

Dr. Lana Dee Povitz  
Middlebury College  
Fall 2018

Office Hours: Tuesdays, 3:30-6:30 or by appointment, Axinn 331

## **Histories of U.S. Radicalism**

SEMINAR HIST 0326 A

LaForce 121

Wednesday, 7:30-10:25 PM

### **Course Description:**

From communism to Black liberation, from radical feminism to libertarianism, this seminar examines the many facets of radical social movements in the United States during the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. In particular, we will draw on individual and collective biographies of radicals to explore chronological linkages and social connections between apparently discrete political tendencies. We will also consider the political, social, cultural, and economic contexts that catalyzed radical movements, the various forms of backlash and repression they faced, and the changing political uses to which these historical movements have been put. Throughout the course, we will consider how race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class, and other dimensions of difference intersected with each other to produce within these movements critiques of, challenges to, and new visions for American society. We will also examine different understandings of radicalism.

### **Course Objectives:**

By the end of this course, you should be able to:

- Explain the main ideas that animated radical movements in the 20<sup>th</sup>- and 21<sup>st</sup>-century United States, as well as be familiar with some of their most important intellectual architects and significant strategies.
- Analyze and utilize primary sources.
- Critically read secondary sources to determine historians' arguments and points of view, and evaluate their use of evidence.
- Write more clearly and succinctly.
- Offer constructive feedback on peers' written work.
- Reflect on your own learning process and habits as scholars.

This is a 300-level course based on student participation. We will learn in two primary ways: through in-class discussions of readings and through regular writing assignments. The volume of reading runs around 250 pages a week, a substantial but manageable amount. We will learn to read strategically, with an emphasis on grasping the author's argument, use of sources, and perspective. It is essential to come to class having done the readings.

## Communication Guidelines

### *In Class*

- During our first class, we will create a contract to establish collectively how we want to behave with each other.
- Please do not text, connect to the Internet, or check social media. I understand the temptation to check devices but I expect you to refrain; in exchange, I promise you my own undivided attention.
- You are expected to arrive on time and stay for the duration of the class. More than two unexcused absences will affect your participation grade dramatically. If you are unable to attend a session, you are responsible for asking your peers what you missed.
- Recording policy: Students may not make audio or video recordings of class sessions without my written permission.
- I will treat you like adults. There is no need to ask for permission to use the bathroom, eat, or drink during class (and sharing food is also welcome). Out of respect for people's ability to focus, it is considerate to avoid noisy, crumb-producing, and/or aromatic food.

### *Discussion Sections*

- A respectful and curious atmosphere is crucial for everyone to learn. Some things to keep in mind:
  - People come to this course with different backgrounds and levels of knowledge. Everyone has to start somewhere. We each have something to offer, and we all have lots to learn (your professor included!).
  - We may only speak from our own experience; at the same time, our experiences may not align with others', even if they claim many of the same identity labels.
  - While personal experiences are important, even more important is the ability to discuss the assigned material. Come to class prepared. This means [close reading \(https://writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu/pages/how-do-close-reading\)](https://writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu/pages/how-do-close-reading), [engaged note-taking \(https://michaelhyatt.com/maximize-non-fiction/\)](https://michaelhyatt.com/maximize-non-fiction/), and arriving with things to say about the assigned texts.
  - Participation is not only about speaking one's opinions: listening carefully, asking a thoughtful question, and adding to your peers' contributions are other ways to create a dynamic exchange of ideas in the classroom.
  - Free speech is important, and people need to feel safe taking intellectual risks in this class. Making mistakes is part of life. If someone says something that hurts you, try to assume it was accidental. You are entitled to explain why their comment was hurtful, so that they and others can learn from your point of view. If someone says you've hurt them, you are expected to listen and try to understand their position. It is fair to ask for more information or to ask for time to consider your response. Try to talk things out face-to-face rather than over email, where miscommunications more easily occur.

### *Outside of Class*

- Students should allow for a 24-hour response time to emails. Responses over the weekend may take longer.

