

Political Theory and the Sea: Empire, Commerce, Slavery

POLI 561 Fall 2018 517 LEACOCK M 11:35-14:25 (EXCEPT FIRST TWO WEEKS)	Professor Yves Winter email: yves.winter@mcgill.ca Office: 418 Ferrier Office hours: W 14:30-16:30 & by appt
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Description

The sea has been an important if understudied dimension of Western political thought. For most of human history, maritime navigation has served as the principal mode of transporting people, commodities, and other cargo over long distances. The sea has been a primary site of trade and commerce, of war, of exploration, and of conquest, yet for political theory, the sea has also been elusive.

The juxtaposition of land and sea has substantively structured the history of the European political-theoretical tradition. The idea of the modern state with its territory, borders, and bounded shape, is part of a political language centered around land. So is that of the political community as an exclusive and spatially delimited unit of the modern world. Maritime issues such as fishing, whaling, piracy, smuggling, and sea-born migration have challenged this terrestrial framework. At the same time, maritime beasts and monsters—such as the biblical Leviathan—have served as a fecund metaphors for the political imagination.

The focus of this course will be on the Atlantic Ocean, which since the late fifteenth century, has been a corridor for imperial conquest, colonialism, and for the trade and exchange of commodities, slaves, raw materials, animals, technology, and ideas. From the fifteenth through the nineteenth century, the Atlantic world has been centrally shaped by the forces of commerce, empire, capital, slavery, and revolution. In this course, we will consider these political-theoretical themes through the distinctive spatial lens of the sea.

Please note that the first meeting (Sept 7) will be a substantive class, and students are expected to do the reading ahead of class.

Prerequisites & Restrictions

This is an advanced seminar open to graduate students, U-3 honours students, and other advanced undergraduates with the permission of the instructor. Students must have taken at least two courses in political theory or political philosophy, at least one of which must be at the upper-level.

Please note that this is a demanding, reading-intensive seminar. The assigned reading is heavy and may at times seem onerous. In a typical week, the assigned reading will be about 200-300 pages, sometimes more. Students are expected to have read and digested the material prior to class, which means that you should reserve 10-20 hours per week to prepare for this class.

Recommended Texts

Most (but not all) course texts are available electronically through the McGill library or will be made available as pdfs on myCourses. For students who prefer to read print copies and are interested in purchasing

the books, a limited number of copies are available at **The Word Bookstore, 469 Milton Street** (cash or cheque only). I recommend that you get the books you wish to buy early in the semester.

Lauren Benton, A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400-1900 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) ISBN 978-0-521-70743-5

Michel-Rolph Trouillot, Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995) ISBN 978-0-8070-8053-5

Hugo Grotius, The Free Sea, ed. David Armitage (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2004) ISBN 0-86597-431-4

Herman Melville, Moby-Dick or, The Whale, ed. Andrew Delbanco and Tom Quirk (New York: Penguin, 1992) ISBN 978-0-14-243724-7

Saidiya Hartman, Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2007) ISBN 978-0-374-53115-7

Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic (Boston: Beacon Press, 2013) ISBN 978-0-8070-3317-3

Ian Baucom, Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005) ISBN 0-8223-3596-4

Assignments and Grades

Written assignments for this course will consist of (i) four short reflection papers; (ii) a seminar paper proposal; and (iii) a 15-20 pp. seminar paper due at the end of the semester.

Your grade is further composed of (iv) class participation.

Reflection papers should be no longer than 2 pages (double-spaced). They are reading protocols, i.e. interpretive-analytical pieces of writing about the assigned readings. They may cover the entirety or only a part of the assigned text. They are neither summaries of the readings nor opportunities for rambling narratives based on free association. As the name suggests, reflection papers demand that you demonstrate your understanding of the material and your ability to analyze it. Analysis may involve identifying and critically assessing: (1) the main problems/questions an author raises; (2) the central claims and arguments; (3) explicit and implicit assumptions; (4) the evidence presented; (5) the strengths and weaknesses of an argument and/or possible counterarguments. Note that reflection papers are not primarily concerned with your reading experience, your feelings about the readings, or your opinions.

In the first session, students will sign up for the weeks in which they write their reflection papers. The papers will be shared with the entire class **before** the seminar. They are due on myCourses no later than 8:00 pm the evening prior to the seminar. **Late papers will receive zero credit (F). Exceptions will only be made in the case of documented medical emergencies.**

We will begin each seminar by asking those who have written reflection papers on the assigned reading to introduce the material, offer comments, and/or raise questions. These are not formal presentations, but students should come prepared to introduce the readings.

