Radical Politics in US History (Research Seminar)
Rutgers-Newark Fall 2017
26:510:553 (History) / 26:050:521 (American Studies)
Mondays 5:30-8:10pm
Conklin 447

Professor: Whitney Strub
wstrub@rutgers.edu
Office hours: Mondays 2-4pm and by appointment (available most afternoons, just email in advance!)

This course is a research seminar dedicated to the study of radical politics and activism in US history, with the ultimate goal of producing a work of original historical research on a relevant topic of your choice. Because the meaning of radicalism will be a continuous subject of class discussion, we do not begin with a fixed definition, but as a broad compass point, let us highlight politics based on a belief in the necessity of overhauling existing parties, systems, and forms of social organization, and working outside of dominant, hegemonic, or consensus beliefs. Or as Angela Davis once put it, noting the word’s etymological origins, “radical simply means ‘grasping things at the root.’”

Our focus will be primarily on left radicalism, for the simple reason that the radical right in US history has a separate history, worthy of its own entire course. Even constricting that genealogy, we cannot possibly cover everything in the US radical tradition, but I have tried to make our readings as broadly inclusive as possible: abolitionism, free lovers, the labor movement, feminism, queer activism, Black and Chicano Power, and as much more as we can cover.

An important note: this is NOT a current-events course. We are not here to discuss the Trump administration, Sanders vs. Clinton, Jill Stein, Chris Christie, or the New Jersey gubernatorial election. I care deeply about all of these things, and assume you do too, but such discussions run the risk of dominating our class time. I don't ask you to hide your politics, nor am I terribly concerned about concealing my own, but as a structuring rule of this course, our discussions should stay on texts, histories, methodologies, and analytical critiques. The two formal rules will be:
1. I will shut down commentary that runs into current-events tangents after about 45 seconds; and
2. There is no political litmus test in this course whatsoever, and your grades will reflect your scholarly work, not your opinions.

Readings
There are no books assigned for this course. Instead, we will read an assortment of scholarly journal articles, with some essays from anthologies. All of the articles should be available through databases hosted on the Rutgers library website (http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/). The easiest way to access them is to do a
search directly from the search bar on the main page, which is automatically set to “articles.”
For the essays and any articles not held in accessible databases, I will post pdfs on the course blackboard.

**Note:** This will be a laptops-down seminar. You must print the articles or bring them on a flat-surface reader, to minimize the distraction that is empirically shown to accompany open laptops.

**Course Requirements:**

**Attendance and Punctuality:** You are expected to attend every class, from start to finish. Attendance is mandatory. Your overall course grade will be lowered by one letter-notation for each unexcused absence beginning with the third one. More than four absences for any reason will result in a loss of credit for the course. Only documented emergencies and medical occasions, or officially school-sanctioned activities, will qualify as excused absences.

**Class Participation.** All students are required to participate in the discussions during class. As a result, you must arrive at class having completed that day’s reading assignment and prepared to talk about it. A valuable part of discussions is the posing of questions; no one is expected to grasp perfectly the significance of all the readings. Engaged questions are just as important as comments. Your participation grade will reflect both the frequency of your participation (too much talking that runs the risk of dominating class time is not an asset) and the quality of your comments and questions. Note that participation also includes active listening; sleeping, texting, side conversations, and other forms of non-listening will be met with punitive measures on the participation front.

**Grading/Assignments**

Course grades will be based on four components:

1. Participation (25%)
The goal here is quality, not quantity, of comments: be thoughtful, engage in dialogue, don’t dominate but do weigh in. Conscious and attentive listening is also a form of participation—texting or other distracted/distracting behavior will be considered an offense against the classroom community. Each student should bring at least one discussion question to each meeting and write it on the board when they arrive—that will help structure our conversations.

2. Short analytical essay (10%)
5-page analytical essay on one of our assigned articles, due in class Oct. 9. Formal assignment prompt will be given out in class in advance.

3. Bibliographical essay (15%)
Critical assessment of the relevant secondary scholarship for your research paper, due in class **Nov. 6**. Formal prompt to be distributed.

4. Research paper (50%)
This will be your major effort, an original contribution to historical scholarship, based on primary and secondary sources, on a relevant topic of your choice. Approx. 20-25 pages, due on the last day of final exams, **Friday, December 22**. Formal prompt to be distributed.

**Grading Guidelines for written work**
**A:** work of exceptional quality, showing profound and meaningful engagement with a rich selection of source material, thoughtful and comparative analysis, superior writing—and most importantly, containing a clear, inventive, and persuasive thesis.  
**B:** work that is above average—shows knowledge and/or contains a thesis, but does not develop it as strongly as it could; sources strong but incomplete.  
**C:** adequate work that fulfills the assignment—often based on summarizing rather than thesis or analysis.  
**D:** subpar work that falls short of fulfilling the assignment but deserves some credit.  
**F:** work that fails to earn credit for the assignment, including plagiarism.

Late assignments will not be accepted. Extensions may be negotiated under extenuating circumstances (which do not include computer-related issues), with some grade deductions, before the due date.  
**No incompletes** will be granted unless the matter has been discussed with me in advance.

**Policy on Academic Integrity (Cheating and Plagiarism)**
You are expected to be familiar with and adhere to the Academic Integrity Policy, available at [http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu](http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu). All students are required to sign the Rutgers Honor Code Pledge.  
Plagiarism will not be tolerated. Any use of the ideas or words of another person without proper acknowledgment of credit will result in penalties up to and including a course grade of F and referral to the academic integrity board. I aspire to be your ally and supporter in all possible ways, but on matters of plagiarism, expect no sympathy. Cases will be handled in a draconian manner, and excuses will not be entertained.

