

Politics Seminar 40100, sec. 2
ELSEWHERE
Fall 2007
Prof. Zillah Eisenstein

Office Hours: Mueller 316
Tues., Thursday 11:30-12:30
Wednesday 1:30-3:00
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Course Expectations: It is expected that all students be present at each class, prepare presentations for class discussion of the reading materials, and complete two writing projects dealing with the queries of the course.

Theoretical Underpinnings

This course asks you to think 'deeply' about what you see and the way you see it; what you look at and what you don't, and why. In this sense I ask you to theorize both a notion of 'presence' and 'absence'—specifically in terms of queries about color and race; sex and gender; colonialism and 'the' west, civilization and modernity, and so on. I want you to think as inclusively as you can, as well as theoretically.

Theory is the ability to imagine and envision beyond the self—and beyond individualized contained moments. Theory, in this sense, allows one to think big—with a history, with a future, with an understanding of the political narratives that operate both silently and loudly. My aim is to push my students to draw connections wherever this may be possible so that they will see in enlarged and inclusive fashion. Part of the aim of the course is to take students to new sites for understanding and enriching the meanings of political—power-filled--life.

The General Focus of the Course

The course has evolved out of and along with my newest research, travel, and writing related to the deconstruction and reconstruction of the so-called WEST/NON-WEST and their constructions of the sex/gender; color/race divides. I want students to rethink their thinking about what the terms west and non-west mean. I want you to do this both historically and contemporarily. In other words—given the origins of democratic theory—are these origins 'truly' and 'simply' of the west? More specifically, what place does the colonization of the Tainos, and the practice of the African slave trade, play in these formulations? And, I want you to think about this question—today—during globalization when ideas travel and change continuously. What is the vested political interest, of both the powerful and the powerless, in this divide? How do the events of September 11, 2001 and its aftermaths in Afghanistan and Iraq inform this discussion?

I also want to then take this divide—WEST/NON-WEST and pluralize it further by diversifying the very notion of unity and diversity themselves. Once diversity becomes a part of each side of the construction, the neat divides of positivism are challenged from within. The next query is to rethink how these discussions impact on the very idea/s of democracy, individuality, and freedom. The focus here is to unsettle the intellectual borders that have become naturalized and normalized: same/difference; self/other; nature/culture; white/black; sex/gender, etc. I will pluralize each side in such a way as to unsettle the clarity of the border-lines between modernity and antiquity.

This course continues to develop from my writing and teaching which uses multi-cultural/racial and intercultural/racial visionings as well as fluid notions of sex and gender to see the body, especially female bodies in more complex, diverse fashion. I use the body—or bodies—as a racialized and sexualized site to re-look at the notion of universality and real democracy from places outside or critical of ‘the’ western canon. By ‘seeing’ complex bodies I hope you will be encouraged to entertain an inclusivity that follows from this starting point. And of course, the conundrum is that there is no singular body--meaning across cultures and nations--and yet the human body speaks in entirely similar ways in ‘other-than-western’ form.

A Few General Themes to Explore

Several of the themes that I wish to probe are: pluralizing the notion of the political across the boundaries of public and private, east and west, liberal and Marxist, feminist and anti-racist. We will explore the similarities and differences between colonialism and global capitalism; the notion of western as much more diverse and owing much of what it is to so-called non-western sites. I will examine the role of the slave-trade in the determination of enlightenment theory and the place of the slave woman’s body in this process. We will challenge the bordered arenas of sex, gender, color and race. We will question the place-origin of the idea of ‘freedom’. Students will develop a notion of what I term POLYVERSAL identity and humanity depending on the way they travel through and use the materials of the course.

Some More Specific Themes:

More specifically the readings engage the following:

1. A redefinition of democracy as a polyversal historical construction
2. A viewing of Sept. 11th and the so-called wars of/on terror and their aftermath for the viewings of the globe that they open and close
3. An examination of diasporic visions of rationality in Islamic thought
4. A discussion of a recoding of universality to embrace multi-inter- and polyglot meanings
5. Theorize the intersections of racialized gender and engendered race especially in the slave trade
6. Examine the particular relations of global, and translocal cultures for a richer notion of inclusivity

7. Utilize while developing methodologies of the 21st century: translation, comparison, translocality, interpretative traveling
8. Embrace the relationship between power-locations and the embrace of non-imperial universalisms
9. Rethink the relationship between the constructions of sex and gender; and color and race in fluid, open, contextualized ways

Essential Readings—Books at I. C. Bookstore

Zillah Eisenstein. AGAINST EMPIRE

Kenzaburo Oe. HIROSHIMA

Martin Bernal. BLACK ATHENA

Vol. 1 Preface, introd, chap iv, chap.v pp. 225-246, chap vi pp.281-297, chap vii, chap viii pp. 337-344, chap. Vix pp. 367-373

Jack Weatherford. INDIAN GIVERS

Arundhati Roy. POWER POLITICS

George Breitman, ed. THE LAST YEAR OF MALCOLM X

Ahmed Rashid. JIHAD

Salmun Rushdie. THE WIZARD OF OZ

W. E. B. Dubois. THE WORLD AND AFRICA

Roxanne Euben. ENEMY IN THE MIRROR

Howard Zinn. TERRORISM AND WAR

Zillah Eisenstein. SEXUAL DECOYS, GENDER, RACE AND WAR IN IMPERIAL DEMOCRACY