

DISOBEDIENCE, RESISTANCE, REFUSAL

Professor A. Livingston. Society for the Humanities. Cornell University

Course Description

This seminar surveys contemporary political theories of disobedience and resistance. We will study scholarship in the fields of political science, sociology, and philosophy to understand transformations in the theory and practice of protest at the dawn of the 21st century.

Beginning with a look backwards to classical debates on the definition, justification, and function of civil disobedience, the first section of this course considers what's living and what's dead in the conceptions of "civil" disobedience inherited from Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights era. We will discuss the shortcomings of this tradition as well as the ways recent scholarship has sought to reconstruct the theory of civil disobedience for understanding contemporary protests against mass surveillance, austerity, immigration restrictions, and police violence.

In the following sections we will consider resistance and refusal as alternative frameworks for theorizing dissent today. Here we will consider contemporary debates on the moral basis of illegal political action, the logic and limits of nonviolence, transformations in repertoires of contention, hierarchy and horizontality in social movements, the relationship between digital and street movements, as well as deviance and infrapolitics.

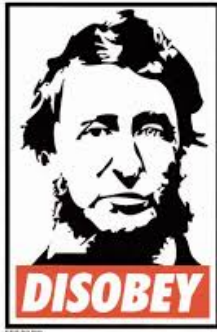


Required Textbooks

All textbooks are available through Buffalo Street Books (215 N. Cayuga St).

- Candice Delmas, *A Duty to Resist: When Disobedience Should be Uncivil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018)
- The Invisible Committee, *To Our Friends*, trans. Robert Hurley (South Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 2015)
- William E. Scheuerman, *Civil Disobedience* (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2018)
- Tommie Shelby, *Dark Ghettos: Injustice, Dissent, and Reform* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016)
- Zeynep Tufekci, *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017)





Course Objectives

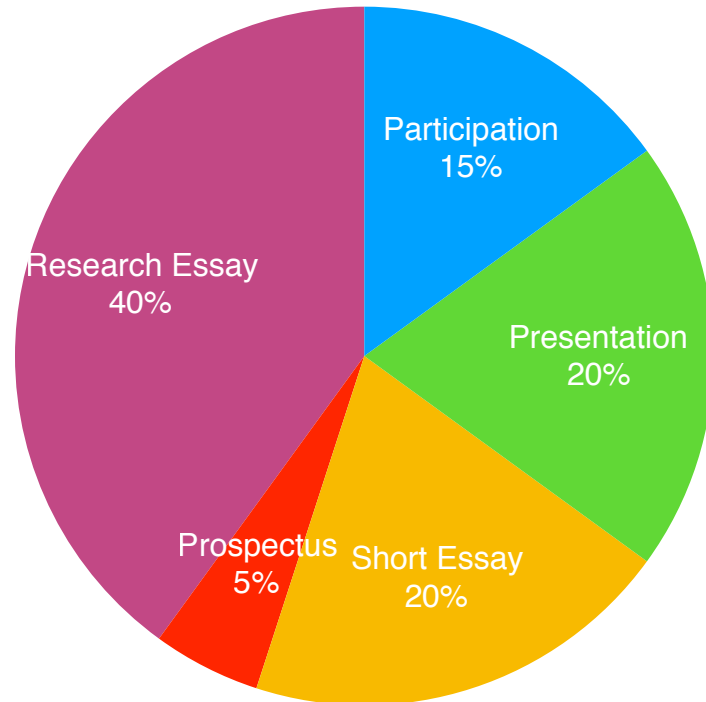
The learning objectives of this course are to develop careful and rigorous reading habits, to sharpen interpretive and analytical writing skills, to cultivate skills for effective oral communication, to broaden your understanding of political theory, and to foster critical thinking. By the end of this semester, students should be able to demonstrate competency in (1) defining political theories and concepts; (2) applying a broader knowledge of political theory; (3) identifying a text's argument and restating it in your own words; (4) interpreting and comparing theoretical arguments and cases; and (5) analyzing and evaluating the normative and conceptual premises of historical and contemporary debates concerning political protest and the ethics of disobedience.

Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites for enrollment in this course. This course is cross-listed with Government, Philosophy, and American Studies. It can be counted towards the senior seminar requirement of the Government Major

Assessment

Final course grades will be calculated on the basis of aggregate scores in the following assessments:



Participation (15%): This is a seminar class. There will be no lectures and students are responsible for generating comments and questions to guide discussion. It is therefore expected that all students come prepared with questions related to the session's readings, and have a point of view that demonstrates a strong command of, and sophisticated engagement with, the assigned texts. Merely being present in the classroom does not count towards this portion of your final grade. This means that while attendance is a necessary condition for participation, it is not a sufficient one.

Seminar Presentation (20%): Each week one student will be responsible for delivering an oral presentation at the beginning of seminar. Your presentation should be a critical synthesis of the reading(s)'s central claims and concepts rather than a simple summary. It should enter into dialogue with the readings in order to assess the strengths and weaknesses of their arguments. You are encouraged to draw critical comparisons between the reading(s) under discussion with

previous thinkers/texts/arguments examined in seminar. Please be sure to conclude your presentation with three or four questions to guide class discussion. Presentations should be no shorter than 12 minutes and no longer than 15 minutes. Instructions on how to prepare an effective seminar presentation are posted on Blackboard. A sign-up sheet will be circulated on the second week of class.

Short Essay (20%): A short essay examining a topic or problem examined in Parts A of the course schedule to be submitted before **week 8 (10/16)**. The short essay should be double spaced, 12pt font, with a length of no more than 1800-2000 words (approx. 6-8 pages double spaced). Word count excludes foot- and endnotes, as well as bibliography. **Graduate requirement**: 3000 words (approx. 10-12 pages)

Research Paper Prospectus (5%): A research paper should be an original piece of scholarship that explores a course topic in some depth. The aim of the prospectus is to get you started thinking about your research paper, help you organize your thoughts, and provide you with early feedback on your project. A prospectus identifies the topic you plan to examine and charts a preliminary outline for how you plan to do it. In 500 words you should: (a) *define your argument*: come up with a working thesis statement or research question, (b) *motivate your thesis*: briefly describe the significance of your topic in terms of its contribution to debates we have considered in seminar or broader questions in political science; (c) *develop a research plan*: identify the primary and secondary sources you plan to draw on and briefly explain how you plan to use them to support your argument. Please also include a short bibliography of 3 to 5 secondary sources. **Graduate requirement**: 1000 words and 5-10 sources. Bibliography is excluded from word count.

Research Essay (40%): A final essay on a topic of your choosing is due one week after the final day of class. This essay should be double spaced, 12pt font, with a length of between 4000-4500 words (approx. 15- 16 pages). Word count excludes foot- and endnotes, as well as bibliography. A successful research paper will be organized around a clear, important, and original thesis supported by appropriate evidence drawn from both the course materials and secondary sources. Your final paper is due by 12pm on **Week 16 (12/11)**. You can submit a copy via email to pal229@cornell.edu. **Graduate requirement**: no more than 6000 words (approx. 25 pages).



Course Policies

Office Hours and Communication: Office hours are held Thursdays between 1:00 and 3:00 in 214 A.D. White House. A sign-up sheet for office hours is available online at <http://drlivingston.youcanbook.me>. I will do my best to respond to student emails in a timely fashion, but please know that I only check my email twice a week during the semester.

Blackboard.com: All course documents are available on Blackboard. If you are unfamiliar with how to access Blackboard, please consult these instructions. Because important announcements and updates concerning the course will be posted regularly on Blackboard, it is imperative that you enable your account to receive notices directly at your @cornell.edu email address.

Electronic Devices: *The use of computers and tablets in class is discouraged.* Surfing the Internet in seminar is distracting to both you and your fellow students. Recent studies suggest that your brain is more actively engaged in learning when you take notes by hand. If you do choose to use a computer in class, please be sure to also bring additional stationary and a pen or pencil. Phones must be turned off during seminar. Off means off – not vibrate.