- Please address emails with a salutation, such as "Dear Professor Povitz," and sign off appropriately ("Sincerely," "With thanks," "Regards," "Best Wishes," etc. followed by your name). Please also include a subject heading for your message, so I can better keep track of a large volume of emails. Do proofread your emails for typos and clarity before pressing send. It is customary to show respect for people's education by using "Professor" or "Dr." rather than "Mr." or "Ms." And certainly avoid "Mrs." which makes assumptions about a female-identifying professor's marital status (and note that no such similar term exists for men).
- Generally speaking, if you have a question or issue that I cannot address in a sentence or two, I'd much prefer to discuss it during office hours or a pre-arranged appointment.
- That said, if I or someone else takes the time to craft a substantive email reply, it is polite to acknowledge this message with a brief note of thanks.
- Logistical queries and requests for minor clarification are welcome; questions that can be answered by reading this syllabus are **not**, so please peruse this document carefully!

### **Academic Honesty**

According to Middlebury, "Plagiarism is passing off another person's work as one's own [including] the ideas, research, writings, creations, or inventions of another. It makes no difference whether the source is a student or a professional." According to the College's Honor Code, students must sign the statement "I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this assignment" on written assignments. Do familiarize yourself with the Honor Code by visiting <http://go/honorcode/>. Ignorance will not be an acceptable excuse if you are found in violation.

I invite you to think of your work as a reflection of yourself and to take pride in your intellectual labor. There will be negative consequences for all instances of plagiarism, cheating, and breaches of academic integrity. At the very least, you will receive a failing grade on that assignment. Middlebury also reserves the right to pursue further punishment as outlined in the College policy. Suspected cases will be reported to the Judicial Affairs Office (JAO) and your Dean.

You can avoid breaching the Code in your research paper by **carefully citing all the sources you reference**. You can find guidelines for using Chicago Manual style at <https://middlebury.libguides.com/friendly.php?s=citation/chicago> or through [go/chicago](http://go/chicago). This policy applies equally to Internet sources.

Wikipedia, despite its many charms, is **not** an appropriate academic source. Middlebury Libraries' guide to U.S. history provides links to encyclopedias, books, articles, journals, historical newspapers, and more. You can find it at <https://middlebury.libguides.com/history-us>. This is a good starting point for research papers.

Remember: *PROCRASTINATION* may lead to *DESPERATION*, and thence to *PLAGIARISM*. Start early!

## **Names and Pronouns**

I will of course address you by your chosen name and your appropriate pronouns. Class rosters are given to me with students' legal names, so please advise me as soon as possible if changes should be made.

## **Accommodations**

[Student Accessibility Services \(SAS\)](#) keeps documentation on file of physical, psychological, or learning disability and provides services to students with disabilities. It also acts as a liaison between students and professors. If you need accommodations to make the class more accessible, please contact SAS and me as early in the semester as possible, before the add/drop period ends.

Please contact the ADA Coordinators for more information. Michelle Audette can be reached at [maudette@middlebury.edu](mailto:maudette@middlebury.edu) (phone: 802-443-2169) and Jodi Litchfield, at [litchfie@middlebury.edu](mailto:litchfie@middlebury.edu) (phone: 802-443-5936). All discussions will remain confidential.

Please note, *a letter from SAS will not be an excuse for late or missed work or absences*. If, after consulting this syllabus, you anticipate needing alternative formats or timelines for assignments, or if you expect to have to miss class, please see me.

## **A Word About Difficult Content**

*The content and discussion in this course will engage with sexism, racism, and other forms of oppression. At times, students might find it emotionally challenging. I will flag especially graphic content and will do my best to make the classroom a space where we can engage empathetically and thoughtfully with difficult content. If you are feeling triggered, you should do what you need to take care of yourself.*

*Please also note that as your professor, I am a mandatory reporter. This means I am required by federal law to report to the Title IX coordinator if you tell me something that suggests you've experience sexual assault, dating violence, stalking, harassment, discrimination, or related retaliation. Middlebury's Title IX team can help you get information about your rights and choices, and let you know about available resources. If you feel comfortable talking with me, I will listen and do whatever I can to help you, but please do be aware of my reporting obligation. If you'd prefer to talk with a confidential resource, like a counselor, a MiddSafe advocate, or another confidential resource, I can help you connect with one.*

## **Assignments**

- ❖ Class takeaways (9 of 12 weeks) 5%
- ❖ Weekly response paper (8/12 content weeks) 25%

- ❖ Letter to a Radical (due **October 17**) 20%
- ❖ Activists Under the Influence essay\*
  - Peer review of first draft 10% (draft to peer **November 7**; peer feedback returned **November 14**)
  - Final draft 25% (due **December 5**)
- ❖ In-class participation 15% (includes filling out the anonymous early October check-in online for a collective 2 points of 15 —**everyone must do it or no one gets the points**— as well as reflective and evaluative comments for final class debrief, for 5 points).

