BIOPOLITICS

Course description
In this course we will spend the first few weeks reading Foucault’s 1975-76, 1976-77 and 1977-78 lectures at the Collège de France, which collectively lay out the foundations for understanding what Foucault calls biopolitics (biopolitique). Foucault’s lectures on war, race, the pre-history of sovereignty, pastoral power, biopower, security, governmentality, liberalism, and neoliberalism upend traditional ways of thinking about politics and provide a model of the genealogical method, even as he moves from year to year to new problems and new ways of looking at them. While Foucault never got around to elucidating the detailed account of biopolitics he had planned, his work has generated an enormous literature on the topic. After reading the lectures, we will turn to applications, reappraisals, and re-deployments of biopolitics in light of contemporary techniques for disassembling the individual and convening populations, and for refiguring the relation between death and power. Centering feminist, anti-racist, queer post-colonial, left, and post-Marxist perspectives, readings in the last part of the course may cover: population racism; Afro-Pessimism; neoliberal governance; biomedical citizenship; gender, nationalism, and the policing of bodies and borders; the new queer and trans normativities; the securitization of risk; the carceral state; and necropolitics. Students will be encouraged to apply the theoretical and empirical work on biopolitics to their own research interests.

Course Requirements

Class participation and presentation (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. In addition, each student will make a presentation based on the topic they have chosen for the literature review paper. Attendance is mandatory. Unexcused absences will result in a penalty in your participation grade.

Five two-three page response papers (25%)
Uploaded at least one day before the class the assignment is due.

Literature Review Paper (50%)
Due December 21st. No incompletes will be granted except in exceptional circumstances.

Course texts

Required


**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.

**Contact information:**
GC Office: 5207
Office Hours: Tuesdays, 1-2
Email: pcurrah@brooklyn.cuny.edu

**Weekly readings:**
*This list below should give you an idea of the amount of reading for each week, but it is possible, even likely, that in the last third of the course the readings will change based on students’ areas of interest and their presentations.*

**August 30: Sovereignties**


**September 6th: “Society Must Be Defended”**

Optional:


**September 13th: ‘Society Must Be Defended,’ cont’d**
Foucault, “Society Must Be Defended,” Chapters 7-11, Course Summary.

Optional:

**September 20th: Security, Territory, Population**

Optional:

**September 27th: Security, Territory, Population, cont’d**

Optional:

**Friday, October 14th: The Birth of Biopolitics**

Optional:


**October 18th: The Birth of Biopolitics, cont’d**

Lawrence Glickman, “Everyone was a liberal,” Aeon, July 5, 2016. [https://aeon.co/essays/everyone-was-a-liberal-now-no-one-wants-to-be](https://aeon.co/essays/everyone-was-a-liberal-now-no-one-wants-to-be)
October 25: Biopolitics and Bare Life

Optional:


November 1: Necropolitics


Optional:
Eugene Thacker, "Necrologies; or, the Death of the Body Politics." In *Beyond Biopolitics*, pp. 46-64.


November 8th: Biopolitics’ other


Optional:

Saidiya Hartman and Frank Wilderson, “The Position of the Unthought”

November 15th: CLASS CANCELED, WE WILL MEET FOR A MAKE UP CLASS ON DECEMBER 13th

November 22nd: Incarceration


   Paisley Currah, “Freeze Frames: The Carceral State, Trans Prisoners, and Neoliberal Penalty”

November 29th: Time


December 6th: Biocitizenship


December 13th: (make up class) TBA