sessions. Should you need to miss a session, let me know ahead of class as I will not consider retroactive explanations and each unexcused absence will incur a five point reduction from your final grade (with a maximum of three, after which you will receive an F for participation/attendance). More importantly, though, I will expect you to come to class prepared, which of course means that you have read/seen/heard the
work assigned in advance of each class. To help you engage with the materials and participate in class discussions you might consider keeping a log of questions as you read/see/hear course materials, questions that you can (and should!) raise in class. What was confusing about the materials? What major arguments does each source make? What common threads or contradictions do you see between each week’s materials, or between one week’s materials and those of another?

**Discussion Section (varies per student, 15%)**

One of the hallmarks of a liberal arts education is open, fluid, and critical discussion. From time to time, in the course of your studies, you will likely find yourself in the position of having to lead these discussions, whether by default or by design (e.g. your professor asks you to lead a section, or you are the only one who read all the materials!). At these times, you will discover that leading a group of your peers in examining a set of documents, drawing out their arguments, finding their contradictions, and arriving at a shared understanding of its major points, is more an art than a science. It involves reading closely, paying attention to what the authors are trying to convey and how they are trying to convey it. What seems forced? What seems left out? What are the hidden meanings or subtexts? Then, you have to convey your interpretations on these questions clearly but provocatively, sparking the imagination (and perhaps even the ire!) of your peers while also paying attention to, and taking care to consider, alternative (or even contrary) interpretations. This is the essence of the liberal arts tradition.

In this spirit, each student will have an opportunity to lead one of the asterisked discussion sections (please let me know by 7 October if you have a preference, otherwise I will assign you a week). For each section there will be three student discussants, and each student in turn will lead a group of four students. These sections will be about forty five minutes in duration and cover only some of the materials assigned for each week. Students will be responsible for closely reading all of these materials and for developing discussion questions based on your interpretation of that material. Please expect and plan to meet with me and with your fellow discussion leaders on the day before your small group, which of course means that you should have read the material by then.

Questions may concern whole texts, or focus on a particular section. In the event that they are detailed (for instance, if there was a particular passage that caught your attention), make sure that your questions can be connected to larger themes in the text. You might also consider incorporating an element of research on the particular country or historical setting of the topics discussed during your week. This research need not be exhaustive, given the time constraints; just enough to give you a sense of how to frame your questions historically. For a forty to fifty minute discussion, you should expect to prepare no fewer than five questions. In all cases, your questions should have a goal in mind. What is the big idea that the various materials point to? What should we get out of the readings? How do they relate to the larger issues of the course: the construction of civilities, the marginalization of (certain) incivilities, etc? How is the relationship between civility and incivility dealt with by each source? In order to get your bearings, students should meet with me on the Tuesday before your discussion section to go over these questions. So that we can keep a record of your questions and for others to refer to them, you should post your questions on the course website.

In the course of actually leading discussion, you should not limit your interventions to just the prepared questions; dare venture answers to those questions, or other questions raised in the context
of the discussion. Use your familiarity with the materials to provide plausible answers to the questions both you and your colleagues raise in the context of the discussion. Keep track in your mind of what your peers have said, so that you can draw connections. My evaluation of the thoughtfulness and work that went into creating your discussion questions will determine your grade for this assignment. Also, my evaluation will rest on how well you are able to engage with your peers’ reactions to your questions. Finally, while it will be the discussants’ responsibility to come up with engaging questions, it is in every student’s best interest to assist each other by coming prepared for class and participating actively in the discussion. After all, every student will have a turn at leading a section.

Assignment One: What is Civil Society? (7 September, 10%)

The first assignment asks you to answer a seemingly simple question: what is civil society? The purpose here is twofold: on one hand to familiarize you with the process of conducting interdisciplinary research; on the other hand to familiarize you with the analytic mess that is “civil society.” You should begin by asking yourself the question: When you think or hear “civil society,” what comes to mind? Then consult the following sources: 1) at least two dictionaries, including the Oxford English Dictionary (if you speak a foreign language, feel free to consult a dictionary in that language), 2) at least two inter/multi-national websites – for instance the World Bank, United Nations, African Union, Arab League, Indian or Chinese governments, etc), and 3) at least two people not enrolled in the class (roommate? parent? friend?). Present your findings in the form of a 4-5 page paper (double spaced, 12 point font, one inch margins, Times New Roman or a comparable font; for the definitions and websites, you should include the sources you consulted as appendices, for instance, photocopies of dictionary definitions and printouts of webpages. We will discuss interview protocols in class). This paper need not, in fact should not, be polished. The purpose is for you (and me) to get a sense of the kind of interpretative variety that surrounds the notion of civil society. What common threads did you find between the various sources? What were the most significant differences between the various definitions, if any? What surprised you about your findings? How did they relate to your own initial sense of civil society? Be sure to reference your sources appropriately (we will discuss referencing techniques in class). Please submit all copies by email – av48@nyu.edu – as I will not accept hard copies.