Note that the uncited usage of uncopyrighted material such as Wikipedia entries still constitutes plagiarism.

**Students with Disabilities notice:**
Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation: [https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines](https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines). If the documentation
supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus’ disability services office will provide you with a Letter of Accommodations. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. To begin this process, please complete the Registration form on the ODS web site at: https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/registration-form. For more information please contact the Office of Disability Services in the Paul Robeson Campus Center, in suite 219, by phone at 973-353-5375 or by email at odsnewark@newark.rutgers.edu.

**Policy on Classroom Courtesy**
Do not bring food, active cell phones, or other communications devices into the classroom. If you mistakenly do bring an active phone and it rings, silence it immediately; answering will constitute an egregious violation of this course’s basic social contract. Texting in class will also result in drastic penalties to your total course grade.

In class discussions, I expect universally respectful interactions. In examining our texts, there may be differing perspectives, disagreements, and debates. This is fine; through such dialogue comes greater understanding. When challenging someone else’s perspective, though, refrain from personal attacks or blistering scorn. If someone makes what you consider an offensive or disrespectful comment, note that this does not absolve you of adhering to the iron-clad rule of respect in responding to it.

Failure to abide by these rules may result in a lowered course grade, or removal from the classroom.

**Policy on Office Hours**
My office hours are for you. Stop by with any questions you have about assignments, readings, classroom discussions, other pertinent topics, or just drop by to say hello. The only thing I discourage is visiting to cover material from a missed class; for that, consult fellow classmates. All else is warmly welcomed. If your schedule conflicts with my office hours, we can set up an appointment at a mutually agreeable time.

**Content notice**
Some of the material in this course will deal with charged issues of race and sexuality, and some material will include coarse language, scenes of violence, and depictions of sexuality. I will try to alert you to anything that might be potentially upsetting in advance, but know that throughout, the course features adult content. If you are concerned about specific triggers, please speak with me early, and I will work with you.

**Tentative syllabus of readings (subject to change, with advance notice)**

**Week 1: 9/11**
Introductions
Get acquainted, go over syllabus

Short essays to discuss:
http://www.aaihs.org/rosa-parks-radicalism-and-remembrance/

Osagyefo Uhuru Sekou, “Martin Luther King’s Radical Legacy, From the Poor People’s Campaign to Black Lives Matter,” *Dissent*, January 2017
https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/martin-luther-kings-radical-legacy-poor-peoples-campus-black-lives-matter-socialist

https://s-usih.org/2017/05/the-left-and-liberalism-a-conversation-with-james-livingston/

**Week 2: 9/18**
**19th century radicalism**

Manisha Sinha, “To ‘Cast Just Obliquy’ on Oppressors: Black Radicalism in the Age of Revolution,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 64 (January 2007): 149-160

Hasan Crockett, "The Incendiary Pamphlet: David Walker's Appeal in Georgia," *Journal of Negro History* 86.3 (2001): 305-318

David Roediger, "'Not Only the Ruling Classes to Overcome, but Also the So-Called Mob': Class, Skill and Community in the St. Louis General Strike of 1877," *Journal of Social History* 19.2 (1985): 213-239


**Week 3: 9/25**

**Wobblies and Socialists**


**Week 4: 10/2**

**Communism and anarchism**


**Week 5: 10/9**

**Queer challenges to heteronormativity**


**Week 6: 10/16**

**New Lefts**


**Week 7: 10/30**

*After ‘The Movement’*


**Week 8: 11/6**

*Against the New Right and Neoliberalism*


Weeks 9-15: independent research, individual meetings with professor
Given that we reconvene as a class at least twice in this period, but precise dates to be collectively determined. Students will share and comment upon works in progress.

FINAL PAPERS DUE BY 5pm FRIDAY, DECEMBER 22

Outtakes: articles that couldn’t fit, but should be of interest:


https://www.ncas.rutgers.edu/sites/fasn/files/img/Left%20of%20the%20Color%20Line.pdf

Erik S. McDuffie, "Esther V. Cooper’s “The Negro Woman Domestic Worker in Relation to Trade Unionism”: Black Left Feminism and the Popular Front," American Communist History 7.2 (2008): 203-209


Gary Dorrien, "Michael Harrington and the "Left Wing of the Possible,"" *CrossCurrents* 60.2 (2010): 257-282


Erik S. McDuffie, "I wanted a Communist philosophy, but I wanted us to have a chance to organize our people’: the diasporic radicalism of Queen Mother Audley Moore and the origins of black power," *African and black diaspora: an international journal* 3.2 (2010): 181-195

Christine Lamberson, "The Zebra Murders: Race, Civil Liberties, and Radical Politics in San Francisco," *Journal of Urban History* 42.1 (2016): 201-225

David P. Stein, ""This Nation Has Never Honestly Dealt with the Question of a Peacetime Economy": Coretta Scott King and the Struggle for a Nonviolent Economy in the 1970s," *Souls* 18.1 (2016): 80-105


**In Memoriam**


Hannah Frank, "'Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain': thinking through Eisenstein's Macbeth drawings," *Critical Quarterly* 59.1 (2017): 70-84

Hannah Frank was not an historian, but a film scholar whose work was very much informed by a sense of radical politics and history, engaging with the visible traces of labor on images in animated film, and the sketches done by one of the most radical filmmakers to ever (almost) work in Hollywood. She passed away suddenly, unexpectedly, and tragically just before this semester began, and I include these suggested readings as a tribute to her.