PHIL 7/8541
History of Sovereignty

Spring 2015 W 5.30-8.30pm CL 201

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will introduce students to the rich and varied history of the concept of sovereignty. The course will be divided into three thematic sections. In weeks one to six, we will explore the articulation of sovereignty in the works of early modern political theorists. Weeks seven to twelve are dedicated to an examination of the ways in which the theories developed by early modern philosophers have been taken up by continental philosophers in the twentieth and twenty-first century. The last three weeks consider the articulation of a concept of sovereignty as self-determination, in particular as it has been proposed by Black philosophers.

Readings include works by Jean Bodin, Hugo Grotius, Thomas Hobbes, Baruch de Spinoza, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Walter Benjamin, Carl Schmitt, Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, as well as short pieces by Black nationalist and decolonial authors (e.g. Delany, Garvey, Cleaver, Carmichael, Fanon).

Seminars will consist of an introduction to the material and a workshop portion. Each week a student will present a draft of their final paper; another student will act as commentator. Presentations will be followed by a Q&A session.

Requirements: presentation, commentary, 15-page final paper on an approved topic of student choice, participation in Q&A sessions.

READING LIST

I recommend that you own a copy of texts marked with an asterisk. All other texts will be made available.


Delany, Martin. The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States. Philadelphia: Martin R. Delany, 1852. [chapters 16, 17, 18, 19, and Appendix]


— — —. The Concept of the Political. Translated by George Schwab. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2007. [recommended background reading]


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**CLASS SCHEDULE**

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**Early modern theories of the state**

Week 1 (Jan 21)

**Required reading:** Bodin, *On Sovereignty*

**Suggestions for further reading:**


Week 2 (Jan 28)

**Required reading:** Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*

**Suggestions for further reading:**


Week 3 (Feb 4)


**Suggestions for further reading:**


**Week 4 (Feb 11)**

**Required reading:** Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*

**Suggestions for further reading:**


Steinberg, Justin D. “Spinoza on Being Sui Iuris and the Republican Conception of Liberty.” *History of European Ideas* 34, no. 3 (September 1, 2008): 239–49.


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**Popular sovereignty**

**Week 5 (Feb 18)**

**Required reading:** Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*

**Suggestions for further reading:**


———. *The Crisis of the European Union* (Polity, 2013)


**Decision or indecision?**

Week 6 (Feb 25)

**Required reading:** Benjamin, “Critique of Violence;” Schmitt, Political Theology

**Recommended background reading:** Schmitt, The Concept of the Political

**Suggestions for further reading:**


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**Week 7 (March 4)**

**Required reading:** Benjamin, “Trauerspiel and Tragedy,” in *Origin of German Tragic Drama*; Agamben, “Gigantomachy concerning a Void,” in *State of Exception*

**Suggestions for further reading:**


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Week 8 (March 11)  No class. Spring break.

**Power beyond sovereignty**

Week 9 (March 18)

**Required reading:** Foucault, *History of Sexuality, Volume 1*

Week 10 (March 25)

**Required reading:** Foucault, “*Society Must Be Defended*”

**Suggestions for further reading:**


Neal, Andrew W. “Cutting off the King’s Head: Foucault’s Society Must Be Defended and the Problem of Sovereignty.” *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 29, no. 4 (October 1, 2004): 573–98.


Week 11 (April 1) No seminar (conference)
Non-sovereign politics

Week 12 (April 8)

Required reading: Agamben, Homo Sacer; Agamben, The Coming Community

Suggestions for further reading:


Finlayson, James Gordon. “‘Bare Life’ and Politics in Agamben’s Reading of Aristotle.” The Review of Politics 72, no. 01 (2010): 97–126.


Short, Jonathan. “‘Life and Law: Agamben and Foucault on Governmentality and Sovereignty,’” *Journal for the Arts, Sciences, and Technology* 3 (1), 2005, 16-25.


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**Self-determination beyond sovereignty**

### 1. Classical Black Nationalism

Week 13 (April 15)

Suggestions for further reading:


2. Modern Black Nationalism

Week 14 (April 22)


Suggestions for further reading:


### 3. Decoloniality and revolution

**Week 15 (April 29)**


**Suggestions for further reading:**