

Political Science 140e
Extreme Encounters With Power — How Individuals Experience Politics
Kevin J. O'Brien

T, Th 2:00-3:30
Spring 2013
101 Moffitt

Office Hours: T, Th 1:30-2, W 11-12
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Course Description:

This course exposes students to ways in which power is exercised on ordinary people. It highlights rather unpleasant aspects of the state and reminds us that politics is often not simply a question of who gets what, but of control and domination. Ranging throughout the world, we will seek to recapture the human experience of politics, as described by scholars, novelists, and journalists and as seen through the eyes of people who have lived through extreme encounters with authority (e.g. state terror, apartheid, police interrogation, detention, attempted genocide). Many of the readings were selected to bring the student face-to-face with coercion in a way that middle-class Americans rarely confront. Some readings discuss altruism and “ways out” for people in difficult circumstances. Considerable attention will be paid to the complex relationships that link the powerful and powerless and to actions that are both more charged and less abstract than we usually discuss in political science courses.

Since many of the readings are personal, ground-level accounts and many of the authors are skillful writers, I hope students will find the selections interesting and not overly long. Students will, however, need to devote considerable time each week to reading and make special efforts to draw out analytical themes and generalizations, wherever possible. With some guidance, students will be expected to react to the readings, to assess the author’s arguments in terms of their own values and knowledge, and to think systematically about the issues raised. The instructor expects to be regularly surprised (and delighted) by insightful remarks and unique perspectives.

Books and Coursepack to be purchased:

- 1) J. M. Coetzee, The Life and Times of Michael K. (Penguin Books, 1984), paperback
- 2) Ted Conover, New Jack: Guarding Sing Sing (Vintage Books, 2001), paperback
- 3) Slavenka Drakulic, How We Survived Communism and Even Laughed (Perennial, 1993), paperback
- 4) John Gaventa, Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley (University of Illinois Press, 1982), paperback
- 5) Primo Levi, The Drowned and the Saved, (Random House, 1989), paperback
- 6) Kevin J. O'Brien and Lianjiang Li, Rightful Resistance in Rural China (Cambridge, 2006), paperback

7) Samuel P. Oliner and Pearl M. Oliner, The Altruistic Personality: Rescuers of Jews in Nazi Europe (New York: Touchstone, 1992), paperback

8) A small coursepack, available at Copy Central

Materials available in the Moffit Library on Two-Hour Reserve:

- 1) One copy of the coursepack
- 2) All the “books to be purchased”

Course Requirements:

Mid-Term Exams (February 14 and April 9) and Final Exam (Scheduled Time, Scheduled Place, May 13, 11:30-2:30) —These exams will test a student’s mastery of the readings and the material discussed in class. Recall and brief analysis of major themes will be essential. Some of each midterm exam will be composed of questions that require short answers (3-4 sentences) that demonstrate knowledge of events and concepts described and an ability to evaluate their significance. Typical questions might be: “Why did Tomas, the surgeon in The Unbearable Lightness of Being, become a window washer?”; “Why didn’t Michael K. escape from the detention center that had no fence or guards?” “Why does Gaventa believe that power has at least three dimensions?” The midterm exams will also likely have one or two essay questions. The comprehensive final exam will mainly be composed of essays, but may also have some short answers. Each mid-term will count for 20% of the student’s final course grade. The final exam will count for 40% of the student’s course grade.

Active and worthwhile participation in sections + any section assignments– 20% of the course grade.

Academic Honesty: All the work you do in this course is expected to be your own. Absolutely no cheating or plagiarism (using someone else’s words or ideas without proper citation) will be tolerated. Any cases of cheating or plagiarism will be reported to the university and handled according to university policy.

Disabilities: Students with disabilities are responsible for making their needs known to the instructor, and seeking available assistance, in a timely manner. All efforts will be made to facilitate the learning of students with any sort of disability.

1/22

Introduction

1/24 How the Powerful Justify Their Power and Why the Powerless Accept It

Eugene D. Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made (New York, Vintage, 1976), pp. 3-25, 70-93 (skim 75-93), 123-33.

Murray Edelman, “The Political Language of the Helping Professions,” Politics and Society 4 (1974): 295-310.

John Gaventa, Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley, pp. 5-20.

Community and Powerlessness

1/29 How Patterns of Quiescence or Rebellion Come to Exist

John Gaventa, Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley, Preface, Chapters 3 and 4.

