

# **RADICAL DEMOCRACY AND RADICAL FEMINISMS**

## *course syllabus*

**professor:** michael e ferguson

**office:** ketchum 137

**e-mail:** michael.e.ferguson@colorado.edu

**office hours:** every Monday 2-3pm, alternating  
Thursdays 3-4pm, and by appointment at  
[professorferguson.youcanbook.me](mailto:professorferguson.youcanbook.me)

**PSCI 7124**

**Spring 2023**

**Ketchum 1B31**

**Th 12:30-3:00pm**

## **course overview**

If democracy is the rule of the people, then radical democracy is a form of democracy that starts at its root: the people. A good deal of democratic theory is concerned not with the people directly exercising their capacity to rule, but with what today we would call democratic institutions, institutions that claim legitimacy because they are grounded in some notion of the will of the people. We are going to start elsewhere, with people engaging in self-rule beyond or outside of formal political institutions.

Ordinary people engage in radical democracy when together with others they attempt to shape the conditions in which they live. That is, radical democracy is something that we see in social and political movements that occur beyond, against, and across formal political institutions.

The conceit of this course is that we are going to turn to people engaged in radical democracy as the source of democratic theory. Instead of looking to academics or canonical texts for ideas about democracy, we will take the work of activists (both in writing and in action) as the subject of our study, as democratic theory.

More specifically, we will be examining radical feminist theory and activism emergent in the United States in the late 1960s and early 1970s (although our explorations will take us both further into the past, and closer to the present as well). Feminists at this time were attempting to theorize problems that previously had no name (terms like sexual harassment, for example, come to us as the result of theorizing begun in this period). They were engaged in an incredibly creative exercise of trying to make sense of patriarchy, sexism, and misogyny while also trying to imagine and enact alternative futures.

What can we learn by studying the archives of radical feminist groups from this time period? What can they teach us about the practice of radical democracy? What can they teach us about the practice of doing theory? What other archives might we turn to in order to deepen our understanding of radical democracy?

## **reading assignments & course schedule**

I encourage you to get and [read print copies of books](#) where this is possible (some of the books listed below are available through the CU Library in print form). All materials are available for free electronically, except for one book: Wini Breine's *The Trouble Between Us* (which is available as a \$15 Kindle if you really want).

**Please note: the schedule that follows is preliminary, and may be revised in light of class conversations, emerging scholarship, current events, and/or professor discretion.**

### **I. political imagination**

**Th Jan 19**

- Michaela Ferguson, "Dead Dogma and the Limits of Feminist Political Imagination: Thinking #MeToo as Consciousness-Raising," *Theory & Event*, April 2022

### **II. how stories about political imagination matter**

**Th Jan 26**

- [Clare Hemmings, \*Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory\* \(2011\)](#)

### **III. the classic triggers of the second wave**

**Th Feb 2**

- Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (English translation available in 1953) (read [Borde translation](#) for complete text; [Parshley translation](#) for a sense of what Anglophone feminists would have encountered), selections TBA

**M Feb 6**

- [archive project](#): archive description due by 5pm

**Th Feb 9**

- [Betty Friedan, \*The Feminine Mystique\* \(1963\)](#)

### **IV. historical context**

**Th Feb 16**

- [Sara Evans, \*Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left\* \(1979\)](#)
- [Alice Echols, \*Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975\* \(1989\)](#)
- Wini Breines, *The Trouble Between Us: An Uneasy History of White and Black Women in the Feminist Movement* (2006)

### **V. into the archives**

**M Feb 20**

- [archive project](#): archive bibliography due by 5pm

**Th Feb 23**

- New York Radical Women: [Notes from the First Year](#) (1968), [Notes from the Second Year](#) (1970), [Notes from the Third Year](#) (1971)
- [Robin S. Morgan, \*Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement\* \(1970\)](#) (at least read the Introduction, and the Principles by New York Radical Women)

**Th Mar 2**

- [Redstockings](#) (1969ff.); read especially [Feminist Revolution](#) (published in 1978, but written earlier)

**M Mar 6**

- archive project: archive annotated bibliography due by 5pm

**Th Mar 9**

- [Chicago Women's Liberation Union](#) (read especially the Liberation Archives)
- Watch documentary [The Janes](#) (only available behind a paywall on HBO)

**Th Mar 16**

- Cell 16: *No More Fun and Games* [Issue 2](#); [Issue 3](#); [Issue 4](#), [Issue 6](#) (other issues available on microform through Norlin)

**M Mar 20**

- archive project: archive first pass due by 5pm

**Th Mar 23**

- [Maxine Williams and Pamela Newman, \*Black Women's Liberation\*](#) (1970)
- Linda LaRue, "The Black Movement and Women's Liberation," *The Black Scholar*, Vol. I, No. 7, May 1970: 36-42
- [Elanor Holmes Norton, Maxine Williams, Frances Beal, and Linda LaRue, \*Black Woman's Manifesto\*](#) (1970-1975)
- [Diane Schulder and Florynce Kennedy, \*Abortion Rap\*](#) (1971)
- [The National Black Feminist Organization's Statement of Purpose](#) (1973)
- (recommended) [Keeanga Yamahtta Taylor, ed., \*How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective\*](#) (2017)