Recording: Audio and video recording devices are **prohibited** in the classroom unless required for accessibility purposes. This is to create a learning environment where students can feel comfortable expressing their opinions in class without the possibility of their contribution to class being reproduced and replayed without their consent.

S/U Option: Students who wish to do so can enrol this course S/U. S/U is not the same thing as pass/fail. Students must earn a minimum of C- to receive a final grade of S. **Graduate requirement:** S = B- minimum.

Classroom Climate: One aim of studying political theory is to unsettle received convictions and upset unexamined beliefs. Because of the controversial and provocative nature of some of the materials we will be studying this semester, I ask that all students exercise respect and generosity towards one another in the face of our inevitable disagreements. It is always welcome to criticize an idea, but never to attack the person who holds it. If at any point in the semester a student feels uncomfortable with the class climate, please do not hesitate to come speak with me directly.

Late Assignments: Please consult the course schedule for information about assignment due dates. Permission to submit late work will only be granted in extenuating and unavoidable circumstances outlined to the instructor in writing prior to the due date. Such circumstances include medical, family, or personal emergencies. Multiple assignments scheduled for the same date do not constitute an acceptable reason for an extension. Late assignments will be penalized 2% of their final grade per day late (weekends included). Extensions will not be granted in any case after the submission deadline.

Accessibility Needs: If you have a condition that affects your ability to participate fully in class or to meet all course requirements, please speak with me as soon as possible so that we can work together to arrange appropriate accommodations. This syllabus and other course materials can be made available in alternate formats. Any student with a disability who may need accommodations in this class can obtain an accommodation letter from Student Disability Services, 420 CCC, Garden Ave Ext.



Knight Institute Deadline Extension

Students who elect to schedule an appointment with a tutor at a Knight Institute Writing Center to discuss a draft of their essay prior to the due date are eligible for a 2-day extension.

The Knight Institute Writing Center provides one-on-one consultation to discuss specific pieces of writing or answer questions you may have concerning your writing. To take advantage of this extension you must:

- (1) inform me *before* the due date that you are meeting with a tutor at the Knight Institute, and
- (2) attach a 250-word reflection of your experience with your final paper explaining (a) how you revised your draft into the submitted essay, (b) how your consultation with the tutor impacted your essay, and (c) what forms of feedback you received where most/ least useful and why.

Failure to meet these two simple conditions will void your extension. To learn more about this resource and schedule a meeting with a tutor see the Knight Institute [website](#).

Plagiarism and Academic Ethics: Students should review Cornell University's [policy](#) concerning plagiarism and violations of academic ethics. The strength of the university depends on academic and personal integrity. Ethical violations include cheating on exams, plagiarism, reuse of assignments, improper use of the Internet and electronic devices, unauthorized collaboration, alteration of graded assignments, forgery, falsification, lying, facilitation of academic dishonesty, and unfair competition. The university has a zero tolerance policy towards plagiarism. All suspected cases of plagiarism will be passed on to the Academic Integrity liaison for disciplinary review. If you have any questions about the appropriate use of secondary sources, your instructor is available to discuss best practices.

Appealing Grades: Any student who feels that their assigned grade does not reflect his or her performance on an assignment can appeal the grade. All appeals must be submitted to the instructor in writing, in the form of a one-page document that clearly explains why you believe that the assigned grade does not reflect your performance. I ask that petitioners wait at least twenty-four hours after the grade is announced before submitting appeals. All appeals must be submitted no later than one week after the grade is announced.



