BIOPOLITICS

Course description
If sovereign power is the power to “take life or let live,” biopower is “the power to foster life or disallow it to the point of death.” In this course we will spend the first few weeks closely examining Foucault’s writings and lectures on the concept of biopower, which operates through both the biopolitical regulation of populations and the disciplinary institutions and discourses brought to bear on individuals. After becoming familiar with the historical and theoretical scaffolding Foucault provides, we will consider reappraisals and re-deployments of biopower in light of new techniques for disassembling the individual and convening populations. Centering feminist, anti-racist, queer post-colonial, and post-Marxist perspectives, readings in the second half of the course may cover: population racism; the commodification of reproduction on a global scale; new forms of neoliberal governance; bio-citizenship; bio-medicalization; gender, nationalism, and the policing of bodies and borders; the securitization of risk; the carceral state; and necropolitics and the refigured relation between death and politics. Students will be encouraged to apply the theoretical and empirical work on biopower to their own research interests.

Course Requirements

Class participation (25%)

The class will be conducted as a seminar. All participants will be expected to have read the assigned reading very carefully and come to class with questions, comments, observations, analyses of connections and discontinuities in/between the texts at hand and readings from earlier classes. The amount of reading will vary, but it will generally be between 100-200 pages each week. At least once during the semester, each student will be responsible for presenting a text – providing a short summary followed by analysis, critique, and questions. Attendance is mandatory. Unexcused absences will result in a penalty in your participation grade.

Six short response papers (30%)

Literature Review Paper (45%)

No incompletes will be granted except in exceptional circumstances.

Course texts

Required


Optional:

Blackboard:
All other texts will be posted on Blackboard, named by the last name of the author and the title of the article/chapter. Many readings from the course bibliography—an extended list of recommended readings—will also be posted on Blackboard.

**Tentative schedule of readings**

September 8th:

September 15th:
Foucault, “*Society Must Be Defended,*” as much of the first half of the book as possible.


September 22nd:
Foucault, “*Society Must Be Defended,*” as much of the second half of the book as possible.

September 29th:
Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, as much of the first half of the book as possible


October 6th:

Optional:

October 20th:

October 27th:
Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*, cont’d.

November 3rd:


November 10th:

Two of the following:


Michelle Murphy, “Distributed Reproduction,” in *Corpus*. 20-38.


The schedule of readings from this point on will depend on student interests. For potential topics, see the list in the course description.

**INITIAL COURSE BIBLIOGRAPHY**

*Readings for the second half of the semester may be drawn from this list. (Fear not--we won’t be reading all of this together in class!)*


Butler, Judith and Gayatri Spivak, *Who Sings the Nation State?*


Currah, Paisley and Lisa Jean Moore. ""We Won't Know Who You Are': Contesting Sex Designation on New York City Birth Certificates," Hypatia 24:3 (Summer 2009): 113-135.


Hacking, Ian. "Biopolitics and the Avalanche of Numbers."


Ishiguro, Kazuo. Never Let Me Go.


Martin, Randy. "From the Race War to the War on Terror." In Beyond Biopolitics, Edited by Patricia Ticento Clough and Craig Willse. Durham, NC: Duke.


_Biosocieties_ 1, 195–217.


Spade, Dean and Rori Rolfs. "Legal Equality and the (After?)Math of Eugenics." Forthcoming in _the Feminist and the Scholar_.


Wood, David Murakami. "Global Cities Between Biopolitics and Necropolitics"