**POLI 276: BIOPOLITICS**

Vassar College

Fall 2015

Tuesday and Thursday 12 pm-1:15 pm

Annie Menzel

103 Rockefeller Hall

Office Hours:

Wednesday 1-3 p.m. and by appointment

**DESCRIPTION**

According to Michel Foucault, “biopolitics” designates modern states’ exercise of  “positive power” to ensure the vitality of the population: for example, optimal birth and death rates, sanitary environments, public health, social insurance, and disease control. At the same time, he argues, biopolitics has ushered in unprecedented forms of violence, exclusion, and even death for groups and individuals who are cast-generally in racialized terms-as threats to the population. Biopolitics is now theorized toward a broad range of phenomena linking politics and life: from the global market in organs to new genomic sciences, technologies, and subjectivities to immigration, refugee, and humanitarian aid policies; from reproductive coercion and commodification to the policing of racialized and gender-transgressive bodies–as well as the radical potential of forms of life excluded from biopolitical norms. Texts for this course include Foucault’s writings and lectures and key conceptual engagements. Additional texts may include feminist, anti-racist, queer of color, post-colonial, disability studies, and post-Marxist analyses.

**TEXTS**

Thomas Lemke, *Biopolitics, An Advanced Introduction* (NYU, 9780814752425)

Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended* (Picador, 0312422660)

Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire* (Duke, 0822316900)

Stephanie Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (Harvard, 0674030680)

Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages* (Duke, 082234114X, 9780822341147)

Joao Biehl, *Vita: Life in a Zone of Social Abandonment* (UC Press*,*0520951468)

Alondra Nelson, *Body and Soul: The Black Panther Party and the Fight against Medical Discrimination* (Minnesota, 0816676496)

**EXPECTATIONS**

Each class will consist of active discussion. Everyone is expected to **complete each session’s reading prior to the class meeting** and **bring the reading to class.**

Starting Week 3, students will take turns facilitating the discussion. Guidelines will be distributed in Week 2.

At the end of each class, we will take a few minutes to reflect on the discussion. I will collect these reflections, read them, and use them to shape the class as we go along. Please bring paper to write on and something to write with.

We may change some of the readings over the course of the semester depending on our own collective desires and/or events happening in the world.

Assignments should be uploaded to Moodle by 5 pm on the due date.

**EVALUATION**

Daily reflections: 10%

Group concept map of Foucault’s biopolitics: 15%

Biopolitics lexicon entry: 20%

Biopolitical case study: 40% (proposal 10%; final draft 30%)

Final reflection 15%

**ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS**

Academic accommodations are available for students registered with the Office for Accessibility and Educational Opportunity (AEO).  Students in need of disability (ADA/504) accommodations should schedule an appointment with me early in the semester to discuss any accommodations for this course that have been approved by the Office for Accessibility and Educational Opportunity, as indicated in your AEO accommodation letter.

**TIMELINESS**

Please try your best to hand in assignments by the due date. However, I know that life happens. If an illness or life situation will cause you to miss a deadline, please let me know as soon as possible, and depending on the circumstances we may be able to arrange an alternate timeline.

**ELECTRONIC DEVICES**

Laptops and smartphones are fine for note-taking and reading, but please do not email, text, update social media, surf the net, make purchases on amazon.com, etc., as these activities draw energy away from the discussion and are distracting to me and to fellow students.

**SCHEDULE**

**Week 1 Introductions**

T 9/1Introduction and discussion

Th 9/3 NO CLASS

**Week 2 Introducing Biopolitics**

T 9/8 Thomas Lemke, *Biopolitics, An Advanced Introduction,* 1-51

Th 9/10 *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1* (final chapter)

**Week 3 Foucault’s Biopolitics I**

T 9/15 *Society Must Be Defended,* 1-40

Th 9/17 *Society Must Be Defended*, 43-85

**Week 4 Foucault’s Biopolitics II**

T 9/22 *Society Must Be Defended*, 87-111, 239-263

Th 9/24 Lemke, *Biopolitics, An Advanced Introduction,* 93-123; Prepare for concept mapping

\*\*\*IN-CLASS GROUP CONCEPT MAPPING

**Week 5 Confronting colonial biopolitics**

T 9/29 Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*

Th 10/1 Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*

**Week 6 Regulating race and sex in the US; From biopolitics to bare life**

T 10/6Ladelle McWhorter, *Racism and Sexual Oppression in Anglo-America* (selection)

\*\*\*WEDS 10/7: BIOPOLITICS LEXICON ENTRY DUE, 5 pm

Th 10/8 Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer,* selection

OCTOBER BREAK

**Week 7 From bare life to necropolitics**

T 10/20 Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer,* selection

Readings on Agamben TBA

Th 10/22

Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics”

**Week 8 Necropolitics and gender**

T 10/27 Melissa Wright, “Necropolitics, Narcopolitics, and Femicide: Gendered Violence on the Mexico-U.S. Border,” in Signs (2011)

Th 10/29 Snorton, C. Riley and Jin Haritaworn. 2011. “Trans Necropolitics: A Transnational Reflection on Violence, Death, and the Trans of Color Afterlife.” In *The Transgender Studies Reader*, Vol. II, edited by Aren Aizura and Susan Stryker.

**Week 9 From transatlantic origins…**

T 11/3 Stephanie Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery*

WEDS 11/4: BIOPOLITICAL CASE STUDY PROPOSAL DUE, 5 pm

Th 11/5 Stephanie Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery*

**Week 10 …to contemporary assemblages**

T 11/10 Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*

Th 11/12 Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*

**Week 11 Abandoned life**

T 11/17 Joao Biehl, *Vita: Life in a Zone of Social Abandonment*

Th 11/19 Joao Biehl, *Vita: Life in a Zone of Social Abandonment*

**Week 12 Molecular biopolitics**

T 11/24 Preciado, *Testo Junkie* (selection)

Roberts, Dorothy "The Social Immorality of Health in the Gene Age: Race, Disability, and Inequality." In *Against Health*, edited by Jonathan Metzl and Anna Kirkland. New York: NYU Press.

Th 11/26: NO CLASS, THANKSGIVING RECESS

**Week 13 Radical Biopolitics**

T 12/1 Alondra Nelson, *Body and Soul*

\*\*\*Weds 12/2 BIOPOLITICAL ANALYSIS CASE STUDY DUE, 5 pm

Th 12/3 Alondra Nelson, *Body and Soul*

**Week 14**

T 12/8 Octavia Butler short story TBA; Course wrap-up

Final exercise: Due date TBA