**Th Mar 30 NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK****VI. some emergent books****M Apr 3**

- seminar paper: topic proposal due by 5pm

**Th Apr 6 TO BE RESCHEDULED (WPSA)**

- [Juliet Mitchell, \*Woman's Estate\*](#) (1971)

**Th Apr 13**

- [Shulamith Firestone, \*The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution\*](#) (1970)

## **VII. scholarly takes on the archive**

### **M Apr 17**

- seminar paper: 10 pages due by 5pm

### **Th Apr 20**

- [Kathi Weeks, \*The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries\* \(2011\)](#)
- Kathi Weeks, "The Vanishing *Dialectic*: Shulamith Firestone and the Future of the Feminist 1970s," *South Atlantic Quarterly* (2015) 114 (4): 735–754

### **M Apr 24**

- seminar paper: peer reviews due by 5pm

### **Th Apr 27**

- [Lorna Bracewell, \*Why We Lost the Sex Wars: Sexual Freedom in the #MeToo Era\* \(2021\)](#)

### **M May 1**

- seminar paper: critical response due by 5pm

### **Th May 4**

- Elena Gambino, *Politics as Sinister Wisdom: Lesbian Feminism Beyond 'The Waves'* (book manuscript)

### **Sa May 6**

- seminar paper: final seminar paper and narrative reflection due by 5pm

## course requirements

### class preparation

The discussions in this course will focus on the readings assigned for that day on the syllabus. I expect you to come to class having completed the reading assignment and prepared to discuss that reading critically, imaginatively, and insightfully. *Always bring the text with you to class.* It is [in your best interest to use a physical copy of the text where possible](#), not an electronic version – although of course in many cases this term, you will not have that option.

The material that we are studying in this course is challenging. To get the most out of this course, I encourage you to flag passages and ideas that remain difficult or confusing after seminar, and come to my office hours to talk about them.

### participation

Participation includes participation in class discussions as well as participation in discussions with the professor outside of class. Only the first is required, but the latter is strongly encouraged and, if significant, can raise your overall participation grade.

Classes will consist primarily of discussion; there will be no formal lectures for this course. Students' participation in class discussion should include demonstrating both speaking and listening skills; in other words, students are encouraged to speak and to speak often, but also to listen to their peers & to respond thoughtfully to others' comments. Students should demonstrate familiarity and critical engagement with the course material, as well as intellectual curiosity. The point is not to have understood everything before coming to class – but to show up with questions, difficulties, and issues ready to explore the course material.

### attendance

Regular attendance in class is essential for successful learning. In our class discussions we will not only discuss information not contained in the reading but we will also practice the critical analytic skills you are expected to develop. To reinforce the importance of attendance in this class, the maximum grade you can receive for participation is dependent upon your class attendance. Students may miss one seminar *for any reason*. Additional absences reduce the maximum possible class participation grade by one letter grade each. For example: a total of 3 absences reduces the maximum participation grade to a C; 4 to a D. This means that five or more absences result in a failing grade for class participation, and therefore in a failing course grade.

This course does not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences for purposes of grading. The professor recommends that students who know that they require three or more absences withdraw from the course, but she will work with students to assess each situation individually.

Campus policy regarding religious observances states requires that faculty make every effort to deal reasonably and fairly with all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments, or required attendance. The attendance and extension policies for this course are designed to be quite flexible. You must notify the professor of any such conflicts *by the end of the first week of classes* so we can work out alternatives.

### **a note on coffee (and other forms of sustenance)**

Our seminar meets over lunch time towards the end of a long week. You should feel free to bring caffeinated beverages and food to seminar, especially if you believe these will help you to be on time, alert, and fully engaged in the course. If the group wishes, we can organize a coffee pool, and rotate responsibility for bringing coffee/snacks for the group. Food that is loud to unwrap or eat, noxious to others, or delicious-smelling is not allowed; an exception will be made for delicious-smelling food only when there is enough to share.

### **weekly writing assignments**

Through weekly writing assignments, we will be focusing in this class on developing two important writing skills that are central to all good writing:

- pre-writing
- writing for an audience

Your task for each writing assignment is simple: in no more than 300 words, raise a problem or a question about the reading for that week that you would like to discuss in the seminar. You should presume that your readers have done the reading (as have you), but you may need to explain the context for the question or problem you wish to raise. This need not be a formal piece of writing, but it should be proofread for spelling and grammar issues. It also need not be a full 300 words; feel free to submit shorter assignments if you believe that you can express the question or problem in fewer words. Writing assignments are due by email to the professor and your classmates by **Wednesday at 5pm**, the day before class. The intention with this deadline is to encourage you to think through the material in advance of class, leaving space for you to process and relax with the material before class on Thursday. **Late assignments will receive a failing grade.** You are required to submit assignments on time for at least 12 of the 15 weeks of the semester, and you are encouraged to submit assignments for every week.

