First Year Research Seminar: Language and the Political 2016
FIRST-UG709; 4 CR; the Gallatin School, NYU
Mondays and Wednesdays, 12:30–1:45 p.m., spring 2015
Location: 7 E 12; room: LL 25
Instructor: Andrew Libby; e-mail: al260@nyu.edu
Class website: https://wp.nyu.edu/languageandthepolitical2016/

Course Description
How does language affect how we think about political possibilities? How have writers and activists sought to change society through changing how we use language? How is rhetoric used politically, in essays, law, oratory, propaganda, and poetry? We read arguments about the interplay of language and the political, think about political theory, examine political rhetoric, and study literary works. We write about the power of rhetoric to form and criticize political practices: movements for civil rights, human rights, rights for women, workers’ rights, and animal rights. We investigate in detail how language participates in our ideas about rights, ethics, political action, and social justice. And we examine the affective dimensions of this interaction of language, ideas, and values.

We will use the readings to focus your critical thinking capacities, expand your horizons, and communicate the results of these processes in writing that is persuasive, coherent, exhilarating, meaningful. During a process of familiarizing ourselves with various approaches to thinking political and social relations, you will then explore in depth two issues of social justice that particularly animate you. You will produce two research projects and present the results of your research to your colleagues.

Learning Goals
1. To use close-reading and writing to evolve the ability to discuss and think critically about an array of texts;
2. To develop and carry out two research projects;
3. To acquire a critical awareness of how political identity categories are never simply given or natural but are subject to a specific set of social-cultural conditions that change through time;
4. To synthesize this awareness so that it can inform your own personal life experience and broaden your scope.

Required Texts
Plato, and Marx and Engels, are available online at www.gutenberg.org.
Marx and Engels are also available at www.marxists.org.
In addition to the works above, I have also placed some required readings under the appropriate unit (e.g., Piety, Family, Fear) on the Resources menu tab on our course website. These readings are indicated by an asterisk (*) in the schedule below.

We also rely on reading your work to sharpen our understanding of key concepts and connections. By participating in this course, you agree to allow me, the instructor, to post your work on the course’s public website. If you wish to opt out, you must do so in writing to me.

Writing Practices: Formal and Informal Writing and Workshops

You will write two research essays for the seminar: one 5-page critical research essay and one 8-page critical research paper. You will shepherd each of these formal essays through a process of drafting and peer-workshopping.

In addition to these two formal essays you will write 2 thinking essays. A thinking essay is a short analytical paper in which you take up an issue of interest to you and develop a pithy argument.

Finally, you will write 11 blog posts (min. 300 words) and 3 comments on other students’ blog posts (min. 100 words). Blog posts are due by noon the day before we discuss the topic of the post; comments are due the day of the discussion of the topic. I will provide prompts for blog posts. Detailed instructions for writing blog posts are on the class website.

We will also do low-stakes in-class writing, and I may give a few brief written homework assignments.

We draft the essays, and drafts of your essays in progress form an essential component of our workshops (and your grade). I will give specific instructions on workshopping as each of our workshop dates approach.

In our student research conferences at the end of the term, you will present the results of your research. We’ll discuss specifics of the two research projects and of presentation format as we proceed.

Formatting and submitting work. Final versions of all essays must be formatted as follows: double-spaced, with one-inch margins on all sides, 12-point type (Times New Roman or something comparable). You must carefully proofread and edit your final drafts. Each of your essays must have a title. Final versions are due on the dates indicated on the syllabus.

All thinking essays may be submitted electronically by sending an attached Word file to my e-mail address: al260@nyu.edu. E-submissions are due by 11:30 a.m. on the due date of the thinking essay. Please label your file as follows: your first name, comma, name of the author you’re writing on. For example: Andrew, Plato.doc.

Submitting hard copies of any essay is also fine. It should be typed/printed out.