### **Class takeaways**

After each class, note down between two and four of the main things you took away, writing no more than a few sentences about each. By articulating what seemed most important, surprising, useful, and/or otherwise worth remembering from each class, you will “fix” the important lessons in your mind. You may very occasionally comment on classroom dynamics, since these are also integral to learning, but takeaways should normally focus on concepts and ideas, drawing on readings **and** material presented in class.

You have 24 hours after a class ends to post your takeaways to Canvas. Post them under the Discussions tab (select +Discussion in the upper right-hand corner). Where it says Topic Title, please title your contribution by date, e.g. “Class takeaways 9/12,” “Class takeaways 11/14,” etc. You may skip any four classes (no need to tell me which). Note that the Class takeaways will not receive letter grades. As long as you do the reflective work and submit within 24 hours, you will get full points. Late posts will not be given points.

### **Weekly response papers (500 words)**

The purpose of frequent low-stakes writing assignments is to help you practice reading critically, for argument and perspective, and to put new knowledge into conversation with things you already know. Weekly responses may focus on one of the readings, so long as you find a way to reference all the others, or they may zero in on a common keyword, idea, or issue. You may skip any four weeks.

Some guidelines for response papers:

- **Please email them to me using Canvas.**
- **Response papers are due on the day of the class at 9:30 AM.**
- DO NOT SUMMARIZE what we have all read.
- Every paper should end with one discussion question, which may be on a topic different from your response. Anything really insightful, I will try to fold in to class discussion.
- Response papers can be cumulative—that is, relating previously covered material is usually a good thing.
- Papers should be no longer than 500 words.

- Writing is informal—no citations needed. But response papers must be proofread carefully and written in clear, vernacular language.

### **Letter to a Radical (approximately 1,000 words)**

Select a radical person, living or dead, who, for whatever reason, captures your imagination (they may have appeared in class material, but this isn't necessary). Write them a long, juicy letter that engages them on an issue about which both of you are passionate. You might, for instance, reference a book or a manifesto they authored, a song they wrote, or a certain course of action they took. You may explain what they represent to you and why. Consider addressing, as well, any significant differences between you—generational, political, experiential—including any judgments you might have, and any questions. Don't hold back, but do make sure you know what you're talking about and who you're talking to. In other words, pay them the respect of conducting the necessary background research, and don't be afraid to reference what you know in your letter. Use Chicago Manual Style footnotes (since this is, after all, a formal assignment, your subject will have to forgive this formality).

If enough of you submit these in handwritten form, perhaps we can put together an installation somewhere on campus, or a digital exhibit.

### **Activists Under the Influence Essay\* (10 pp.)**

Movements for social change reflect a kaleidoscope of influences—political, ethnic, geographic, spiritual—many of them quite unexpected. Choose an individual activist, collective, or organization, and explore who and what influenced them. Feel free to consider topics not covered in class and to see me to discuss ideas beforehand.

Oral histories, such as those found at the [Sophia Smith Collection of Oral Histories](#), memoirs, diaries, and letters, if available digitally or in nearby archives, tend to be especially rich sources for information about influences. The very ambitious among you might even consider conducting your own interviews with activists still living, as one kind of evidence among many. (If you want to do this, I am happy to provide you with resources for doing interviews, and will reward you with up to 5% in extra credit.)

Your essay should be a polished piece of writing, featuring a clearly stated thesis (as Rampolla defines it on p. 56: "*a statement that reflects what you have concluded about the topic of your paper, based on a critical analysis and interpretation of the source materials you have examined.*"). It should reflect a range of evidence, including both primary sources and relevant secondary scholarship. Be sure to cite your sources using Chicago Manual Style. The paper should be no more than 10 double-spaced pages, in standard format: Times New Roman or similar font; size 12; 1-inch margins.

On **Wednesday, November 7**, hand in a complete first draft to your peer, either printed or, if you'd prefer to receive feedback digitally, through Track Changes, you can email it. Whose work you read and who reads yours will be determined by alphabetical order using the class roster.

