

CONTEMPORARY CIVILIZATION 1102 – 028  
SPRING 2019 – M/W 4.10-6.00 pm  
206 BROADWAY RESIDENCE HALL

Instructor: Victoria Wiet  
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Office hours:  
Monday and Tuesday 12.00-2.00pm  
408D Philosophy

Created in 1919 as a War and Peace Issues course, the central purpose of Contemporary Civilization is to introduce students to a range of issues concerning the kinds of communities—political, social, moral, and religious—that human beings construct for themselves. This course is intended to prepare students to become active and informed citizens by developing the intellectual skills necessary for participating in enduring debates about what the best kind of community looks like. Central to the question of how to construct human society is the question of power. Last semester, we looked at a range of answers to the following questions: what is power, who should have power, and why? The texts at the end of the semester came to the consensus that the only legitimate basis for state and social power is the consent of the people and that the purpose of possessing power is to ensure the common good. The texts we read this spring—written during and as a reflection on what scholars call “modernity”—explore the challenges of securing the consent of every member of society and acting toward the benefit of all rather than the privileged few.

The trajectory of this semester tracks the new issues that have arisen since the eighteenth century as thinkers and activists have sought to figure out what it would take to achieve the good of all. We start with Enlightenment and contemporary considerations of whether the possession of “common humanity” means that diverse human communities can uphold a universal code of ethics that ensures the collective good. While not necessarily abandoning the premise of a universal “common humanity,” the next unit takes seriously the phenomenon of human difference. Early feminists, liberal politicians, and civil rights activists all demonstrate how socially constructed interpretations of human difference have unjustly led to an unequal distribution of the “good.” The second half of the syllabus explores whether this unequal distribution of the good can be overcome. Marxists propose that this unequal distribution can only be transcended through class conflict; the global wars of the first half of the twentieth century suggest the implausibility of achieving quality of life for all; while sexual minorities, postcolonial subjects, and those writing at the intersection of multiple forms of social inequality have considered how personal and cultural transformation might be pursued despite the manifold circumstances that make this transformation seem unrealizable.

On the syllabus, you’ll find many names that have been taught in CC for decades, from Immanuel Kant to Friedrich Nietzsche. You’ll also find names you might have encountered in other classes but which are not part of the standard CC syllabus, from James Baldwin to Gloria Anzaldúa. These authors rightfully sit at the center African-American Studies’ and Women Studies’ curricula, but they also contribute unique perspectives to the same issues that occupy John Stuart Mill and Frantz Fanon. As you do the reading for this semester, consider how voices like Baldwin and Anzaldúa give you new insights into the arguments of someone like Mill; also consider how the context of CC might lead you to read someone like Baldwin in a new ways.

## **Classroom expectations and access statement**

The members of this class are racially and ethnically diverse. We will be of different religious, political, and cultural affiliations, and have differing class backgrounds. We are bisexual, lesbian, gay, straight, asexual, and queer; transgender, nonbinary, male-bodied and masculine identified, female-bodied and feminine identified, and intersex. Some of us may find the issues discussed in this class sensitive, personal, or troubling, as well as challenging and provocative. Please be conscious that all of us enter the classroom with personal histories that inform how we individually respond to class readings and materials. By enrolling in the class, you agree to discuss the material in a mature manner respectful of both the material and your classmates. Differences in opinion are encouraged; hostile comments and personal attacks are prohibited.<sup>1</sup>

If you are having difficulty with the material or class discussions to the point of being unable to complete the assignments, please let me know. A week prior to when an assigned reading will be discussed, I will update a document on Courseworks with content notes listing passages in the text(s) which address sexual violence, racist violence, or suicide.

If you have a documented disability and need accommodations for the course, please let me know ASAP. I also understand that not all temporary or permanent disabilities are documented or match the criteria for official documentation. If there is anything I can do to help you learn in the classroom or complete the assignments, please get in touch and we can think of how to address your needs.

## **Electronics policy**

All electronics (including laptops, tablets, and mobile phones) must be switched off and stowed away during class. During the 5 minute break, you are allowed to take out your electronics, but they must be put away once class reconvenes. Failure to abide by this rule will first result in a warning from me; subsequent electronics use will result in a lowered participation grade.