Course Requirements

Our seminar relies on discussing and analyzing the readings together and on a regular series of writing workshops. This method will not succeed without your regular and timely attendance. You must attend class on a regular basis and arrive on time. If you fall ill or experience an emergency, please call Gallatin and e-mail me so that you can be prepared for the next class. Excessive absences (more than two) can jeopardize your final course grade.
Grading

Grades are based on your ongoing class participation, your responses to your colleagues’ writing, and the quality of your written work. Participation consists in regular attendance, punctuality, in-class work and contributions to discussions. The development you experience as you write improves the quality of your writing, so I will consider it when reckoning final grades. I am happy to read and evaluate any revisions of essays, provided (a) the first version of the essay was submitted on time and (b) you submit the revision not later than one week after I have returned the first version of the essay to you.

The anticipated numerical breakdown for each component of your final grade is as follows:

- Participation, in-class writing, homework: 20%
- Blog posts (11 + 3): 30%
- Thinking essays (two): 10%
- Research essay 1 (all phases): 15%
- Research essay 2 (all phases): 25%

More than two absences will jeopardize your grade. Do not miss a workshop day; it is impossible to benefit from that experience if you are not there. Missing a workshop will jeopardize your grade.

Doing Honest Work

I follow the Gallatin policies on academic integrity.

Plagiarism is the use of work done by someone else and presented as one’s own work, without acknowledging the source. Examples include but are not limited to using material from books, articles, blogs, websites, reference works (including wikipedia), student or faculty papers, etc., that one did not write oneself without properly attributing the source of the material. This also includes purchasing or outsourcing written assignments for a course. A detailed definition of plagiarism may be found in Hacker. Gallatin’s policies and procedures for handling such academic dishonesty are published in the Gallatin student handbook: http://www.nyu.edu/gallatin/pdf/GallatinBulletin.pdf

I will go over proper documentation style in the course of the semester in conjunction with Hacker’s *A Pocket Style Manual*.

Office Hours and Connectivity

My office is room 407 in 1 Washington Place. E-mail is the best way to reach me: al260@nyu.edu. The phone is 27772.

My office hours for the spring term are:

- Mondays, 10:00 a.m.–11:00 a.m. and by appointment.

I may need to adjust this syllabus and course schedule to accommodate pedagogical needs as they arise. If I do, I will.
Course Schedule

You should read each assigned text by the dates indicated below. For instance, you have to finish reading all of Le Guin and Genesis before coming to class on Jan. 28.

1. Piety, Family, Fear

Week 1

January 25
- Introduction.
- Writing assignments: 1. Blog post (due by 12:00 noon 1-26); 2. Add your profile to Who We Are on the website.

January 27
- Reading for discussion: Le Guin (2 pp.)* and Genesis 1–3 (4 pp.)*.
- Writing assignment due next session: Write two pages analyzing how Le Guin’s protagonist uses language to make her point.

Week 2

February 1
- Two-page essay on Le Guin due.
- Reading for discussion: Plato, *Apology.*
- Writing assignment due 2-2 by noon: Blog post on Plato.

February 3
- Reading for discussion: Plato, *Apology* and *Crito.*
- Writing assignment due next session: Thinking essay on Plato.

Week 3

February 8
- Thinking essay on Plato due.
- Plato, conclusion; Bellah, “Civil Religion in America” (18 pp.)*;
- Freud tutorial;
- Writing assignment due next session: Develop one critical question on Neumann.

February 10
- Submit critical question on Neumann.
- Neumann, “Anxiety and Politics” (30 pp.)*;
- Discussion of research paper 1: developing a research question;
- Writing assignment due 2-16 by noon: Blog post on Orwell, Lakoff, or Lorde.

2. Speech, Work, Exploitation

Week 4

February 15: No class. Presidents’ Day.