Assignment Two: The Uncivil Origins of Civil Society (25 October, 20%)

The second assignment offers you an opportunity to learn how to engage closely with theory. In particular, it asks you to place the materials between 30 September and 21 October in conversation with each other, from the Greeks to Burke and Madison. Doing so serves a couple of purposes. For one it familiarizes you with the skill of close reading and analysis, which we will discuss further and practice throughout the semester. This means paying attention not just to the overarching argument or ideas a piece makes but the words that are used, the way in which an argument is structured, the kinds of evidence deployed in. And by engaging with two readings, the assignment also asks you move beyond a book report, instead locating support, the context within which an argument is advanced. So for instance, if you led discussion on Hobbes’s _Leviathan_, you might also consider how John Locke’s ideas on “Civil Government” compare or contrast by paying attention to the different historical moments and cultures of which they were a part? What echoes of Aristotle’s _Politics_ do you detect in Rousseau “social contract”? Or in what ways do Machiavelli and Madison...
seem to concur, and where do they seem to differ? As always, be sure to reference your sources appropriately. Your essay should be **5-6 pages, double spaced, 12 point font, one inch margins, Times New Roman or a comparable font.** Please submit all copies by email – av48@nyu.edu – as I will not accept hard copies.

**Assignment Three: The Faces of Contemporary Incivility (16 or 20 December, 30%)**

Throughout your college career (and beyond!) your professors and others will ask you to write research papers. Essentially, you can think of a research paper as an essay with a clearly defined (and limited) scope, that dialogues with an existing literature (i.e. what others have written or said about the topic), that advances an argument, and that is supported by primary sources. The purpose of this assignment is to acquaint you with this process. It asks you to examine one specific case of contemporary incivility, its evolution (especially in its tactics), and its relationship to the idea of “civil society.” You can select any example you wish, including the cases in Part One or Part Four of the course. Either way, you should consult with me during the week of 5 October to let me know what case you have selected.

In terms of your research, you should begin by familiarizing yourself with the context of your case. Locate a couple of books or articles to get a sense of how and why the particular case under study came to be (you and I will meet to discuss potential background sources). As you read the secondary sources (books and articles) make sure you take notes, paying special attention to the arguments the authors make, and to the sources they use (yes, you should read the footnotes!). What are the arguments advanced? Are they convincing? Do the sources seem varied? You should also complement this contextual overview by compiling a dossier of clippings drawn from mainstream periodicals (New York Times, Wall Street Journal, The Economist, and local press) and alternative media sources (blogs, indy media, NGO sites, etc.) going back a year or two, to find out where your particular example of contemporary incivility stands today. If you are working on one of the cases covered in class, the assigned documents should form part of this dossier. However you will note that these are not up to date. As such you should complement them with your own research. Also, if you are working on a case that allows you to conduct interviews, either in person, by phone, or by email, let me know as there are protocols you will need to follow. When examining your dossier, you will want to pay particular attention to how the various sources frame the question of incivility, how (if at all) and why the concept of “civil society” is used to characterize the case.

When writing your paper, which should be **between 10-12 pages (double spaced, 12 point font, one inch margins, Times New Roman or a comparable font)**, you should be concerned with one overarching issue: how does your case disrupt conventional interpretations of civil society, and how does it bolster them? Remember, the purpose of this exercise is to craft an argument based on sources. A research paper is not a suspense novel; revealing your argument at the end is not an effective way to craft a research paper. The excitement should come in the way your argument unfolds, how you draw your sources together, and what insights you are able to include (and how clearly you are able to convey them) in the course of analyzing materials. As such, early in your paper you should telegraph (i.e. indicate to the reader) what your overarching argument is, how you will develop it (i.e. what subsections will help you make the argument), and what sources you will be relying on (if pertinent, you should also comment on any shortcomings of your sources; for instance, if your sources are primarily one-sided, you should indicate why, and how it affects the
overall argument). You should include a brief (two to three pages) section that dialogues with the major secondary literature you found. How have others dealt with the case? Has the question of civility arisen? If so, in what terms?

Devote the bulk of your paper to exploring the actual case. Here is where you will deploy a close reading of the sources you have collected. How, if at all, has your case evolved? Why? If it has not, why not? What is the relationship between this case and other groups considered more mainstream (NGOs, etc)? Are the claims around policy questions, or do the problems center on broader questions of cultural identity, political and economic systems, etc? If it’s a policy issue, what decisions have been implemented or failed to have been implemented, according to whom, and at what social, political, and economic cost? What have been the consequences, positive and negative, of the types of incivility deployed? To the extent that you can gather, what is the opinion of the citizenry? Finally, in a two to three page section, make use of the broad knowledge of the idea of “civil society” and incivility you will have acquired by then, coupled with the more detailed grasp of the case you have explored, to forward well-formed, research-supported hypotheses on how the challenges to democratization in your chosen case study might be overcome.

As you develop your paper, keep the following dates in mind:

October 8-9: Meet to select case/sources
November 12-13: Meet to discuss progress
December 13: Last Date to Submit Optional Rough Draft
December 16: Paper Due if Rough Draft not submitted
December 20: Paper Due if Rough Draft submitted

Please submit all copies by email – av48@nyu.edu – as I will not accept hard copies.

