

THE BAD GOOD LIFE

CRUEL OPTIMISMS, BAD ROMANCES, AND OTHER POLITICAL DEPRESSIONS



What if the good life that we desire turns out to be bad? This course explores the intersections of personal and political life when our hopes are damaging to ourselves or to others. Topics covered include: optimism, the American Dream, antiblack racism, depression, intimacy, heteronormativity and homonormativity, queer survival, ecological crises, and the end of the world.

AS.191.105
POLITICAL SCIENCE
PROGRAM FOR THE STUDY OF WOMEN,
GENDER, AND SEXUALITY
T 3P - 5.30P
GREENHOUSE 113

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OFFICE HOURS BY APPOINTMENT



REQUIRED TEXTS

J. Jack Halberstam, *Gaga Feminism: Sex, Gender, and the End of Normal*

Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*

Celeste Ng, *Everything I Never Told You*

Adam Phillips, *Monogamy*

RESERVES

All other required and recommended readings are available on the library's eReserves: <https://ares.library.jhu.edu/shib/>

Our course reserves include print copies of the texts listed above and a number of films that are related to the class themes.

ACCESSIBILITY

If you are a student with a disability or believe you might have a disability that requires accommodations, please contact Dr. Brent Mosser in Student Disability Services, 385 Garland, 410.516.4720, studentdisabilityservices@jhu.edu. We will then work together to make the appropriate accommodations.

COURSE POLICIES

Education

This seminar is designed for you to pursue your own curiosities across a few interrelated topics. It is not an introductory course that surveys the foundations of an academic discipline. I am responsible not for imparting knowledge but for facilitating and challenging your thoughts. I encourage you to view yourself as responsible for your learning; what you get out of this class will be what you put in it.

Our seminar welcomes confusion. We will face big issues and tough questions. Many of the readings will be abstract, challenging, and maddening. *Don't worry.* What you don't understand at first may become clear after discussion and further reflection. We will address confusions together during class. You may likely leave the semester with few answers but with many productive questions and a capacity to think more deeply.

Electronics

The use of electronic devices during class time is prohibited. Exceptions will be made for those who require the use of recording devices for the purpose of accessibility.

Absences

Each class meeting is important because our seminar meets only once a week. You are thus allowed only one unexcused absence. Further unexcused absences will result in reductions to your grade.

ASSIGNMENTS

Participation .05

Our seminar is designed to thrive on your contributions to discussion. I will be more of a discussion facilitator than a lecturer. Please come to class prepared to engage the readings, address your classmates' points, respond to presentations, and ask questions that further our discussion.

Presentation .15

You will make one 15-minute presentation on a week of your choice. You will then lead discussion for about 45 minutes while the class responds. Your presentation is an opportunity to focus on issues that you want to think through with the class. Spend more time crystallizing key themes than on summarizing the texts. Relate the readings to other texts and themes in the course. Quote rich passages and explore them in detail. Comment on the style of the texts and the moods they induce in you. Pose questions for discussion while elaborating what led you to them. Please distribute a handout or copy of your presentation to the class. I encourage brainstorming ideas with me beforehand.

Papers .40

You will write two papers that address a prompt through close textual analysis. Each paper will be between 1500 and 2000 words in length. You will have about two weeks to complete each paper. After reading your paper, I will meet with you individually to discuss it. You have the opportunity to rewrite one of your papers.

Final Paper .40

You will write a final paper of at least 3000 words in length. More details will be provided during the semester. Your final paper will be due on Thursday, December 17 at noon.



1 // CRUEL OPTIMISMS

September 1

Sara Ahmed, "Why Happiness, Why Now?" 1-17

Barbara Ehrenreich, "Introduction" and "Smile or Die: The Bright Side of Cancer," 1-44

September 8

Lauren Berlant, "On Her Book Cruel Optimism"

Kathleen Stewart, "Pockets"

Lauren Berlant, "Cruel Optimism: On Marx, Loss, and the Senses," 33-51

Charles Johnson, "Exchange Value," 27-40

Said Sayrafiezadeh, "Appetite"

September 15

Kathleen Stewart, "Real American Dreams (Can Be Nightmares)," 243-257

Ann Cvetkovich, "Depression is Ordinary: Public Feelings and Saidiya

Hartman's *Lose Your Mother*," 131-146

Ta-Nehisi Coates, "Letter to My Son"

Melvin L. Rogers, "Between Pain and Despair: What Ta-Nehisi Coates Is Missing"

Lester Spence, "'Coates is a Realist, Not a Pessimist'"

Recommended:

Ann Cvetkovich, "Public Feelings: A Collective Project," 1-26

2 // INTIMACY AND ITS DISCONTENTS

September 22

Lauren Berlant, "Intimacy"

Adam Phillips, *Monogamy*

FIRST PAPER DUE ON SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 27 AT 3P

September 29

Laura Kipnis, "Love's Labors," 11-51

Celeste Ng, *Everything I Never Told You*, 1-123

Recommended:

Lauren Berlant, "Against Sexual Scandal"

October 6

Celeste Ng, *Everything I Never Told You*, 124-292

October 13 - NO CLASS

SECOND PAPER DUE ON SUNDAY, OCTOBER 18 AT 3P

3 // IT GETS... WORSE?

October 20

Tavia Nyong'o, "School Daze"

Jasbir Puar, "In the Wake of It Gets Better"

J. Jack Halberstam, *Gaga Feminism*, 65-94

Sara Ahmed, "Unhappy Queers," 88-120

October 27

Michael Warner, "Beyond Gay Marriage," 81-147

Michael Cobb, "The Supreme Court's Lonely Hearts Club"

J. Jack Halberstam, *Gaga Feminism*, 95-130

November 3

Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, "Sex in Public," 547-566

J. Jack Halberstam, *Gaga Feminism*, 131-150

José Esteban Muñoz, "Queerness as Horizon," 19-32

4 // THE END OF THE WORLD

November 10

Margaret Atwood, "It's Not Climate Change—It's Everything Change"

Dana Luciano, "The Inhuman Anthropocene"

Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses," 197-222

Dougland Hine and Paul Kingsnorth, "Uncivilisation: The Dark Mountain Manifesto"

November 17

Barbara Ehrenreich, "Postscript on Post-Positive Thinking," 195-206

Sara Ahmed, "Happy Futures," 160-198

Eugene Thacker, "Cosmic Pessimism," 66-75

Roy Scranton, "Learning How to Die in the Anthropocene"

November 24 - NO CLASS

December 1

Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*

FINAL PAPER DUE ON THURSDAY, DECEMBER 17 AT NOON