February 17
- Reading for discussion: Orwell, “Politics and the English Language” (10 pp.)*; Lakoff, “The Political Unconscious” (32 pp.)* and “The Brain’s Role in Family Values” (34 pp.)*; Audre Lorde, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House,”*
- Discussion of research paper 1: developing a research question (cont’d, as needed).
- Writing assignment due 2-21 by noon: Blog post on Shiva.
**Week 5**

**February 22**
- Reading for discussion: Arlie Hochschild, “From the Frying Pan into the Fire” (20 pp.)*; Shiva, *Biopiracy* (128 pp.).

**February 24**
- Reading for discussion: Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (30 pp.).
- Discussion of source materials for research essay.
- Writing assignment due next session: Thinking essay (3 pp.) on *The Communist Manifesto*.

**Week 6**

**February 29**
- Thinking essay (3 pp.) on *The Communist Manifesto* due.
- Writing assignment due next session: research essay 1 proposal and annotated bibliography.

**March 2**
- Research Paper 1 proposal and annotated bibliography due.
- Discussion of research projects.
- Writing assignment due next session: Draft research essay 1 (min. 5 pp.).

**Week 7**

**March 7**
- Workshop for research essay 1 (min. 5 pp.).
- Discussion of proper citation and documentation.
- View *Beasts of No Nation* (137 minutes).

**March 9**
- Research essay 1 (min. 5 pp.) due.
- Reading for Discussion: *Beasts of No Nation*.
- Reading for discussion: Weber, excerpt from “Politics as Vocation”*; *Beasts of No Nation* (film).

**Spring Recess:** March 14 (Monday) through March 20 (Sunday).

**3. Embodying “No”**

**Week 8**

**March 21**
- Reading for Discussion: Sun Tzu, *The Art of War* (60 pp.);
- Writing assignment due 3-22 by noon: Blog post on Sun Tzu.

**March 23**
- Reading for discussion: Sun Tzu (cont’d); Gandhi (149 pp.);
- Writing assignment due 3-27 by noon: Blog post on Gandhi/Montegna.
Week 9
March 28
- Reading for discussion: Gandhi (cont’d); Karuna Mantena, “Gandhi’s Realism: Means and Ends in Politics”;
- Writing assignment due due 3-29 by noon: Blog post on Hunger.

March 30
- Film for discussion: Hunger (film).
- Open discussion of the next research project; freewrite.
- Writing assignment due 4-3 by noon: Blog post on dignity.

4. Dignities, Reconciliations, Reparations

Week 10
April 4
- Reading for discussion: Waldron, Rosen, Kateb.
- Viewing assignment due next session: Dear Mandela.
- Writing assignment due 4-5 by noon: Blog post on Dear Mandela.

April 6
- Guest lecturer: Rob Ascherman on Abahlali baseMjondolo
- Film for discussion: Dear Mandela (film).
- Reading for discussion: Steve Biko, excerpts from I Write What I Like; interview with Gail Gerhart.

Week 11
April 11
- Reading for discussion: Walker, Meridian (front matter and pp. 1–132).
- Discussion of topics for research project 2.
- Writing assignment due 4-12 by noon: Blog post on Meridian.

April 13
- Reading for discussion: Walker, Meridian (133–242).
- Writing assignment due 4-17 by noon: Blog post on Between the World and Me.

Week 12
April 18
- Ta-Nehisi Coates, Between the World and Me (176 pp.).
- Writing assignment due next session: A research-project proposal (one paragraph) with 4–8 sources, annotated.

April 20
- Discussion of Research Project 2.
- Discussion of proper citation and documentation.
- Draft your research essay 2, first version (min. 6 pages).

Week 13
April 25
- Workshop research essays 2, first version (min. 6 pages) due.
- Writing assignment due by May 9: 8-page final version of your research essay 2.

April 27
- Presentations of research projects.
Week 14

May 2
- Draft of your research essay 2 due if you’d like me to review it (optional).
- Presentations of research projects.

May 4
- Presentations of research projects.

Final Week

May 9
- Conclusion;
- Research essays due (8 pages).