James Scott, "False Consciousness or Laying it on Thick," in Domination and the Arts of Resistance (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), pp. 70-107.

1/31 **How Patterns of Power are Maintained or Altered**

Gaventa, Chapter 6 (omit pp. 145-61), pp. 199-201, Chapters 8-10.

2/5, 2/7, 2/12 **How the Wealthy and Powerful Interpret Their Position**

Tina Rosenberg, Children of Cain: Violence and the Violent in Latin America, (New York: William Morrow, 1991), pp. 219-70

Watch and Discuss "The Official Story" (in class)

2/14 In-class Exam

Living under State Socialism

2/19 The Effects of Poverty and Deprivation on East European Women

Slavenka Drakulic, How We Survived Communism and Even Laughed Chapters 1, 3, 5, 6, 9, 13, 14, 19.

2/21, 2/26, and 2/28 Living with Censorship and Interrogations

Milan Kundera, The Unbearable Lightness of Being, pp. 176-192.

Slavenka Drakulic, How We Survived Communism and Even Laughed, Chapters 8 and 10.

Liu Binyan, A Higher Kind of Loyalty, Chapters 3, 6, 16, 17, 18.

Watch "The Lives of Others" (out of class, for section discussion)

3/5, 3/7 **Petty Harassment and the Indignities of Oppression**

J. M. Coetzee, The Life and Times of Michael K., Parts I and II.

3/12 **Peasant Power and Decollectivization in China**

Daniel Kelliher, Peasant Power in China (Yale, 1992), pp. 19-39, 233-53

James Scott, "Everyday Forms of Resistance," in Forest Colburn (ed.), Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance (M.E. Sharpe, 1989), pp. 3-33

Lucien Bianco, Peasants Without the Party (M.E. Sharpe, 2001), pp. 251-53, 257-73

3/14, 3/19, 3/21, 4/2 **Popular Resistance in China**

Kevin J. O'Brien and Lianjiang Li, Rightful Resistance in Rural China, Preface, Chapters 1-6

Ethan Michelson, "Justice from Above or Justice from Below? Popular Strategies for Resolving Grievances in Rural China," China Quarterly, (March 2008): 43-64

Watch and discuss "Qiu Ju Goes to Court" in class (3/21 and 4/2)

Detention and Coercion

4/4 Prison Guards: Living with Rules, Enforcing Rules

Ted Conover, Newjack: Guarding Sing Sing, pp. 3-136

In Class Exam -- 4/9

4/11 Class Canceled (Instructor Overseas)

4/16, 4/18 **Torture and Torturers – Concentration Camps, Argentina, Abu Ghraib**

Bruno Bettelheim, "Individual and Mass Behavior in Extreme Situations," in Surviving and Other Essays (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), pp. 48-83.

Janice T. Gibson and Mika Haritos-Fatouros, "The Education of a Torturer," Psychology Today, November 1986, pp. 50-58.

Jacobo Timerman, Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number (New York: Vintage, 1981), pp. 32-41, 55-57, 93-104.

Stanley Millgram, "Some Conditions of Obedience and Disobedience to Authority," Human Relations 18 (February 1965), pp. 57-75.

4/23, 4/25 **Bureaucratic Evil, Its Victims and Survivors**

Primo Levi, The Drowned and the Saved, Chapter 1-3, 7 -- omit pp. 60-66, 161-66.

Bruno Bettelheim, "Eichmann: The System, the Victims," reprinted from The New Republic, June 15, 1963, pp. 23-33, in Surviving and Other Essays (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), pp. 258-73.

4/30, 5/2

Doing Good — Saving People During the Holocaust

Samuel P. Oliner and Pearl M. Oliner, The Altruistic Personality: Rescuers of Jews in Nazi Europe (New York: The Free Press, 1988), pp. 1-12, 49-170, 187-222

Kristen Monroe, The Heart of Altruism: Perceptions of a Common Humanity (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 197-216

Scheduled Exam Period, Scheduled Place -- **FINAL EXAM** -- 5/13, 11:30-2:30

Picture / Photo books. Another factor to bear in mind is that paper books don't need power to function. They can be read anywhere with sufficient light, and are perfect travelling companions for exactly this reason. The obvious cons are: Paper books are bulky and heavy. Carrying more than 2-3 around can become a chore. You need a light source to read them - another thing that you'll probably carry around. And they don't have to be permanent. Lighting conditions essentially become meaningless. Many readers incorporate display lighting allowing you to read whenever and wherever you like.