ON REVOLUTION, CONTINUED

Political Science 34625
Winter Quarter 2016
Thursdays, 9:00–11:50 am, Pick 506

This graduate seminar will be devoted to advanced study of themes in and around Hannah Arendt’s 1963 book *On Revolution*; it is a continuation of PLSC 24525/34525, “Hannah Arendt: *On Revolution*” (Fall 2015). That seminar is not a prerequisite for this one, but this seminar does presuppose prior study of *On Revolution*, whether in the earlier seminar or some other context.

The main aim of both seminars is to understand and evaluate a central piece of Arendt’s theoretical vocabulary: the concept of the “social,” which is often paired with and distinguished from the idea of the “political.” Even people who have never read *On Revolution* often know it by its reputation: as a critique of the French Revolution, which supposedly decayed into terror because it allowed politics to be driven by the “social question” of mass poverty, and a vindication of the American Revolution, which supposedly succeeded because it was strictly political. In the Fall, reading the text of *On Revolution*, we found that things were more complicated; that Arendt might not merely oppose the good, political American Revolution to the bad, social French Revolution; and that her uses of the concepts of the “social” and the “political” might leave room for—even invite or encourage!—the politicization phenomena and problems that, because they are related to the needs of embodied human life or to instrumentally rational material production, more familiarly austere versions of Arendtian thought would treat as intrinsically anti-political.

This seminar will not wholly abandon Arendt-interpretation, but it is more concerned with bringing Arendt’s book into conversation with other theorists and with historical scholarship on the revolutions she discusses, as well as one she doesn’t discuss. The seminar will be organized into three multi-week units. In the first unit, we ask what happens to our understanding of revolution, of the distinction between “social” and “political,” and of *On Revolution* itself (as a theoretical text and as a historical artifact of the postwar era of decolonization) when we foreground the antislavery and anticolonial Haitian Revolution of 1791–1804, about which Arendt wrote nothing. In the second unit, we ask how the historical literature on the American and French Revolutions bears on the distinction between the “social” and the “political,” focusing on such topics as: changing interpretations of the so-called “Critical Period” of the 1780s; the relation of the Constitution to the Revolution; the significance of consumption to politics in the Revolutionary era; the politics of crowds; the political significance of the *sans-culottes*; and the rise of the Jacobin dictatorship and the beginnings of the Terror in 1793. And in the third unit, we ask how Arendt’s ideas relate to broader trends in postwar (especially French) thought, including the counter-Marxist assertion of the autonomy of the political, and the interpretation of the French Revolution as the key to understanding democracy and totalitarianism in and beyond the twentieth century (focusing on the work of Claude Lefort, François Furet, and a few of their interpreters, heirs, and critics).

The electronic version of this syllabus can be found at [http://patchenmarkell.wordpress.com/classroom/](http://patchenmarkell.wordpress.com/classroom/)
ADMISSION: This is a limited-enrollment, by-consent-only seminar, open to graduate students. Advanced undergraduates who took PLSC 24525 may also apply for admission. If you wish to apply for a place in the course, you must attend the first session; no decisions about admission will be made before then.

TEXTS: Though it isn’t technically assigned in this seminar, you should already have a copy of Hannah Arendt’s *On Revolution*, and you’ll want to keep it handy. Note that there are several different editions of *OR* in circulation, and they are paginated differently. I recommend using the 2006 Penguin Classics edition (it’s the one with an introduction by Jonathan Schell and an illustration of a raised fist on the cover) so that we can (literally) all be on the same page.

Five other books have been ordered at the Seminary Coop:

C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins*, 2nd ed. (Vintage)
David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity* (Duke)
François Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution* (Cambridge)
Martin Breaugh, *The Plebeian Experience* (Columbia)

*All other readings will be available through the course’s Chalk site.*

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS: A seminar paper of 15–20 pages, due on **Friday, March 18** unless you have made other arrangements in advance (which is easy to do; just ask), on a topic of your choice, which you should discuss with me in advance by the end of February.

GRADES: Your grade for the seminar paper will be your grade for the course. However, any student who is absent for three or more sessions of the seminar, except in cases of medical or other documentable emergency, will only be graded on a pass-fail basis.

INFERNAL CONTRAPCTIONS: You’re welcome to use a laptop or tablet to access the PDFs of readings, or to take notes, if you’d like. If you do, please keep the wireless turned off, and please don’t use those devices for anything else in class. Please also keep your phones silent (really silent, not on “vibrate”) and keep them in a pocket or a bag.

WEEKLY MEETINGS AND READING ASSIGNMENTS:

Week 1 (January 7): Introduction

No reading for this introductory discussion, but you are advised to begin reading *The Black Jacobins* ASAP, since it is long.

Week 2 (January 14): Slavery, colonialism, and revolution, I

C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins* (all).
Week 3 (January 21): Slavery, colonialism, and revolution, II

5. Adom Getachew, “Universalism After the Post-Colonial Turn: Interpreting the Haitian Revolution,” unpublished MS (not for circulation beyond the seminar).

Week 4 (January 28): Slavery, colonialism, and revolution, III

David Scott, Conscripts of Modernity (all).

Week 5 (February 4): Economic, social, and political, I


Week 6 (February 11): Economic, social, and political, II


Week 7 (February 18): Economic, social, and political, III


**Week 8 (February 25): Democracy, totalitarianism, and the political, I**


**Week 9 (March 3): Democracy, totalitarianism, and the political, II**


**Week 10 (March 10, to be rescheduled): Democracy, revolution, and totalitarianism, III**

Martin Breaugh, *The Plebeian Experience*, all (but deemphasize chaps. 4 and 7 if necessary).