

American Studies/Sociology 220

## **Freedom: Great Debates on Liberty and Morality**

Spring 2016 Wellesley College

Thomas Cushman and Jonathan B. Imber

### **GOALS OF THE COURSE**

This course offers an interdisciplinary examination of the idea of freedom through a case study approach. The course is designed to offer an understanding of different ideas of freedom in relation to each other, with particular attention to the similarities and differences among competing visions of freedom. One of the main goals is to offer students a sociological perspective on some of the most important public debates on various issues in American society. The goal of this approach is to use social science data, concepts, and theories to understand issues that are often approached from a viewpoint of ideological/political orthodoxies rather than an analytical and disinterested perspective.

### **REQUIRED TEXTS**

Jason Brennan, *Libertarianism: What Everyone Needs to Know*

Charles E. Cobb, Jr., *This Nonviolent Stuff'll Get You Killed: How Guns Made the Civil Rights Movement Possible*

Frank S. Meyer, ed., *What Is Conservatism?*

Charles Murray, *By the People: Rebuilding Liberty Without Permission*

In addition, there are a number of reserve articles on Sakai that are required. The professors, on occasion will send you brief articles and/or data to look at which are part of the class.

### **General Expectations:**

This course deals with contemporary issues which can be provocative, controversial and even offensive to some. A requirement of the class is a willingness to listen to and debate others' points of view. We approach these subjects with the objectivity and disinterestedness that we believe are the hallmark of the sociological perspective. We are confident that analysis and debate are the necessary ingredients to sustained understanding of complex matters about which reasonable people can, do, and will disagree.

There is no requirement to accept any view, but toleration is crucial. The classroom is a place for consideration of a diversity of views. If you are not comfortable with lively and vigorous debate in which your views will be challenged and in which you may freely challenge others' views (including the professors'), this may not be the class for you. On the other hand, if you have difficulties with such debates and discussions this class will afford you the opportunity and skills to engage in them and see their value for advancing your intellectual capacities and knowledge.

**All students are expected to attend class.** We do not calculate an exact percentage of the grade based on attendance and participation, but we will take attendance occasionally and will keep note of participation and use that record when making close decisions about a final grade. Because the class meets only once a week, your participation is essential.

We have organized the course in the following way: Each week we will open with brief lectures by either Professor Cushman or Imber or both. We will take a short break after an hour and return for questions and discussion led each week by two students. Sign-up for assignment of student pairs will be made at our second meeting (February 2).

### **Papers and Exam**

#### A. Two 8-10-Page Papers

1. First paper due March 8 submitted by email attachment in Word to:

jimber@wellesley.edu

2. Second paper due April 14 submitted by email attachment in Word to:

jimber@wellesley.edu

B. Final Exam (take home, open book, distributed the last day of class, due last day of finals,

Monday, May 16, 4:30PM

## **COURSE OUTLINE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS**

### **January 26: Positive and Negative Liberty: A Review of the Bill of Rights**

Readings:

- Positive and Negative Rights, <http://www.learnliberty.org/videos/positive-rights-vs-negative-rights>
- "The Common Law and Civil Law Traditions" (sakai)
- Matt Zwolinski, "Liberty," in *Central Issues in Philosophy*, (sakai)
- Christopher Hitchens, "Jefferson's Quran: What the Founder Really Thought About Islam" *Slate*, January 9, 2007. (sakai)
- Alexandra Méav Jerome, "The Jefferson Qur'an" *Oxford Islamic Studies Online*. (sakai)
- George Washington, Letter to the Hebrew Congregation of Newport, August 18, 1790. (sakai)

### **February 2: Property Rights and Personhood: The Case of Slavery**

Readings:

- John Locke, "Second Treatise on Civil Government, Ch. 5: Of Property" (sakai)
- Frederick Douglass, "Letter to Thomas Auld" and "An Address to the Colored People of the United States", in *Speeches and Writings*, e-book available on Clapp Library site, pp. 111- 127 ( sakai)
- James L. Huston, "Property Rights in Slavery and the Coming of the Civil War," *The Journal of Southern History*, 65:2 (1999): 249-286. (sakai)

### **February 9: Arguing the Second Amendment**

Readings:

- Supreme Court of the United States, "District of Columbia, et al., Petitioners v. Dick Anthony Heller, June 26, 2008. (sakai)
- Amicus Briefs arguing for and against Heller (sakai)
- Chs. 1-3 in Adam Winkler, *Gunfight: The Battle over the Right to Bear Arms* (sakai)

### **February 16: Arguing the Second Amendment, continued**

Readings:

- Charles E. Cobb, Jr., *This Nonviolent Stuff'll Get You Killed: How Guns Made the Civil Rights Movement Possible*

## **February 23: What is Libertarianism?**

Readings:

- Jason Brennan, *Libertarianism: What Everyone Needs to Know*, Chs. 1-5

## **March 1: What is Libertarianism? (continued)**

Readings:

- *Libertarianism: What Everyone Needs to Know*, Chs. 6-9
- Excerpts from Wendy McElroy, ed. *Liberty for Women: Freedom and Feminism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (sakai)

## **March 8: What is Conservatism?**

Readings:

- Frank S. Meyer, *What Is Conservatism?*

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## **FIRST PAPER DUE, March 8**

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## **March 15: Debating the Libertarian/Conservative Divide: Correspondences and Convergences**

Reading:

- Charles Murray, *By the People : Rebuilding Liberty Without Permission*, in entirety.

## **March 29: In Depth: Drugs and Alcohol**

Readings:

- Chapters One, Two, and Three in John C. Burnham, *Bad Habits: Drinking, Smoking, Taking Drugs, Gambling, Sexual Misbehavior, and Swearing in American History*. (sakai)
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**April 5: In Depth: Sex and Freedom**

Readings:

- Camille Paglia, "The Modern Campus Cannot Comprehend Evil" *Time*, Sept. 29, 2014
- Vanessa Grigoriadis, "Love and War" *New York Magazine*, Sept. 21, 2014

**April 12: In Depth: Speech**

Readings:

- Maitra and McGowan, excerpt from *Speech and Harm* (sakai)
- "Of the Liberty of Thought and Discussion, Ch. 2 in John Stuart Mill *On Liberty* available online at: <http://www.bartleby.com/130/2.html> and on sakai
- Kelefa Sanneh, "The Hell You Say", *The New Yorker*, August 10, 2015,. Online at : <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/08/10/the-hell-you-say> and on sakai

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**SECOND PAPER DUE, April 12**

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**April 13: Jefferson Lecture, Charles Murray, 7:00 PM, this is a required lecture for the class.**

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**April 26: Trigger Warnings, Microaggressions and the Culture of Offense**

Readings:

- Derald Wing Sue, Chapter 1: "Microaggressions, Marginality, and Oppression" available as e-book . *Microaggressions and Marginality* , ed. Derald Wing Sue, on Wellesley Clapp Library server.
- Frank Furedi, "Microaggression Theory: An Assault on Everyday Life" (sakai)
- Heather MacDonald, "The Microaggression Farce, *City Journal*, available online at: [http://www.city-journal.org/2014/24\\_4\\_racial-microaggression.html](http://www.city-journal.org/2014/24_4_racial-microaggression.html) and on sakai

**May 3: Women, Libertarianism, and Conservatism**

Readings:

- Jennifer Burns, "The Three 'Furies' of Libertarianism: Rose Wilder Lane, Isabel Paterson, and Ayn Rand" (sakai)
- Russell Kirk, *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Conservatism*