

Core Curriculum CC 222: Social Sciences II

'Unmaking' the Modern World: The Psychology, Politics, and Economics of the Self

Boston University College of Arts & Sciences

Spring 2022 Syllabus

Lectures: Thursdays 12:30-1:45pm
in Tsai Auditorium, 685 Comm Ave
Course Credits: 4.0

Seminars:

B1 with Sean Desilets, sdesilet@bu.edu
TR 11-12:15pm in CAS 114A

B2 with Maria Gapotchenko, daisym@bu.edu
TR 2-3:15pm in CAS 114B

C1 with Rachelle Reinhart, rrhart@bu.edu
MWF 10:10-11am in CAS 114B

C3 with Marie McDonough, msmcd@bu.edu
MWF 2:30-3:20pm in CAS 114A

D1 with Anthony Petro, apetro@bu.edu
Mondays 2:30-5:15pm in REL 404



David Wojnarowicz, Untitled, 1988-89

Coordinator: Anthony Petro, Department of Religion
Phone: 617-353-3088 Email: apetro@bu.edu

Writing Fellow: Ben Kampler (Sociology), benjnk@bu.edu

Department Office: CAS Room 119, open 9-5, Monday-Friday, core@bu.edu

Course Description: Can we ever be free? This course focuses on how 20th and 21st-century social theorists have critiqued optimistic Enlightenment arguments made by liberal philosophers about growing human self-control, rationality, and freedom. Beginning with writers heavily influenced by the carnage and chaos of the First World War, CC222 explores two related narratives about the (im)possibility of freedom. The first deconstructs the idea of the autonomous, rational, freedom-seeking self. We explore how some thinkers explained the genesis of the very idea of the “self” and how that self was always “disciplined” or even produced by structural and cultural constraints. For some thinkers, this meant that the very idea of individual “authenticity” or of individual “resistance” to social norms stemmed from the constitution of social orders themselves. The second narrative questions the idea that the arc of human history inevitably bends towards greater freedom. For theorists in this tradition, the political transformations evident since the end of absolutist monarchies at the end of the 19th century have not brought liberation, but rather only more subtle means of social control. Many of the texts we read will seek to demonstrate how and why we may all be deeply complicit in our own subjugation. By tracing these two intertwining narratives, CC 222 explores the legacy of some of the major social and political crises of the 19th and 20th centuries, including colonialism, decolonization, rising nationalism, capitalism, sexism, and institutional racism. Students will engage critically with how theorists imagine and attend to the possibility of something like “freedom.”

COURSE OBJECTIVES & LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this course, students will:

- Recognize how social, economic, and political shifts from the beginning of the 20th century into the 21st century have shaped theories about, and descriptions of, human psychology, sociology, economics, and politics.

- Understand why assumptions about what constitutes an “individual” and “human nature” may be tied to specific social and economic forms.
- Understand why certain seemingly “liberatory” developments, such as the end of legal discrimination, the dawn of “flexible” capitalism, the decline of state-sanctioned violence like the death penalty, and the rise of the sciences of the self, are entangled in the ways that humans remain subjugated.
- Think critically about what “resistance” or “freedom” look like in the contemporary world.
- Discern why the possibilities and limitations presented by the social world are so closely tied to social positionality, including gender, race, class, generation, and nation.

This course provides one Hub unit in each of the following areas:

Social Inquiry II

- In turning from political theory towards more historically and sociologically grounded approaches to individuals, politics, and society, students will learn to critically re-evaluate some of the core concepts mobilized in liberal political and economic discourse, including individual autonomy, freedom, authenticity, and the self.
- We will also introduce a range of other social science terms in order to be able to discern contemporary forms of social life, including personhood, hegemony, performativity, and discursive disciplining. These new terms will assist in making familiar social and political arrangements look “strange,” in order to give students new ways of thinking about contemporary problems, including sexism, racism, and inequality.
- Students will apply principles and methods from the social sciences based on collecting new or analyzing existing data in order to address questions, solve problems, or deepen understanding. They will understand the nature of evidence employed in the social sciences in order to be able to demonstrate a capacity to differentiate competing claims in such fields. This includes reflecting on and critically evaluating how social scientists formulate hypotheses, gather empirical evidence of multiple sorts, and analyze and interpret this evidence.

Philosophical Inquiry

- This course introduces students to a range of major philosophical thinkers who have had a tremendous impact and legacy on the study of the social sciences writ large, including Freud, Mauss, Foucault, and Butler.
- Students will learn to identify and articulate the specialized vocabulary and theoretical arguments put forth by the figures noted above in order to distinguish the impact and legacy of philosophical questions that engage with sexism, racism, and inequality in society.