Paper proposals should be 2-3 pages in length (double spaced). They ought to (1) outline a question or problem; (2) articulate a tentative thesis; (3) offer a tentative paper outline; and (4) identify relevant literature.

Seminar papers can take a variety of forms, and further instructions will be made available later in the course.

Your written work will be graded on originality, reasoning and argument, organization, clarity of exposition, and style. A detailed grading rubric will be posted on myCourses. Everything is graded on the letter grade scale (A to F), and final grades are computed using the 0-4 GPA scale.

Grade	Grade Points
A	4.0
A-	3.7
B+	3.3
B	3
B-	2.7
C+	2.3
C	2.0
D	1.0
F	0

Final grades are calculated according to the following schedule. Students must receive a passing grade (D) in each of the following grade categories to receive a passing grade for the course.

Reflection papers	20%
Seminar paper	50%
Paper proposal	10%
Class participation	20%

Rules and Policies

All **assignments** are due on the dates indicated in the syllabus. **Late papers** will be docked one third of a letter grade for every 24 hours late, including weekends. Extensions are available only for serious and documented reasons, and they must be requested ahead of time. No extensions will be granted on (or after) an assignment's due date. Do not send assignments via email unless otherwise instructed.

Reflection papers are due without exception the evening before the class. **No late reflection papers will be accepted under any circumstances.**

As this is a seminar, **attendance** is critical. Students with three or more absences should not expect a passing grade.

You are responsible for having read the assigned texts prior to the class meeting. Prepare for class by taking notes and by thinking about questions, ideas, or problems that arise in your reading. Be sure to bring books (print or electronic versions) to class.

McGill University values **academic integrity**. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the [Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures](#). Please note that I take plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty

seriously, and your work will be reviewed for potential plagiarism issues by means of text-matching software.

Conformément à la Charte des droits de l'étudiant de l'Université McGill, chaque étudiant-e a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté.

As the instructor of this course I endeavor to provide an inclusive learning environment. However, if you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss them with me and the [Office for Students with Disabilities](#) (514)398-6009.

Class Schedule

Sept 7 Introduction: Theorizing Space

Carl Schmitt, The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum, pp. 42-49; 67-100; 172-184 (pdf).

Please note that the first two class meetings take place on a **Friday!**

Sept 10 No class (Rosh Hashana)

Sept 14 Theorizing Space and Power

Lauren Benton, A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400-1900 (not available electronically)

Please note that the first two class meetings take place on a **Friday!**

Sept 17 The Black Atlantic

Paul Gilroy, The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness, chs. 1-3, 6 (pdf)

Sept 24 International Law and the European Colonial Expansion

Hugo Grotius, [The Free Sea](#)

Oct 1 No class (election day)

Oct 8 No class (Thanksgiving)

Oct 15 Enlightenment Visions (I)

Montesquieu, The Spirit of the Laws, books 14-16, 20-21 (pdf)

Adam Smith, The Wealth of Nations, book IV, chs. 1-3, 7-8 (pdf)

Oct 22	<p>Enlightenment Visions (II)</p> <p>Immanuel Kant, "Idea for a Universal History with Cosmopolitan Purpose"</p> <p>Immanuel Kant, "Perpetual Peace"</p> <p>James Tully, Public Philosophy in a New Key: Vol. 2, ch. 5</p>
Oct 29	<p>Slave Routes (I)</p> <p>Eric Williams, Capitalism and Slavery, chapters 2, 3, 5 (pdf)</p> <p>Philip Curtin, The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex, chapters 2, 6, 7</p> <p>Sidney W. Mintz, "Was the Plantation Slave a Proletarian?" (pdf)</p>
Nov 5	<p>Slave Routes (II)</p> <p>Saidiya Hartman, Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route</p>
Nov 12	<p>The Revolutionary Atlantic (I)</p> <p>Susan Buck-Morss, "Hegel and Haiti," in Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History</p> <p>Michel-Rolph Trouillot, Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History</p> <p>Adom Getachew, "Universalism After the Post-colonial Turn: Interpreting the Haitian Revolution"</p> <p>Paper Proposals DUE</p>
Nov 19	<p>The Revolutionary Atlantic (II)</p> <p>Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic (not available electronically)</p>
Nov 26	<p>The Revolutionary Atlantic (III)</p> <p>C.L.R. James, A History of Pan-African Revolt</p> <p>Herman Melville, "Benito Cereno" (pdf)</p>
Dec 3	<p>Connections</p> <p>Ian Baucom, Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History</p>
Dec 4	Seminar Paper Presentations & Review

Dec 14

SEMINAR PAPERS DUE by 12PM (418 Ferrier) or in my mailbox in 414 Leacock