Course Schedule

Readings marked with an asterisk (*) are available on the course's Blackboard site. Recommended readings are available on reserve at Olin Library

Week 1 (8/28). Introduction

- Robin Celikates, "Learning from the Streets: Civil Disobedience in Theory and Practice," in *Global Activism: Art and Conflict in the 21st Century*, ed. Peter Weibel (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015), pp. 65-72*
- Brandon M. Terry, "After Ferguson," *The Point Magazine* 10 (2015)*

PART A: DISOBEDIENCE

Week 2 (9/4). Nonviolent Direct Action

- Martin Luther King, Jr. *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2010 [1958]), pp. 77-95, 206-221*
- Martin Luther King, Jr. *Why We Can't Wait* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2010 [1964]), pp. 85-110*
- Martin Luther King, Jr. *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2010 [1968]), pp. 23-70*

Recommended:

- Karuna Mantena, "Showdown for Nonviolence: The Theory and Practice of Nonviolent Politics," in *To Shape a New World: Essays on the Political Philosophy of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, eds. Tommie Shelby and Brandon M. Terry (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Harvard University Press, 2018), pp. 78-101
- Brandon M. Terry, "Requiem for a Dream: The Problem-Space of Black Power," in *To Shape a New World*, pp. 290-324
- Jeanne Theoharis, *A More Beautiful and Terrible History: The Uses and Misuses of Civil Rights History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018), pp. 3-27
- Alexander Livingston, "Love, Law, and Civil Disobedience" (unpublished book chapter)*

Week 3 (9/11). Disobedience as Fidelity to Law

- John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, revised ed. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Harvard University Press, 1999 [1971]), pp. 293-346*
- Charles Mills, "Ideal Theory as Ideology," *Hypatia* 20, no. 3 (2005): 165-184*
- Andrew Sabl, "Looking Forward to Justice: Rawlsian Civil Disobedience and its Non-Rawlsian Lessons," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 9, no. 3 (2001): 331-349*

Recommended:

- Robin Celikates, “Civil Disobedience as a Practice of Civic Freedom,” in *On Global Citizenship: James Tully in Dialogue*, ed. David Owen (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 207-228
- Jacob T. Levy, “There is No Such Things as Ideal Theory,” *Social Philosophy and Policy* 33, n. 1-2 (2014): 312-333
- William E Scheuerman, “Recent Theories of Civil Disobedience: An Anti-Legal Turn?” *Journal of Political Philosophy* 23, no. 4 (2015): 427-449
- Alexander Livingston, “Power for the Powerless: Martin Luther King, Jr.’s Late Theory of Civil Disobedience” (unpublished book chapter)*

Week 4 (9/18). Disobedience as Democratic Disruption

- Iris Marion Young, “Activist Challenges to Deliberative Democracy,” *Political Theory* 29, no. 5 (2001): 670-690*
- William Smith, “Civil Disobedience and the Public Sphere,” *Journal of Political Philosophy* 19, no. 2 (2011): 145-166
- Robin Celikates, “Democratizing Civil Disobedience,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 42, no. 10 (2016): 982-994*

Recommended:

- Archon Fung, “Deliberation Before the Revolution: Toward an Ethics of Deliberative Democracy in an Unjust World,” *Political Theory* 33, no. 2 (2005): 397-419*
- Mathew Humphrey and Marc Stears, “Animal Rights Protest and the Challenge to Deliberative Democracy,” *Economy and Society* 35, no. 3 (2006): 400-422
- William Smith, *Civil Disobedience and Deliberative Democracy* (New York: Routledge, 2013)
- John Medearis, *Why Democracy is Oppositional* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), pp. 15-52

Week 5 (9/25). Towards a Critical Theory of Disobedience

- William E. Scheuerman, *Civil Disobedience*, pp. 1-80

Week 6 (10/2).

- William E. Scheuerman, *Civil Disobedience*, pp. 81-160

Week 7 (10/9). Fall Break

- NO CLASS.

PART B: RESISTANCE**Week 8 (10/16). Uncivil Disobedience****• SHORT ESSAY DUE IN CLASS**

- Candice Delmas, *A Duty to Resist*, pp. 1-71

Week 9 (10/23).