Critical Thinking

- Since CC 222 will compare and contrast the various theoretical approaches introduced by these theorists, students will learn to think critically about the relationship between claims and evidence. What kinds of evidence allow theorists to make what kinds of claims, particularly about the (im)possibility of freedom? How and why? For which theorists is empirical evidence relevant? For which is it less relevant? And how might empirical evidence be used to critique even the most conceptual of claims?
- The final paper project builds on this critical evaluation of claims and evidence. It will require students to wrestle with the limits of particular ways of thinking about human subjectification and query whether and to what extent we can ever “escape” from the subtle workings of power and socialization.

Content Warning about Course Material: Some of the material we are reading this semester explicitly addresses physical, racial, and sexual violence. It would be hard to think about society and politics in the contemporary world without addressing these difficult issues. Some of the texts we read use language to describe groups that is no longer socially acceptable and may deeply offend some people. We will need to grapple with *why* authors—writing in a particular social and political context—used the terms they use. We will also want to think about the impact those terms have in the context of the text. We may need to process the reactions you have to these terms as readers in the present. We can do this as a class and/or in one-on-one discussions with section leaders. Aside from direct quotations, you should avoid using derogatory or potentially offensive language when you are writing in your own voice.

Course Structure: This syllabus outlines the schedule of lecture topics and the reading associated with those topics. Your section leader will also give you a syllabus that breaks down those readings session by session and gives you additional detail about writing and participation assignments.

Grading: The responsibility for grading lies with each section instructor. And every section is slightly different. That said, **all students will write a midterm paper, worth 15%, and a final paper, worth 20%.** In addition, all section leaders will evaluate students' **class participation, worth 20%.** The details about what class participation includes are up to each section leader. In order to scaffold both the mid-term and the final exams, section leaders will assign additional papers/assignments at their discretion. Please consult your section syllabus for grading and assignment details.

Extra credit: Make a TikTok (or the video equivalent) about the class material. We are leaving what the content can look like open-ended. But in order to receive credit, we need to be able to understand your TikTok as coming out of CC222 readings, lectures, and discussions. You can make up to 5. Each will be worth 1 extra point on your final paper. We also hope to share these TikToks widely as we see fit, including offering a collective screening of the best ones in the final course lecture on April 28th. In order to have the time to put together a montage of videos for our final lecture, **the latest date for sharing videos with us is April 21nd by midnight.**

Writing is an essential component of the Core Curriculum and is coordinated closely with the Boston University Writing Program. Ben Kampler will serve as the Writing Fellow for CC222. Core Writing Fellows are graduate students familiar with the works read in the Core who are available to work with you one on one and support you at any stage of the writing process. To make an appointment, consult the online reservation instructions at www.bu.edu/core/writing. An online writing handbook is available at the same webpage.

Lecture sessions will be recorded on Echo360 for the benefit of registered students who are unable to attend live sessions (either in person or remotely) due to illness or other special circumstances. Recorded sessions will be made available to registered students via the Blackboard section associated with CAS CC 222 A1; access this by logging in at learn.bu.edu or by using the link at bu.edu/core/cc222. Students may not share such sessions with anyone not registered for the course and may not repost them in a public platform.

Courseware and Communication: Course communication will take place via announcements and handouts in lecture and seminar, and email messages sent from **core@bu.edu** and from the accounts of individual seminar instructors. Lecture media, handouts, and readings can be accessed via **www.bu.edu/core/cc222**. Your seminar leader may make use of a course site specific to your section, for sharing assignment materials, readings, and other resources. Seminar-specific course sites can be accessed via **www.learn.bu.edu**.

COMMUNITY OF LEARNING: CLASS AND UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Accessibility, learning and testing accommodation. We assume that all of us learn in different ways. If there are circumstances that may affect your performance in this class, please talk to your discussion course leader as soon as possible so that we can work together to develop strategies for accommodations that will satisfy both your learning needs and the requirements of the course. The Office of Disability & Access Services is the office responsible for assisting students with disabilities. If you have a disability that interferes with your learning (whether visible or invisible, physical or mental), you are encouraged to register with this office. Disability & Access Services will work with you to determine appropriate accommodations for your courses, such as additional time on tests, staggered homework assignments, or note-taking assistance. This office will give you a letter outlining the accommodations you need that you will share with your teachers; specific information about your disability will remain private. Letters of accommodation should be presented as soon as possible to ensure that student needs are addressed from the start of the course. Contact Disability & Access Services at **access@bu.edu** and 617-353-3658; learn more at **www.bu.edu/disability**. Please note that Boston University complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

Religious Observance. Boston University's policy on religious observance will be adhered to in this course.

Dates, and Policies Regarding Late Work and Exams. Your seminar leaders will determine how papers and other work should be submitted, as well as the penalties assigned for late work. It is possible for you to take a make-up version of the final exam if you have an exam scheduling conflict or three exams scheduled on the same day. Contact the office via core@bu.edu, and your seminar leader, if this is the case. Please be sure to keep a back-up copy of all papers written.

