

THE ETHICS OF RESISTANCE

SYLLABUS

PHIL 4901: Seminar
T/F 9:50-11:30am
Room: Ryder Hall 270

Professor Candice Delmas
c.delmas@northeastern.edu
Pronouns: she/her
Office: 406 RP or [online](#)
Hours: T 11:45-12:45 &
W 10:30-11:30

Instructor permission required.
NU attributes: Demonstrating
Thought and Action in a Capstone;
Writing Intensive.



Zabou, "Bang Bang," London UK 2015

Overview

This seminar addresses some of the ethical and political issues that arise from individuals' and groups' practices of political resistance. These issues concern, among others: political legitimacy (the state's authority toward its subjects), individuals' moral duties and role-related responsibilities toward themselves and each other, strategic efficacy, and representation (perceptions and distortions of movements, their actors, means, and goals). We tackle these issues through different focuses corresponding to the seminar's three interrelated units. In the first unit on *civil disobedience*, we address questions such as: Do we have a moral duty to obey the law? What makes an illegal act an instance of civil disobedience? Should civil disobedients accept punishment? And, more fundamentally: What is the point of a theory of civil disobedience? How does social change come about? In the second unit on *(non)violence*, we explore the nature and power of nonviolence and the moral and strategic issues surrounding the use of violence in decolonization movements. Does the end justify the means? How should we assess political movements that resort to illegal and violent tactics? The third unit is devoted to *direct action* and the political ethics of self-defense: How should we think about resistance to officials? What is direct action and under what conditions is it normatively permissible or called for? Throughout the course, we will answer these questions and more by relating philosophical debates to historical and contemporary cases of resistance, including decolonization movements, the Black freedom struggle, labor movements, anti-war resistance, and anarchist politics.

Learning outcomes

1. Critical thinking: Students will improve their skills in understanding, analyzing and criticizing ideas, as well as developing their own, original philosophically grounded arguments.
2. Oral communication: Students will improve their capacity to present and explain, clearly and precisely, some difficult arguments, and to discuss these arguments orally with their peers.
3. Content: Students will gain an in-depth understanding of theories of resistance and will master one particular topic by engaging in independent research project.
4. Values: The course will encourage students to develop intellectual independence, curiosity, and self-criticism.
5. Written communication skills: Students will develop and improve their writing and research skills through writing and revising an extended essay i.e., their capstone projects.



Shepard Fairey, *Hong Kong Visual Disobedience* (2016)

Requirements

This seminar is discussion-based and writing-intensive. Assessment for the class includes 5 components, for a total of 100%:

1. Participation (10%)
2. Notes (5%)
3. Socratic Pods (5%)
4. Class Facilitation (15%)
5. Capstone (65%)

Failure to complete one of these assignments will result in an 'F' for the course. You will be able to access your grades on Canvas Gradebook.

Please refer to the "Seminar Handbook" for detailed instructions concerning each assignment. You will be quizzed on your knowledge of the syllabus and Handbook. The quiz grade will factor into your participation grade.

Grade conversion

A ≥ 93 A- = 90–92 B+ = 87–89 B = 83–86 B- = 80–82 C+ = 77–79
C = 73–76 C- = 70–72 D+ = 67–69 D = 63–66 F ≤ 60

Appealing grades

Any student who feels that their assigned grade does not reflect their performance on an assignment can appeal the grade. All appeals must be submitted to the instructor in writing, in the form of a one-page document that clearly explains why you believe that the assigned grade does not reflect your performance. Petitioners must wait at least twenty-four hours after the

grade is announced before submitting their appeals. All appeals must be submitted no later than one week after the grade is announced.

Submissions

All written submissions should be double spaced, 12-point font. Save and submit your assignments in Word or PDF, not Pages, Notes, or Google Docs. As a Northeastern student, you can get Word and Adobe for free: in myNEU, go to “Tech Marketplace for Students.”



Materials

The materials for this course are available on Canvas. The reading load is often heavy and very often difficult. To stay afloat, plan for a sufficient amount of time to *actively* read the texts (around 3 hours before each class). Don't hesitate to come to my office hours if you have any difficulty. You must **print** the texts and bring them to class since electronic devices are not permitted in class.