**Required Readings**

The following texts are REQUIRED and available for purchase at the NYU Bookstore.


We will be reading extended portions from the texts below. They will be available in Bobst Library reserves, but you might also consider purchasing them independently for future reference.

NOTE: Additional required readings, such as book chapters and assorted primary sources, will be made available by the instructor, as permitted by relevant copyright restrictions, outside Rm. 506. **YOU** are responsible for accessing/printing any journal articles not linked in the class schedule below. We will go over how to use the Bobst Library website to find periodical articles in class.

**Academic Integrity**

As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website ([www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html](http://www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html)) for a full description of the academic integrity policy.

**Late Submissions/Incompletes**

Students can ask for extensions and will receive them at the instructor’s discretion, though any late submission will incur a half grade drop unless the delay results from documented medical reasons or family emergencies. **Only requests made in advance of the deadline will be considered.** Assignments submitted late without previously alerting the instructor will not be graded. The last day to submit any pending work granted an extension is **20 December**. If you anticipate being unable to meet this deadline, you should contact the instructor immediately and request to receive an Incomplete, which will be granted at the instructor’s discretion and only with a previously approved plan to complete outstanding work.

**Extra Credit**

Over the course of the semester, the instructor may make extra credit opportunities available to students. These may include attending relevant talks, performances, films, expositions, etc. Students are also encouraged to recommend any events that strike them as relevant to the course. Each extra credit opportunity will add one point to a student’s final grade, with no more than three points possible.
Class Schedule (subject to change)

PART ONE: THE AGE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

1. Wed 4 Sept: Course Intro: Rethinking the “Civil” in Civil Society

***ASSIGNMENT ONE DUE: SATURDAY 7 SEPTEMBER***

2. Mon 9 Sept: What is Civil Society, Anyway?


PART TWO: THE UNCIVIL ORIGINS OF CIVIL SOCIETY

8. Mon 30 Sept: Building Society

9. Wed 2 Oct: Building Political Life

10. Mon 7 Oct: Building The State


12. Mon 14 Oct: FALL RECESS (No class)


- Thomas Jefferson, *Declaration of Independence* (1776)
- Marquis de Lafayette, *Declaration of the Rights of Man* (1789)

PART THREE: DEFINING AND TESTING THE BOUNDARIES OF CIVIL SOCIETY

15. Wed 23 Oct: Reactions to Incivility: The Liberal State


***ASSIGNMENT TWO DUE: FRIDAY 25 OCTOBER***

16. Mon 28 Oct: Associational Life as Civil Society

- Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (Vol. I, Part II, Chapters 6 – 9, 80 pp)

17. Wed 30 Oct: Morality and Civil Society (1)


18. Mon 4 Nov: Morality and Civil Society (2)


19. Wed 6 Nov: Alternatives to Liberal Civil Society (1)***


20. Mon 11 Nov: Alternatives to Liberal Civil Society (2)

**EXTRA CREDIT: TUESDAY 12 NOVEMBER: TIME/LOCATION TBA**

**FILM: Revolution ’67**


• Robert F. Williams, Negroes with Guns. Detroit: Wayne State, 1998 (84 pp)

22. Mon 18 Nov: Testing the Boundaries of Civility: The Young Lords

• “El Barrio and the YLO Say No More Garbage in Our Community,” *Palante* 1 no. 4 (1969)
• “One Year of Struggle,” *Palante*, 17 July 1970
• “La Vida Pura: A Lord of the Barrio,” *Village Voice*, 21 March 1995 (7 pp)


• “Civil Disobedience” *In the Life*. PBS. July 2009. (30 mins)

***INCIVILITY TOUR OF NYC: SATURDAY 23 NOVEMBER, 10AM-4PM***


25. Wed 27 Nov: NO CLASS (Thanksgiving)

**PART FOUR: INCIVILITY IN THE AGE OF CIVIL SOCIETY**
26. Mon 2 Dec: Incivility in Transition: South Africa

- “Manifesto of Umkhonto we Sizwe” 16 Dec 1961 (1 p)
- Nelson Mandela, “Keynote Address” Easter Transvaal, 3-4 Sept 1993 (4 pp)

**EXTRA CREDIT:** TUESDAY 3 DECEMBER: TIME/LOCATION TBA
FILM: Drowned Out!

27. Wed 4 Dec: Post-Liberal Civilities: India

- Gail Omvedt, “Dams and Bombs,” *The Hindu*, 4-5 August, 1999 (4 pp)
  - Part One
    (http://www.narmada.org/archive/hindu/files/hindu.19990804.05042524.htm)
  - Part Two
    (http://www.narmada.org/archive/hindu/files/hindu.19990805.05052524.htm)

28. Mon 9 Dec: Post Liberal Civilities: Argentina


29. Wed 11 Dec: Between Civility and Incivility in the Age of Civil Society


**ASSIGNMENT THREE DUE:** 13 DECEMBER: OPTIONAL ROUGH DRAFT
16 DECEMBER (if rough draft not submitted)
20 DECEMBER (if rough draft submitted)