## **Attendance**

Prompt arrival and attendance for all class sessions is mandatory. A single unexcused absence will adversely affect your participation grade. Three unexcused absences will result in your final grade for the course lowered by a full letter, or 10 points (that is, a 92/A- will become an 82/B-). **Four or more unexcused absences will result in a failing grade for the course.** The official Core Curriculum policy is as follows:

Students are expected to attend every session of their Core classes. In the event that a student must miss a class due to religious observance, illness, or family emergency, instructors are expected to provide students with the opportunity to make up any missed work. Instructors may also encourage (though not require) that students complete additional assignments to help make up for lost class participation. Whenever possible (in the case of religious holidays, for example), students should provide advance notification of absence. Students who miss class without instructor permission should expect to have their grade lowered.

Reasons for an excused absence include religious observance, illness, and personal emergency; excused absences must be accompanied by documentation (e.g. a note from a health professional, an advising

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<sup>1</sup> Language in the “Course description” and “Classroom expectations” sections draws on syllabi from instructors at Columbia University and Brandeis University.

dean, or athletic coach) in order to be valid. **If you would like further clarification as to what qualifies as an excused absence or valid documentation, please do not hesitate to get in contact with me. It is up to my discretion to decide whether or not an absence is excused.**

NOTE: For **one** unexcused absence, I will allow you to make up the absence by meeting with me to discuss what you missed and completing an additional discussion post. Any additional absences will negatively affect your grade.

Finally, you are expected to be in class by 4.10pm. Chronic tardiness will result in a lowered grade. My personal attendance records include lateness, and I will contact you if I notice frequent late arrival.

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

Papers: 45%

Paper 1: 20% (due 28 March)

Paper 2: 20% (due 7 May)

Exams: 30%

Midterm: 10% (in class, 4 March)

Final: 20% (Friday 10 May, 1.00-4.00pm; location TBD)

Reading responses: 15%

Participation: 10%

Essay prompts and exam study guides, including assessment criteria, will be released in advance. In the meantime, here's a brief description of what you'll be asked to do in each assignment:

- **Paper 1** (4-5pp): Assess whether a CC text of your choice (from the first half of the semester) sufficiently explains a contemporary political, social or economic problem.
- **Paper 2** (6-7pp): Two options:
  - **Reflection essay:** Reflect on which two texts from CC—at least one of which must be from the second semester—have most profoundly transformed the way you understand yourself and the world around you.
  - **Textual analysis:** Articulate a question that addresses a problem, tension or ambiguity in a single text from the second semester of CC, and then develop a thesis that provides an answer to that question by performing a close analysis of specific parts of the text.
  - **Comparative application:** Compare the explanatory power of **two** of our texts from this semester of CC by testing whether each author can adequately explain a contemporary social, political or economic problem.

### **Late submissions**

**All work must be submitted on time in order to receive full credit.** Extensions will only be granted in the case of a documented illness, medical procedure or personal emergency. In these cases—and these cases only—you can either request an extension in advance (such as if you have a medical procedure scheduled for the weekend before a paper is due). Alternatively, you can receive a retroactive extension by providing documentation after the original due date if you should unexpectedly become ill or face some other emergency within 48 hours of the essay deadline. In all cases, the new deadline is up to my discretion.

For each 24-hour period your paper is late, you will receive a 5 point deduction from your essay grade (a 95 will become a 90, etc). **The late penalty will come into effect 20 minutes after the deadline (e.g. 10.20pm).** That means that between 10.20pm after the deadline and 10pm the next day, you will lose 5 points off your essay grade; within 24-48 hours after the deadline,, you will lose 10 points; within 48-72 hours, 15 points, etc).

### **Reading responses**

We will be following the same system as last semester. Starting the week of 28 January, you are required to post reading responses every other week. Group A will start on 28 January, while Group B will start on 4 February. **If you are unable to write a response during the week your group is “on,” you can submit a response the following week.**

During weeks in which your group is “on,” you must submit a reading response to the Courseworks discussion board by **11.59pm the night before class. You can choose whether you respond to Monday’s or Wednesday’s reading; this means submitting your response either by Sunday at 11.59pm or Tuesday at 11.59pm** You can choose whether you do so before Monday or Wednesday’s session. For weeks where we only meet once, you must submit a response the day before that week’s class meeting.