One week later, on **Wednesday, November 14**, you will return the work providing printed copies (one for your peer and one for me), or digitally. You are expected to have engaged carefully and respectfully with your peer's writing, marking up the margins and line-editing where needed. You will also write a 1-p. cover letter (standard format), sharing your understanding of the paper's thesis, the strongest parts of the essay (most insightful, interesting, or surprising), sections needing revision, development, or clarification, and any other thoughts that could help produce a better paper.

The final paper is due in hard copy **Wednesday, December 5**. If it would help to have the extra time, you can submit it to me without penalty as late as noon on Friday, December 7.

\*If you can think of a more creative means than an essay of expressing a central idea and incorporating both primary and secondary sources, you're welcome to explore it. For instance, you might feel inspired to make a podcast, write a play, create or craft a historically accurate short story. Please discuss with me first if you'd like to do something like this so we can be sure to preserve the assignment's intended rigor and come up with alternate modes of peer review. I am open to using part of the final class for presentations of creative interpretations, if there are any.

### **Class readings and participation**

Students are expected to come to class prepared to talk about the readings in an informed and thoughtful way. The participation grade considers timeliness, attendance in all classes, and the quality of discussion contributions, both intellectual and interpersonal.

### **Reflective and Evaluative Notes**

Reflection and evaluation help us track our growth and show us where we have room to develop. In addition to collecting the Check-ins and the regular Class Takeaways, I will ask you to come to our final class with a **substantial and substantive** set of typed notes that reflect upon and evaluate your experience of this course. I will collect these and read them closely.

Please take some time to address the following:

- What is the single most important big-picture idea you learned about the history of U.S. radicalism in the twentieth century?
- How did you, as a learner, relate to the following activities?
  - Readings (include within this your favorite(s) and least favorite(s), and why)
  - Class takeaways assignment
  - Letter to a Radical assignment (note what you did well and where you could improve)
  - Seminar discussions

- Library visit
- Peer review
- Activists Under the Influence assignment (note what you did well and where you could improve for next time)
- Comment on the class dynamics: In what ways were they helpful? In what ways challenging or frustrating?
- What could the professor have done to better support your learning?
- What could you have done better in supporting your own learning?
- What have you learned about yourself from this course?
- Any glaring omissions: topics or issues you think should have been covered, and why?
- What questions are you leaving with?

Informal (but clear and carefully proofread) writing is fine: bullet points, fragments, immoderate use of em-dashes and other idiosyncratic grammar, "non-academic" language. Go for it! The real work is to distill your experience into insights that will serve you in the future.

### **Required Books**

We will be reading substantial sections of the titles listed below, if not the entire thing. If not listed here, selected chapters will be scanned and available as PDFs on Canvas.

John Patrick Diggins, *The Rise and Fall of the American Left*

Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*

#### **EITHER**

Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*

#### **OR**

Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics*

Dan Berger, *Outlaws of America: The Weather Underground and the Politics of Solidarity*

Sarah Schulman, *The Gentrification of the Mind: Witness to a Lost Imagination*

Nancy MacLean, *Democracy in Chains: The Deep History of the Radical Right's Stealth Plan for America*

Reference (optional but recommended):

Mary Lynn Rampolla, *A Pocket Guide to Writing in History*



### **Week 1 [9/12]: Introductions**

- Review course expectations
- Create class contract
- Watch and discuss [\*American Reds: The Failed Revolution\*](#)

### **Week 2 [9/19]: American Communism**

- Heavier reading week
- Vivian Gornick, *The Romance of American Communism*, 3-27.
- John Patrick Diggins, *The Rise and Fall of the American Left*, 13-217.
- Theodore H. Draper, "American Communism Revisited," *New York Review of Books* 32:8 (May 9, 1985) (10 pp)
- Richard Wright, *The God That Failed*, 115-162

### **Week 3 [9/26]: Visions of Black Liberation**

- Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, Preface (xxvii-xxxiii) and Introduction (1-5)
- W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*: Chapter 1 (6 pp)
- Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams*, ix-134