Optional, recommended buys:

- *The Cambridge Companion to Civil Disobedience*, William E. Scheuerman ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2021) [\$99]
- William E. Scheuerman, *Civil Disobedience* (Key Concepts, Polity, 2017) [\$24]
- Candice Delmas, *A Duty to Resist: When Disobedience Should Be Uncivil* (Oxford University Press, 2018) [\$24]



Other resources

The entry on “[Civil Disobedience](#)” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* presents the state of the art in debates on civil disobedience and contains many bibliographical references. I am also sharing a supplementary reading list compiled by Prof. William Smith for the seminar on “Disobedience in Political Thought” which he taught at the Chinese University of Hong Kong in 2020-21. You should also check PhilPapers.org for your bibliographical research (privileging articles from philosophy journals rather than from other disciplines – check the “About” page of the journal in question if you're not sure).

In the interest of helping you learn about real, historical and contemporary episodes of resistance, I am also sharing some resources in the form of fun and interesting podcasts and worthwhile (some masterful) documentaries and films. I urge you to check out a bunch.



Podcasts

[Brixton: Flames on the Frontline](#) (Big Narstie, BBC Radio 5, 2021): a BBC show about the 1981 Brixton uprising

[Resistance](#) (Saidu Tejan-Thomas Jr., Gimlet Media, 2020-): a show about resistance centered on the Movement for Black Lives

[The Women's War](#) (Robert Evans, iHeart Radio, 2020): a show about the socialist, women-led revolution in Rojava, Northeast Syria

[Hi-Phi Nation](#) (Barry Lam, Slate, 2017-): a show about philosophy that turns stories into ideas. Check out S3 E8 on [uncivil disobedience](#) and the animal liberation movement in Australia.



Films

See the “FILMS” document on Canvas.

Class format and COVID-19

We will meet in person (for now at least). If I need to stay home for some COVID-related reason, I will hold the class online (assuming I am not sick). If you need to stay home, you will not be penalized. Class notes will be uploaded after every class meeting. See the Handbook for more details.

- Per University policy, we are all required to wear a mask or face covering.
- Wear your mask properly, which means covering both your nose and mouth.
- Do not eat in the classroom. If you need to eat during our class time for a health reason, please leave the classroom briefly to do so. If you need to drink, remove your mask carefully and put it promptly back on.
- If you have any symptoms (aches, loss of smell, cough, etc.), do not come to class. Follow the University guidelines.

Communication and email etiquette

Please email me directly (at c.delmas@northeastern.edu), rather than through Canvas, and always indicate the course number in the email subject (ex: “PHIL 4901 question about the Rawls reading”). Write in a polite and professional manner:

- Start your email with a salutation (“Dear Professor Delmas” is better than “Hi!”). In general, you should call a professor or employer by their title, (Professor, Dr. etc.) unless they ask you to refer to them in another way. Don’t call your female professors “Miss” or “Ma’am.”
- Write full sentences and spell properly (pls dun wrte llk ur txtN).
- Make sure that the information you are emailing about is not on the syllabus or on Canvas.
- If you were absent, do not write me to ask: “Did I miss anything?” If you do, I’ll send you [this poem](#) by Tom Wayman.
- If you are writing about a group assignment, make sure you to CC your partners.
- I am happy to answer brief questions by email, but for substantive questions about course material or assignments, please see me in person before or after class, or in my office.
- Sign your full name (Sincerely, First Name Last Name).
- I will respond to your queries within 2 business days. If you have not heard from me after 2 business days, please send me another email.

No electronic devices in class

Research shows that [students perform substantially worse when they use computers to take notes in class](#).¹ The use or display of any mobile computing or communications devices (including computers, recording devices, phones, and even tablets you might only use for reading texts) is strictly banned during class, except when explicitly permitted (e.g., for note-takers, ADA-related

¹ <https://www.insidehighered.com/digital-learning/views/2018/12/12/what-research-tells-us-about-using-technology-classroom-opinion>

accommodations, or for the Capstone Conference). Tuck your cell away; do not leave it on your desk or lap.

Recording

You may not record and share our meetings (whether in person or virtual). This prohibition is to create a learning environment where students and faculty can feel comfortable expressing their opinions in class without the possibility of their contribution to class being reproduced and replayed without their consent. I will always let you know and ask for your consent if I decide to record meetings, such as guest talks, for future use.

Classroom climate

Our classroom functions as a community of learners, and as such, it's vitally important that it be inclusive and respectful. For this to be the case, we all have a role to play. Learning happens most effectively in classes where mutual respect and a spirit of generosity is expected and maintained. Mutual respect in the classroom means treating all students and the professor with respect. This involves daily attendance with preparation so one can participate in discussions effectively; turning in all assignments on-time; bringing a seriousness of purpose to your examination of the materials and issues; being an attentive listener when others are speaking; being open to new ideas, evidence, arguments, and points of views; and being receptive to constructive feedback.