**Responses should be about 300 words, but this relative brevity should not come at the expense of thoughtfulness and analytical rigor.** In each response, you should select a short passage from the text (anywhere from a single phrase to a few sentences), transcribe that passage, and then, in 200-300 words, comment on it with the purpose of trying understand a combination of the following: what the author is saying, how they make their point, and what the “stakes” and/or limitations of their argument are. In order to develop this understanding, you might consider doing one or more the following:

- **Define an important term.** Identify a term or concept that seems important to the author’s argument and do your best to explicate it. What, for example, does Marx mean by “estranged labor”? Having defined the term, then consider why it’s important for the author’s argument.
- **Analyze rhetorical strategies.** Are there rhetorical strategies—such as asking questions, analyzing historical sources, addressing counter argument—that appear frequently in the text? What are they? How do they help you perceive what argument the author is trying to make?
- **Make a comparison.** Does this text remind you of another text we’ve read this semester, whether because they seem similar or powerfully different? How does making this comparison help us better understand the assigned text?
- **Application.** Does something in the text remind you of a contemporary problem, issue, or event? Explain the connection you’ve made between the passage and a contemporary issue in order to illuminate what precisely the author is saying in that passage.
- **Mind the gaps.** What are the limitations to an author’s argument? Working with a single passage, consider what questions or issues an author doesn’t address even though the project they seek to accomplish in the text indicates that they should address that question or issue. Alternatively, consider what counterarguments that someone might pose to a particular passage, identify the logic behind that counterargument, and consider whether that counterargument is a strong one.
- **Instead of selecting your own passage, you are also welcome to respond to a classmate.** Do you have a different interpretation of the passage they’ve selected? Do you think the author

means something different by a term than the way your classmate responded it? Do you agree with the comparison or application they've made, or want to offer another perspective? Do you find your classmate's analysis strong and compelling, and want to further expand on it? When responding to a classmate, do not simply say "I agree" or "I disagree"; supplement their analysis with analysis of your own.

NOTE: Reading responses aren't a "throwaway" assignment; instead, they're intended to help you practice and improve your analytical skills over the course of this semester. Because I expect you to take them seriously, I will take them seriously myself and will be providing brief but detailed feedback on each response. I will also assign a score based on a 5-point scale:

- 5 = excellent
- 4.5 = good
- 4 = meets expectations
- 3.5 = okay, but needs significant improvement
- 3 = meets minimal expectations
- 0 = unacceptable

### **Participation**

Contemporary Civilization is a seminar-style class which depends upon the exchange of ideas, questions and expertise among every member of the class in order to yield positive learning outcomes for all students. To put it simply, one of the most important skills CC fosters is the ability to listen, reflect and extemporaneously think aloud and with others. For this reason, engaged participation is required and will be assessed by your instructor; I will release preliminary participation grades after the midterm.

A high participation grade will reflect prepared, thoughtful, and respectful presence in class and office hours. Additionally, failure to submit class minutes for one week will adversely affect your participation grade.

#### *In-class participation and office hours*

You will often find readings for this course difficult, and the debates they give rise to can be contentious; you might be unsure about whether what you have to say about course materials is "right." For these reasons, the nature of CC can exacerbate the already common anxiety about speaking up in class discussions. **If you have any concerns about your ability to participate to class discussions, please do not hesitate to get in contact me and we can discuss options to ensure that you can be a vital contributor to our collective learning.**

All class members should note that discussions will be conducted according to the assumption that **the kind of thinking we do during discussion can and should be different from the kind of thinking we do for a graded paper.** Do not feel like you need to present the same well-developed, precise and thoroughly supported kind of argument that you're expected to demonstrate in your papers, although you are welcome to contribute comments that meet any or all of these criteria. Instead, your comments during class discussions can be tentative, half-formed, and speculative; the point of class discussion is to clarify our understanding by thinking aloud and receiving responses from others. Questions are encouraged—they signal your ability to diagnose gaps in your understanding and help move discussions forward by making sure all participants are working from a shared, substantiated set of assumptions.

### *Class minutes*

At the beginning of the semester, everyone will be required to sign up to take “minutes” for one class session. Though you are not expected to take a comprehensive transcription, your notes should provide an accurate overview of class proceedings. During the first week of the semester, I will post the sign-up to Courseworks as well as detailed guidelines for formatting the minutes.