Academic Conduct. All members of the University are expected to maintain the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity; we have the same expectations of each other in this course. Seminar leaders take the issue of plagiarism seriously and expect all the work you do in this course to be your own. Plagiarism or other forms of academic misconduct in this course can result in a failing grade for the course and/or referral of the case to the CAS Academic Conduct Committee, which may impose penalties up to and including expulsion from the University. Your best rule is to make sure you cite every source you employ, using quotation marks and providing citation whenever you use someone else's words. If you have questions about what plagiarism is and how it differs from the appropriate use of other people's work, consult the Academic Conduct Code (www.bu.edu/academics/policies/academic-conduct-code) or speak with your instructor. Lectures may not be reproduced in any form or otherwise copied, displayed, or distributed without the written permission of the instructor. Please note in particular that selling or buying lecture notes or summaries is prohibited in this class and may result in disciplinary action under the BU Code of Student Responsibilities.

Readings: In Core, we prioritize using physical copies of the reading. Books can be purchased through BU's Barnes & Noble, though you will often find much cheaper versions online. are expected to be able to consult readings in class—so make sure that you have them with you in some form (books or print outs) during your seminar section's discussions. If the cost of books presents a problem, please reach out to Prof. Petro, or to our Core director Prof. Kyna Hamill at kyna@bu.edu. We can make sure you get copies of the necessary books.

Over the course of the semester, we will be reading all or much of the following books:

1. Sigmund Freud: *Civilization and its Discontents*, trans. James Strachy (Norton, 9780393304510)
2. Michel Foucault: *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Sheridan (Knopf, 9780679752554)
3. Michelle Alexander: *The New Jim Crow* (New Press, 9781620971932)
4. Frantz Fanon: *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Philcox (Grove, 9780802143006)
5. Wendy Brown, *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism* (Columbia, 9780231193856)

Be sure to obtain these *specific* editions. **Visit CAS 119 to pick up a free copy of the course packet with additional readings.**

CC 222 SPRING 2022 LECTURE SCHEDULE

Lecture #1, Thur. 1/20: Where did Enlightenment political theory leave us?
Lecturers: Susanne Sreedhar (Philosophy and WGS) and Vladimir Petrović (Core)
Reading: Setting the scene – Immanuel Kant, “What is Enlightenment?”

Lecture #2, Thur. 1/27: The Freudian revolution and its impact on the social sciences
Lecturer: Anthony Petro (Religion and WGS)
Reading: Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (pages 23-88)

Lecture #3, Thur. 2/3: What if modernity is repressive and makes us neurotic?
Lecturer: Sean Desilets (CAS Writing, Core and WGS)
Reading: Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (pages 89-149)

Lecture #4, Thur. 2/10: What is the relationship between the human body and the social body?
Lecturer: Jonathan Klawans (Religion and Judaic Studies)
Reading: Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (pages 1-73)

Lecture #5, Thur. 2/17: What if the self that is supposed to be “free” isn’t universal?

Lecturer: Kimberly Arkin (Anthropology)

Reading: Marcel Mauss, “A Category of the Human Mind”

Lecture #6, Thur. 2/24: The Foucaultian revolution and its impact on the social sciences

Lecturer: Lida Maxwell (Political Science and WGS)

Reading: Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* – Part I, section 1 (the body of the condemned) and Part III section 1 (the art of distributions, the control of activity)

Lecture #7, Thur. 3/3: What if liberal political orders do not make us free?

Lecturer: Sean Desilets (CAS Writing, Core and WGS)

Reading: Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* – Part III, section 1 (the organization of geneses, the composition of forces) and Part III section 3 (panopticism)

March 5-13, Spring Break – *no classes*

Lecture #8, Thur. 3/17: Race and the US carceral system

Lecturer: Katherine Levine Einstein (Political Science and Center for Antiracist Research)

Reading: Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow* (Introduction, and Chapters 1, 3, 4, and 6)

Lecture #9, Thur. 3/24: What if the “universal” is particular and exclusive?

Lecturer: Marie McDonough (Writing Program and WGS)

Reading: Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (Chapters 1 and 5)

Lecture #10, Thur. 3/31: The impossible work of decolonizing the self

Lecturer: Joyce Hope Scott (African American Studies)

Reading: Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (Chapters 4 and 8)

Lecture #11, Thur. 4/7: What if we are all colonized through discourse from the outside in?

Lecturer: Marie McDonough (Writing Program and WGS)

Reading: Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (Preface to the 1990 edition, and Chapter 1)

Lecture #12, Thur. 4/14: What possibilities exist for liberation?

Lecturer: Anthony Petro (Religion and WGS)

Reading: Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (Chapter 3 Part IV, Conclusion, and Preface to the 1999 edition)

Lecture #13, Thur. 4/21: What if neoliberalism makes us even less free?

Lecturer: Ashley Mears (Sociology and WGS)

Reading: Wendy Brown, *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism*

Lecture #14, Thur. 4/28: Course wrap-up and TikTok screenings

Lecturers: All seminar leaders

Reading: David Graeber, “On the Phenomenon of Bullshit Jobs: A Work Rant”

May 4 *Last Day of Classes*

May 5-8 *Study Period*

May 9-13 *Finals*