Mutual respect does not mean that you must refrain from expressing disagreement. Indeed, disagreement often fuels the best discussion. Rather, it means that the terms of disagreement are centered around the material discussed rather than the individuals discussing them. Relevant here is a quote from James Baldwin: "We can disagree and still love each other, as long as your disagreement is not rooted in my oppression and denial of my humanity and right to exist." We're in this together, and we all bear responsibility for making our classroom inclusive, welcoming and committed to not perpetuating harmful systems of oppression.

My belief is that racism and other systems of oppression are part of the air that we all breathe, and we are all responsive to our environment. Micro-aggressions are inevitable when we are all breathing poisoned air, and so I ask us all to be accountable, and use these instances as learning opportunities. Essentially, when someone expresses feeling harmed by another person, we will believe them, and address the impact, not the intent, with the assumption that the person who caused harm did so *unintentionally* and can and will learn from the situation. Please feel free to approach me in person, by email or anonymously, if there is anything along these lines that we should address.

The course will feature readings and discussions that include descriptions of explicit violence, brutality, offensive language and indirect references to these things. Feel free to step out of the classroom if you feel uncomfortable with the material or the class discussion. This is particularly important for those who may have direct experience of forms of violence: please care for yourself first. Don't hesitate to discuss any of these with me.

Gender inclusivity

Language is gender-inclusive when we use words that affirm and respect how people describe, express, and experience their gender. Please let me know your preferred pronouns and names. I—we—will honor students' gender identities and gender expressions.

Gender neutral language

In philosophy, gender-neutral writing is the accepted practice recommended by the American Philosophical Association (APA). Appropriate language use includes, for example: “humanity,” “humankind,” “people,” or “they.” You can also alternate between the feminine and masculine pronouns. You should avoid the term “man” as the universal for “human beings,” as it no longer communicates the generic sense of “everyone” or “anyone.” If you are unfamiliar with the idea of gender inclusive language, it may be helpful to read: <http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/gender-inclusive-language/>. When quoting writers who utilize non-inclusive language, leave their words in the original (“Man by nature desires to know”). Gender-specific language is, of course, appropriate when referring to a gender class such as “men” or “women.”

Title IX

Northeastern is committed to providing equal opportunity to its students and employees, and to eliminating discrimination when it occurs. In furtherance of this commitment, the University strictly prohibits discrimination or harassment on the basis of race, color, religion, religious creed, genetic information, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, national origin, ancestry, veteran, or disability status. The Northeastern University [Title IX policy](#) articulates how the University will respond to reported allegations of sexual harassment involving students, including sexual assault, and provides a consolidated statement of the rights and responsibilities under University policies and Title IX, as amended by the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013.² Please know that Title IX mandates me to report sexual assault if you share your experience with me.

Accessibility needs

Northeastern is fully committed to creating a community characterized by inclusion and diversity. As part of this commitment, it upholds the American with Disabilities Act as Amended of 2008 and the American with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of Rehabilitation Act, referred to collectively as the ADA. The ADA requires Northeastern to provide reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities unless doing so would create an undue hardship, compromise the health and safety of members of the university community, or fundamentally alter the nature of the university's employment mission. Students seeking information regarding ADA accommodations should review the University's ADA Information and Resources Procedure available [here](#).³

Academic integrity

² http://www.northeastern.edu/policies/pdfs/Title_IX_Policy.pdf

³ <http://www.northeastern.edu/oidi/compliance/americans-disabilities-act-ada/>

Please familiarize yourself with [Northeastern's policy on academic integrity](#) and how it will be dealt with: "Academic dishonesty violates the most fundamental values of an intellectual community and undermines the achievements of the entire University." Any incident of academic dishonesty will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution (OSCCR).

The University defines **plagiarism** as using as one's own the words, ideas, data, code, or other original academic material of another without providing proper citation or attribution. It can occur either accidentally or deliberately. Claiming that one has "forgotten" to document ideas or material taken from another source does not exempt one from plagiarizing. The following require citation:

- Word-for-word quotations from a source, including another student's work.
- Paraphrasing (using the ideas of others in your own words).
- Empirical data.
- Unusual or controversial facts not widely recognized.

My policy: if *any part* of your paper contains plagiarism or cheating of any kind and at any level, you will receive a failing grade for that assignment *regardless of the amount plagiarized, intention or circumstances*. This may also result in you failing the course. I will make use of the plagiarism detection services available through Canvas, and your papers will be archived in the Canvas database.