- Candice Delmas, *A Duty to Resist*, pp. 72-107, 136-197

Recommended:

- Candice Delmas, *A Duty to Resist*, pp. 229-254
- Kimberley Brownlee, "Features of a Paradigm Case of Civil Disobedience," *Res Publica* 10 (2004): 337-351
- Bernard E. Harcourt, "The Politics of Incivility," *Arizona Law Review* 54, no. 2 (2012): 345-373
- Austin Sarat, "Keeping Civility in Its Place: Dissent, Injustice, and the Lessons of History," in *Law, Society, and Community: Socio-Legal Essays in Honor of Roger Cotterrell*, eds. Richard Nobes and David Schiff (New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 293-308

Week 10 (10/30). Sacrifice, Citizenship, and Political Action

- Hannah Arendt, "Reflections on Little Rock," in *Responsibility and Judgment*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2003 [1959]), pp. 193-213*
- Danielle S. Allen, *Talking to Strangers: Anxieties of Citizenship since Brown v. Board of Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), pp. 25-49*
- Juliet Hooker, "Black Lives Matter and the Paradoxes of U.S. Black Politics," *Political Theory* 44, no. 4 (2016): 448-469*

Recommended:

- Danielle S. Allen, *Talking to Strangers*, pp. 101-118
- Jonathan Havercroft and David Owen, "Soul-Blindness, Police Orders, and Black Lives Matter: Wittgenstein, Cavell, and Rancière," *Political Theory* 44, no. 6 (2016): 739-763
- Juliet Hooker, "Black Protest/White Grievance: On the Problem of White Political Imaginations Not Shaped by Loss," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 116, no. 3 (2017): 483-504
- Fred Moten, *The Universal Machine* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), pp. 65-139

Week 11 (11/6). Dignity and Deviance

- Tommie Shelby, *Dark Ghettos*, pp. 1-48, 80-116, 175-200

Week 12 (11/13).

- Tommie Shelby, *Dark Ghettos*, pp. 175-227, 252-273

Recommended:

- Robin D.G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: Free Press, 1996), pp. 17-34, 183-227
- Cathy J. Cohen, "Deviance as Resistance: A New Research Agenda for the Study of Black Politics," *Du Bois Review* 1, no. 1 (2004): 27-45
- Shatema Threadcraft, "Intimate Justice, Political Obligation, and the Dark Ghetto," *Signs* 39, no. 3 (2014): 735-760

PART C: REFUSAL

Week 13 (11/20). Prefiguration and Public Assembly

•RESEARCH PROSPECTUS DUE IN CLASS

- Bernard E. Harcourt, "Political Disobedience," *Critical Inquiry* 39, no. 1 (2012): 33-55*
- Margaret Kohn, "Privatization and Protest: Occupy Wall Street, Occupy Toronto, and the Occupation of Public Space in a Democracy," *Perspectives on Politics* 11, no. 1 (2013): 99-110*
- Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), pp. 66-98*

Recommended:

- Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, "The Fight for 'Real Democracy' at the Heart of Occupy Wall Street," *Foreign Affairs* (10/11/2011)
- Jodi Dean, "Claiming Division, Naming a Wrong," *theory & event* 14, no. 4 (2011)
- Marina Prentoulis and Lasse Thomassen, "Political Theory in the Square: Protest, Representation and Subjectification," *Contemporary Political Theory* 12, no. 3 (2013): 166-184
- Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World Without Work* (New York: Verso, 2015), pp. 1-24

Week 14 (11/27). Networks, the Internet, and the Limits of Horizontality

- Zeynep Tufekci, *Twitter and Tear Gas*, pp. 49-112, 189-222

Recommended:

- Zeynep Tufekci, *Twitter and Tear Gas*, pp. 28-48, 132-163, 223-260
- Jo Freeman, "The Tyranny of Structurlessness," *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 17 (1972-73): 151-164
- Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, 3rd edition (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 119-139
- Barbara Ransby, "Ella Taught Me: Shattering the Myth of the Leaderless Movement," *Colorlines* (June 12, 2015)

Week 15 (12/4). Destituent Power

- The Invisible Committee, *To Our Friends*

Week 16 (12/11).

- **RESEARCH PAPER DUE.** Submit digital copy to pal229@cornell.edu no later than noon (12pm).