For the session you are the designated note-taker, you are allowed to take notes on your laptop. Please do not abuse this privilege, however.

Minutes will be collected together on Courseworks so that everyone can review past classes in preparation for papers and exams.

### **Academic integrity**

Columbia College is dedicated to the highest ideals of integrity in academia. Therefore, in Literature Humanities and Contemporary Civilization, any instance of academic dishonesty, attempted or actual, will be reported to the faculty chair of the course and to the dean of the Core Curriculum, who will review the case with the expectation that a student guilty of academic dishonesty will receive the grade of “F” in the course and be referred to dean’s discipline for further institutional action.

As an instructor, I have a zero tolerance policy regarding instances of plagiarism and will initiate the appropriate disciplinary procedures should any breach of academic integrity come to my attention. If you desire any clarification about what constitutes plagiarism, please contact me. Here is a brief list from the Columbia University *Handbook* (pp. 140-141) of some of the forms plagiarism can take:

- Submitting essays, or portions of essays, written by other people as one’s own.
- Failing to acknowledge, through proper in-text citation and other bibliographic information, the sources of ideas essentially not one’s own, including materials on the Web.
- Submitting work written for one course to a second course without having received prior permission from both instructors.

### **Textbooks and other required texts**

The following books are available for purchase at the Columbia University Bookstore:

- Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, revised ed. (Cambridge, ISBN 9781107401068)
- Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (Modern Library, ISBN 9780679783367)
- Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (Oxford, ISBN 9780199555468)
- Mill, *On Liberty, Utilitarianism, and Other Essays* (Oxford, ISBN 9780199670802)
- Marx, *The Marx-Engels Reader* (Norton, ISBN 9780393090406)
- Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo* (Vintage, ISBN 9780679724629)
- Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Harcourt, 9780156701532)
- Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (Vintage, ISBN 9780679752554)
- Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Norton, ISBN 9780393973938)
- Williams, *Seeing a Color-Blind Future* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 9780374525330)
- Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Grove Press, ISBN 9780802141323)

All other readings will be available to download in PDF form from the class CourseWorks page. You are required to either print out a copy or save and download the PDF onto your tablet.

**You must read from the editions noted above;** because seminar discussions will focus on the texts, it's necessary that all members of the class work from the same pagination and translation. **I understand that textbooks are expensive, especially for a reading-heavy course like CC.** You are welcome to purchase used copies of any or all of the textbooks; websites like BookFinder ([www.bookfinder.com](http://www.bookfinder.com)) allow you to search for an ISBN and thus will help you identify a copy of the same edition we'll be working from in class. You can also check out any of the required texts from Butler Library or through Interlibrary Loan or Borrow Direct, but be aware that shorter loan periods for ILL and BD means that it could be tricky to ensure that you have a copy of the book during the time you must read and bring it to class.

### **COURSE CALENDAR**

Readings marked (CW) will be available for download on Courseworks. These readings must be printed and brought to class in hard copy, OR downloaded and saved to your tablet to read in class offline.

<b>Weds 23 January</b>	Introduction
<b>UNIVERSALISM</b>	
<b>M 28 January</b>	Immanuel Kant, <i>Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , Preface, Books 1-2 (pp. 3-34, until “We shall enumerate some duties”; approx. 30pp)
<b>W 30 January</b>	Kant, <i>Groundwork</i> , finish Book 2 (pp. 34-55; starting with “We shall now enumerate some duties; approx. 31pp)
<b>Mon 4 February</b>	Kant, “Concerning the Definitive Articles of a Perpetual Peace Between States”; Seyla Benhabib, “The Philosophical Foundations of Cosmopolitan Norms”; Universal Declaration of Human Rights (CW) (Approx. 25pp) [NB: Focus on the Benhabib essay; the Kant piece is short and provides context for Benhabib]
<b>DIFFERENCES</b>	
<b>W 6 February</b>	Mary Wollstonecraft, <i>Vindication of the Rights of Woman</i> , Introduction and Chs. 1-2 (pp. 71-104; approx. 33pp)