Plagiarism is often the result of poor time management: students do not give themselves enough time to complete the assignment and end up plagiarizing deliberately or accidentally. If you are unclear as to whether or not a source requires citation, please consult the Writing Center or email me. When in doubt, give a citation. You will never be penalized for having too many citations, but you may be guilty of plagiarizing if you don't.

FACT (Faculty Advisor Communication Tool)

I will be using this tool to alert advisors of any students who are having difficulty meeting the expectations for the course as described in the syllabus. This is intended to help students who may benefit from additional support. A FACT report is not punitive in any way. It does not affect your grade and does not go on your transcript. It only alerts you and your advisor that you might need some additional support. If you think you might need extra help, please talk to me and/or your college advisor.

Other concerns

Life at college can be very challenging, especially during these difficult times. Students can feel isolated, overwhelmed, lost, anxious, or depressed. Sometimes they experience relationship difficulties and low self-esteem. I care about your success in this course, and I care even more about your success in life. University Health and Counseling Services is staffed by experienced, professional psychologists and counselors, who are attuned to the needs of college students. Their services are free and confidential. Find out more [here](#).⁴ Please let me know if you encounter challenges that impede your progress in the course, so we can find ways to mitigate those. Note that if anything in your private life interferes with your performance in the class, it is important that you try to approach me in a timely manner, that is, before, not after, the relevant deadlines.

⁴ <https://www.northeastern.edu/uhcs/counseling-services/>

Class Schedule

It may change, perhaps more than once: make sure you always refer to the latest draft and up-to-date Canvas modules. Keeping up to date with the class schedule and assignments due is your responsibility.

Day	Topic	Readings
F 9/10	Introduction(s)	Read the Syllabus and Handbook.

PART I. CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

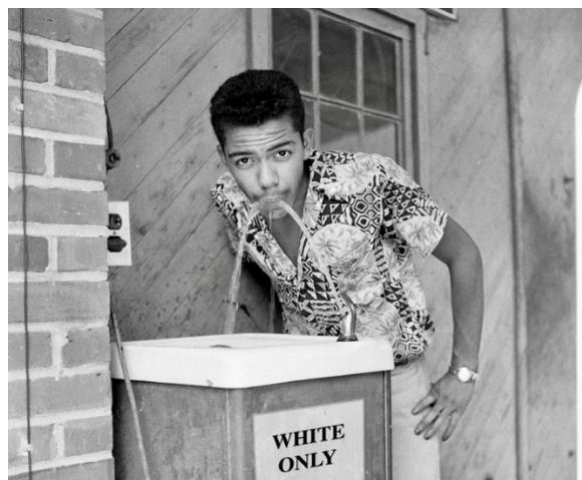


Photo of Cecil J. Williams by Rendall Harper, South Carolina, 1956.

Listen to the [Resistance](#) podcast (S2, E1: “F Your Water Fountain,” April 14, 2021) if you’re curious!

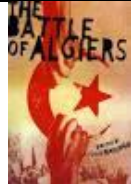
T 9/14	Fidelity to law	John Rawls, <i>A Theory of Justice</i> , chap. VI: “Duty and Obligation” (1999 [1971])
F 9/17	Liberal rights	Ronald Dworkin, “A Theory of Civil Disobedience” (1968) Joseph Raz, <i>The Authority of Law: Essays on Law and Morality</i> , chap. 14: “A Right to Dissent? I. Civil Disobedience” (1979)
T 9/21	Republicanism	Hannah Arendt, <i>Crises of the Republic</i> , chap. 2: “Civil Disobedience” (1972 [1970])
F 9/24	Democratic disruption	Iris Marion Young, “Activist Challenges to Deliberative Democracy” (2001) Robin Celikates, “Learning from the Streets: Civil Disobedience in Theory and Practice” (2015)
T 9/28	Digital disobedience	William E. Scheuerman, “Digital Disobedience and the Law” (2016) Candice Delmas, That Lonesome Whistle (2016)
F 10/1	Anarchism	Henry David Thoreau, “Civil Disobedience” (1848) James Ingram, “Anarchism: Provincializing Civil Disobedience”

		(2021)
T 10/5	Indigenous resistance	<p>Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, "Indigenous Resurgence and Co-Resistance" (2016)</p> <p>Burke Hendrix, <i>Strategies of Justice: Aboriginal Peoples, Persistent Injustice, and the Ethics of Political Action</i>, chap. 4: "Justified Lawbreaking" (2019)</p> <p>Capstone Prep Step 1: Select Topic</p>