### **Week 4 [10/3]: Black Power, Black Feminism**

- Black Panthers, [Ten-Point Program](https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/workers/black-panthers/1966/10/15.htm) ( <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/workers/black-panthers/1966/10/15.htm> )
- Julius Lester, "The Angry Children of Malcolm X" (3 pp)
- Malcolm X, "[The Ballet or the Bullet](http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/blackspeech/mx.html)" (listen or read : <http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/blackspeech/mx.html> )
- WATCH: [Angela Davis](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2HnDONDvJVE), 1972 interview clip on violence and revolution ( <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2HnDONDvJVE> )
- Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton, *Black Power*, 34-56
- Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams* (135-156)
- [The Combahee River Collective Statement](http://circuitous.org/scraps/combahee.html) ( <http://circuitous.org/scraps/combahee.html> )

### **Week 5 [10/10]:**

- No readings. Take a deep breath and immerse yourselves in your Letter to a Radical.
- Deadline for filling out the online anonymous mid-term assessment. Remember: everyone in the class must do this, or no one gets the marks.
- Research session with Brenda Ellis in the library. I will be in Montreal at a conference.

### **Week 6 [10/17]: The Emergence of Radical Feminism**

- Somewhat heavier reading this week (Millett and Firestone are each dense).
- Letter to a Radical due at the beginning of class.
- Watch and discuss *She's Beautiful When She's Angry*
- Millett, *Sexual Politics* (entire) or Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex* (entire)
- Susan Faludi, "Death of a Revolutionary," *The New Yorker* (14 pp.)
- Carol Hanisch, "[The Personal is Political](http://www.carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/PIP.html)" ( <http://www.carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/PIP.html> )

### **Week 7 [10/24]: Queer Liberation**

- Relatively lighter reading week
- Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR), selected readings (17 pp)
- Radicalesbians, "[The Woman-Identified Woman](#)" (<http://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/radicalesbianswoman.html> )
- Alice Echols, "Queer Like Us," in *Aftershocks*, 129-144
- Third World Gay Revolution, "What We Want, What We Believe" (6 pp)
- Audre Lorde, "The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism", 124-133

### **Week 8 [10/31]: Solidarity, Anti-Imperialism, and the White Ultraleft**

- Dan Berger, *Outlaws of America* (entire)

### **Week 9 [11/7]: Nonviolent Direct Action and Antiwar Activism**

- First draft of Activists Under the Influence essay due to peer at the beginning of class.
- Barbara Deming, "[On Revolution and Equilibrium](#)," 1968 (<https://peacenews.info/node/3611/revolution-and-equilibrium> )
- Martin Duberman, *A Saving Remnant: The Radical Lives of Barbara Deming and David McReynolds*, selection.
- Marianne Hirsch, "'What We Need Right Now Is to Imagine the Real': Grace Paley Writing Against War," *PMLA* 124, no. 5 (Oct. 2009): 1768-1777.
- Barbara Epstein, *Political Protest and Cultural Revolution: Nonviolent Direct Action in the 1970s and 1980s*, Introduction and a chapter tbd. (NOTE: the week before, we will organize who will read what; during class each person will share about a particular chapter. Epstein's book is available as an ebook from the library webpage.)

### **Week 10 [11/14]: AIDS Activism in the Reagan Era**

- Return Activists Under the Influence essay to peer, marked up and with a page-long cover letter, before or at the beginning of class.
- Sarah Schulman, *The Gentrification of the Mind* (entire, can skip Parts 4 and 6)
- EITHER read Sarah Schulman interview with [Amy Bauer, ACT UP Oral History Project](#) OR read (or listen to) Michelle Esther Obrien interview with [Jamie Bauer, NYC Trans Oral History Project](#). Of course, you could read both. Note: Jamie (formerly went by Amy) currently uses They pronouns, so that's how we'll refer to them in discussion.
- **WATCH** *United in Anger*.

**Thanksgiving:** 11/21: NO CLASS – ENJOY YOUR LIVES!

### **Week 11 [11/28]: Libertarianism and the Rise of the Radical Right**

- Nancy MacLean, *Democracy in Chains* (entire)
- Murray Rothbard, "Four Strategies for Libertarian Change," 1-10

### **Week 12 [12/5]: Course Debrief**

- Final draft of Activists Under the Influence due to me at the beginning of class.
- Course debrief. Please come prepared to share your reflective and evaluative notes.
- Extreme potluck.