You are expected to read through the writing assignments shared by all members of the class in advance of our seminar on Thursday, although you do not need to have worked out a response to each of your classmates' writing in advance.

The weekly writing assignments will be graded on a simple pass/fail scale. A failing grade will be awarded in those cases when the writing does not indicate a serious effort to respond to the assignment (e.g. a perfunctory question that shows no curiosity or imagination about the reading; a comment that does not demonstrate that you have done the reading; assignments that consistently demonstrate that you have *begun* but not *completed* the reading). A passing grade is an indication of serious engagement with the assignment.

**If you are ever curious about how you are doing in the course, please do not hesitate to come and see me in office hours.** I recognize that awarding only pass/fail grades can be disconcerting to students who want to know if they are on track to get an A or a B. If this is you, please come talk to me!

### **archive projects**

While the substance of the course is focused on feminist activism in the late 1960s and early 1970s, your interests in studying the theory and practice of activists may lie elsewhere and/or elsewhen. Accordingly, this project asks you to do at least preliminary work in identifying and researching an activist archive that fits with your scholarly interests. You may, if you choose, make the examination of this archive the

subject of your seminar paper. Or you may opt to complete this set of assignments about an alternate archive, and then write your seminar paper about the material assigned in the course.

Note: an archive need not be a record of past activism; it can be an ongoing archive of activism (e.g. tweets, blogs, protests that are happening now). The important criteria here are that your archive must be a) accessible to you for study (e.g. physical archives housed at another institution will not suffice for this project), and b) substantive enough to be able to be interpreted. This latter criterion is quite fuzzy; if you have any questions about whether there is enough to work with in your particular archive, you should talk with the professor.

The archive project includes the following deadlines:

- by 5pm on February 6, a description of the archive you will be focusing on for the project. Descriptions should make clear that you have identified significant source material that is available to you either physically or electronically.
- by 5pm on February 20, a bibliography of scholarly (and where relevant, popular) works on the activists you have selected for your archive. If there is substantial scholarship already on this activist group, you should be selective about the works included, and include a maximum of 20 works (no more than 10 of which should be book-length). If there is not substantial scholarship on this activism group, you should include whatever you are able to find (this may include journalism or other types of sources).
- by 5pm on March 6, an annotated bibliography of the works you included in your bibliography assignment. See Canvas for a handout detailing how to do an annotated bibliography.
- By 5pm on March 20, a “first pass” at identifying the theory/theories emerging from your analysis of your chosen archive. This should be 3-5 pages in length (double-spaced, times new roman, normal margins, that sort of thing), although longer assignments may be submitted *if (and only if) you plan to write your seminar paper about this archive.*

Students who think that they will use this archive as source material for their seminar paper are encouraged to submit their work in advance of these deadlines. Extensions for any student may be granted for any of these deadlines at the professor’s discretion.

All archive project assignments must be submitted on Canvas to the appropriate dropbox in .pdf form ONLY.

## **seminar papers**

In preparation for the final seminar paper, students must meet the following deadlines:

- by 5pm on April 3, a 2-3 page proposal for the topic of the seminar paper
- by 5pm on April 17, at least 10 double-spaced pages of draft material for the seminar paper, plus a timetable indicating how you intend to break down the remaining work and complete it for the final deadline. These drafts will also be shared with two classmates.
- by 5pm on April 24, a peer review of the two classmates’ draft work, submitted to the professor AND to the other students
- by 5pm on May 1, a critical response to the peer reviews and updated timeline for completion
- by 5pm on May 6, the final seminar paper, 20-25 pages in length (double-spaced, times new roman, normal margins, that sort of thing) AND a separate narrative reflection on the writing

process explaining any choices the author made in the revision process that diverge from what was expected or planned earlier

Extensions may be granted for the intermediate deadlines at the professor's discretion, with the exception of the deadlines on April 17 and 24, which involve classmates' schedules. Extensions will not be granted for the final paper, except in the case of a documented medical or family emergency. **Late seminar papers will not be accepted.**

All seminar paper assignments must be submitted on Canvas to the appropriate dropbox in .pdf form ONLY. This includes the intermediate assignments, as well as the final seminar paper.

### **auditors**

I welcome auditors in this course, and I treat them as full participants in the seminar. Auditors are expected to attend regularly, to come prepared, and to participate in class discussions. I do not require auditors to submit written work, but I strongly encourage them to participate in the weekly writing assignments so as to deepen their engagement with the material. I reserve the right to ask auditors to leave the class if they are unable to meet these expectations.

### **grading**

Final course grades will be calculated as follows:

25%	Participation
10%	Weekly Writing Assignments (at least 11)
15%	Archive Project
50%	Seminar Paper

**N.B.: Failure to complete any single course requirement will result in failure of the entire course, regardless of whether other course requirements have been met.**

Please see the course Canvas site for the additional CU Boulder required syllabus statements for this class.