**PART II.
(NON)VIOLENCE**



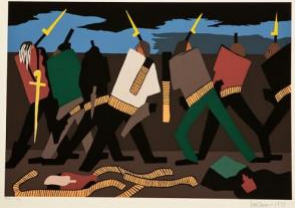
F 10/8	M. K. Gandhi on Satyagraha & M. L. King, Jr. on nonviolence	<p>Everyone reads: M. K. Gandhi, <i>Selected Writings</i>, "The Practice of Satyagraha or Civil Disobedience"</p> <p>Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" (1963)</p> <p>Half the class reads: Gandhi, <i>Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule</i>, Preface to the New Edition, Preface: "A Word of Explanation," chap. 4: "What is Swaraj?," chap. 14: "How Can India Become Free?," chap. 16: "Brute Force," chap. 17: "Passive Resistance" (1938); Richard B. Gregg, <i>The Power of Nonviolence</i>, chap. 2: "Moral Jiu-Jitsu" (1960)</p> <p>Other half reads: King, <i>Where Do We Go From Here?</i> chap. 2: "Black Power" (1968)</p>
T 10/12	Organizing	<p>★ Virtual Guest Talk by MIE INOUE (Assistant Professor, Political Studies Program, Bard College)</p> <p>Readings TBD</p> <p>Listen to: Ella Baker Center, Who was Ella Baker? (part 1)</p> <p>Capstone Prep Step 2: Topic Overview</p>

F 10/15		* No class meeting * Watch Gillo Pontecorvo's The Battle of Algiers (1962)
T 10/19	Violence	Frantz Fanon, "Why We Use Violence" (1960) Fanon, <i>The Wretched of the Earth</i> , chap. 1: "On Violence" (1961) Watch: The Forgotten Huey Newton (16 min.)
F 10/22	Anger	Malcolm X, " The Ballot or the Bullet " (read/listen) (1964) Barbara Deming, " On Anger " (1971) Andrea Dworkin, <i>Our Blood</i> , chap. 6: "Redefining Nonviolence" (1976) Audre Lorde, " The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism " (1981) bell hooks, <i>Killing Rage</i> , "Killing Rage: Militant Resistance" (1995)
T 10/26	Catholic radicalism	★ Guest Talk by WHITNEY KELTING (Associate Professor of Religious Studies, Northeastern University) Dorothy Day, "Voluntary Poverty," (1948) Gustavo Gutiérrez, "Preferential Option for the Poor" (1968) Capstone Prep Step 3: Bibliography
F 10/29	Self-destructive resistance	Lisa Guenther, "Unmaking and Remaking the World in Solitary Confinement" (2018) Banu Bargu, "The Silent Exception: Hunger Striking and Lip-Sewing" (2017) Capstone Prep Step 4: Lightning presentation (in class)

**PART III.
DIRECT ACTION**



T 11/2	Property destruction	The Black Bloc Papers, chap. 3: " The Battle of Seattle/N30: The Anti-WTO Protests November-December, 1999 " William E. Scheuerman, "Politically Motivated Property Damage" (2021) Capstone Prep Step 5: Preliminary outline
F 11/5	Self-defense	Elizabeth Hinton, <i>America on Fire</i> , chap. 2: "The Projects," chap. 3: "The Vigilantes" (2021) Chad Kautzer, A Political Philosophy of Self-Defense (2018) Jason Brennan, When Nonviolence Isn't Enough (2019)
T 11/9	Resisting officials	★ Guest Talk by DANIEL VIEHOFF (Assistant Professor of Philosophy, New York University) Readings TBD Capstone Prep Step 6: Full draft due
F 11/12	Labor strikes	Rosa Luxemburg, The Mass Strike, the Political Party, and the Trade Unions (1906)
T 11/16	Global resistance	Simon Caney, "Responding to Global Injustice: On the Right of Resistance" (2015)
F 11/19	Victims' duties to resist	★ Virtual Guest Talk by ASHWINI VASANTHAKUMAR (Queen's National Scholar in Legal & Political Philosophy, Associate Professor at Queen's Law School) Readings TBD
T 11/23	Epistemic resistance	José Medina, <i>The Epistemology of Resistance</i> , chap. 5:

		“Meta-Lucidity, ‘Epistemic Heroes’, and the Everyday Struggle Toward Epistemic Justice” (2013)
T 11/30		CAPSTONE CONFERENCE
F 12/3		Capstone Prep Step 7: Draft Workshop
T 12/7		CAPSTONE CONFERENCE
M 12/13		FINAL CAPSTONE PAPER DUE (10am)