<b>M 11 February</b>	Wollstonecraft, <i>Vindication</i> , Chs. 3-4, Ch. 9 (pp. 105-149, 221-231; approx. 55pp)
<b>W 13 February</b>	John Stuart Mill, <i>On Liberty</i> , Parts I-II (pp. 5-54; approx. 50pp)
<b>M 18 February</b>	Mill, <i>On Liberty</i> , Parts III-IV (pp. 55-90; approx. 45pp)
<b>W 20 February</b>	Sojourner Truth, "Ain't I a Woman?"; Olympe de Gouges, "Declaration of the Rights of Woman"; Harriet Taylor Mill, "The Enfranchisement of Women" (CW; approx. 40pp)
<b>M 25 February</b>	Frederick Douglass, "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?"; James Baldwin, "Down at the Cross: Letter from a Region in My Mind" (CW; approx. 50pp)
<b>W 27 February</b>	Catharine MacKinnon, "Difference and Dominance: On Sex Discrimination"; Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color" (CW; approx. 75pp, but the Crenshaw essay has long footnotes so it reads quickly)
<b>M 4 March</b>	"Differences" unit review
<b>W 6 March</b>	<b>MIDTERM EXAM</b>
<b>CONFLICT</b>	
<b>M 11 March</b>	Adam Smith, <i>Wealth of Nations</i> , Book I, Chs. I-IV, VIII (pp. 3-32, 73-99; approx. 57pp)
<b>W 13 March</b>	Karl Marx, "Estranged Labor," and selections from <i>Capital</i> on commodities and surplus value, from <i>Marx and Engels Reader</i> (pp.



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70-81, 302-312, 319-329, 344-361)  
(approx. 59pp)

NOTE: Focus on getting through the discussion of alienation (pp. 70-81) and commodities (pp. 302-312, 319-329); if necessary, you can just skim the discussion on surplus value (344-361). Marx on surplus value and the “labor theory of value” \*\*is extremely important\*\* in the tradition of Marxist thought, so we’ll be returning to it the Monday after break.

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**M 18 March**

**NO CLASS**

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**W 20 March**

**NO CLASS**

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**M 25 March**

Marx and Engels, “The Communist Manifesto,” from *Marx and Engels Reader* (pp. 469-500, approx. 31 pp)

Review *Capital* selections from 3/13, especially pp. 344-361

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**W 27 March**

Nancy Fraser, “Is Capitalism *Necessarily* Racist?” (CW; approx. 20pp)

**28 March: Essay #1 due at 11.5pm on Courseworks**

Selections from Silvia Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (TBD; will be available on CW by 3/15)

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## **CRISIS**

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**M 1 April**

Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Essay 1 (pp. 24-56; approx. 32pp)

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**W 3 April**

Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, excerpts (CW; excerpts TBD, expect about 40pp)

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**M 8 April**

Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, excerpts (pp. 305-

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	327; 332-349; 354-357, 372-398; approx. 75pp)	
<b>W 10 April</b>	Arendt, <i>Totalitarianism</i> , excerpts (pp. 417-419, 424-433, 435-479; approx. 55pp)	
<b>M 15 April</b>	Michel Foucault, <i>Discipline and Punish</i> (pp. 135-141, 170-184, 195- 228; approx. 45pp)	
<b>TRANSFORMATIONS</b>		
<b>W 17 April</b>	Excerpts from Oscar Wilde, <i>De Profundis</i> , and excerpts from John Addington Symonds, "A Problem in Modern Ethics" (CW; excerpts TBD, expect about 60pp)	
<b>M 22 April</b>	W.E.B. Du Bois, <i>The Souls of Black Folk</i> , Preface, I-III, V-VI, IX (pp. 1-45, 54-75, 105-119; approx. 75pp)	
<b>W 24 April</b>	Patricia Williams, <i>Seeing a Color-Blind Future: The Paradox of Race</i> (approx. 74pp)	
<b>M 29 April</b>	Frantz Fanon, "On Violence," from <i>The Wretched of the Earth</i> (pp. 1- 62; approx. 62pp)	
<b>W 1 May</b>	Gloria Anzaldua, "La conciencia de la Mestiza: Towards a New Mestiza"; Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses"; José Esteban Muñoz, introduction from <i>Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics</i> (CW; approx. 65pp)	
<b>M 6 May</b>	<i>Conclusions</i> Homi K. Bhabha, "Commitment to Theory" (CW; approx. 28pp)	7 May: Essay #2 due at 11.59pm on Courseworks
<b>F 10 May</b>	Final exam 1.00-4.00pm	Location TBA