

**ANTH 2130: Biopolitics**  
Brown University, Fall 2019  
Professor Myles Lennon

***Course Description***

Foucault's concept of biopolitics transformed how anthropologists understand and approach power, agency, modernity, and, more broadly, life itself. As a critical theoretical tool, it has informed a range of contemporary social theory and social science—from intersectional research on reproductive health clinics to theories of the postcolonial state to ethnographies on consumer culture. This course will introduce graduate students to the core components and theoretical lineages of biopolitics, exploring both its foundational texts and recent ethnographic and theoretical work that builds on *and challenges* Foucault's seminal writings and lectures. In the process, we will highlight the work of Black, indigenous, women, trans, and queer scholars who have sharpened our discipline's apprehension of biopolitics through intersectional, postcolonial, and anti-racist perspectives.

This course consists of three parts. The first part will explore the conceptual foundations of biopolitics. In particular, it will introduce students to the sub-concepts of anatomo-politics/governmentality, the biopolitical state and sovereign power, and bare life, helping us draw connections between the broad governance of populations and the micro-maintenance of individuated bodies. The second part of this course will trace the development of biopolitics as a concept through contemporary social and anthropological theory, including necropolitics, geontopolitics, and biocapital. We will explore the work of feminist scholars and scholars of color who have expanded on, complemented, and challenged the Foucauldian lineage. The third section will explore ethnographic monographs, archival research, and social science case studies that illustrate and further develop the theoretical arc of the first two sections.

***Course Requirements***

Attendance and Participation (20%)

This is an advanced seminar. Please come to class prepared to critically and actively engage with the assigned texts.

Discussion leader (20%)

Each student will lead at least one class discussion. Discussion leaders will be responsible for summarizing the major arguments of the assigned texts and offering three provocative questions for discussion.

Précis (30%)

To facilitate close analysis, each student will be expected to write a précis—a summary of critical thoughts that arise during your reading—about the assigned texts for six classes. (Suggested length: 1-3 pages, single-spaced.) These should be sent to the course instructor by 7 PM on the day before class. These do not need to be impeccable texts or thoroughly copy edited; the substance of your ideas is more important than the stylization of your ideas.

### Final Paper (30%)

Students will write a 10-15 final paper on a topic of your choosing, drawing from and building on the course readings and course themes. Ideally, the final paper will present an opportunity for you to reflect on your own research or to develop new lines of inquiry related to your project. Please make an office hours appointment to discuss your final paper at least four weeks before the due date.

### ***Books and Texts***

The following required books are available at the Brown bookstore:

- Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*
- Kimberly TallBear, *Native American DNA: Tribal Belonging and The False Promise of Genetic Science*
- Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*
- Natasha Myers, *Rendering Life Molecular: Models, Modelers, and Excitable Matter*
- Kalindi Vora, *Life Support: Biocapital and the New History of Outsourced Labor*
- Beatriz Preciado, *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*
- Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*
- Michelle Murphy, *The Economization of Life*
- Michelle Murphy, *Seizing the Means of Reproduction: Entanglements of Feminism, Health, and Technoscience*

Additionally, I can provide electronic copies of most of these books, upon student request.

All other required readings will be posted on Canvas.

## *Schedule of Meetings, Topics, and Readings*

### **Part One: Foundations**

#### 9/9: Introduction to Biopolitics

Michel Foucault, "Society Must Be Defended" and "Right of Death and Power Over Life," *The Biopolitics Reader*.

Michel Foucault, Lecture One, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College De France, 1977 – 78*.

Michel Foucault, Lecture Two, *The Birth of Biopolitics*.

Nikolas Rose, "Biopolitics in the Twenty-First Century," *The Politics of Life Itself: Biomedicine, Power, and Subjectivity in the Twenty-First Century*.

#### 9/16: From Sovereignty to the Biopolitical State

Giorgio Agamben, "Introduction," "The Politicization of Life," and "Biopolitics and the Rights of Man," *Homo Sacer*.

Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on Control Societies," *Negotiations*.

Michel Foucault, Lectures Two and Three, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College De France, 1977 – 78*.

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, "Biopolitical Production," *Empire*.

#### 9/23: Governmentality and Anatamo-politics

Peter Miller and Nikolas Rose, "Governing Economic Life," *Economy and Society*.

Nikolas Rose and Carlos Novas, "Biological Citizenry," *Global Assemblages: Technology, Politics, and Ethics as Anthropological Problems*.

Wendy Brown, "Foucault's *Birth of Biopolitics* Lectures: Charting Neoliberal Political Rationality" and "Revising Foucault: *Homo Politicus* and *Homo Oeconomicus*" in *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*.

Donna Haraway, "The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies: Constitutions of Self in Immune System Discourse," *The Biopolitics Reader*.

## Part Two: Theoretical Expansions

### 9/30: Biocapital

Stefan Helmreich, "Species of Biocapital," *Science as Culture* 17(4).

Kalindi Vora, Introduction and Chapters 1, 2 and 4, *Life Support: Biocapital and the New History of Outsourced Labor*.

Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17(2).

### 10/7: Black Feminist Revisions

Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*.

### 10/14: Necropolitics - Indigenous peoples' day (NO CLASS—read for the following week)

Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture* 15(1).

Che Gossett, "We Will Not Rest in Peace: AIDS Activism, Black Radicalism, Queer and/or Trans Resistance," *Queer Necropolitics*.

Michelle R. Martin-Baron, "(Hyper/in)visibility and the military corps(e)," *Queer Necropolitics*.

Marina Gržinić, "What is the Aesthetics of Necropolitics?" *Aesthetics of Necropolitics*.

Sarah Juliet Lauro, "Get Out: From Atlantic Slavery to Black Lives Matter," *Aesthetics of Necropolitics*.

### 10/28: Environmental Considerations: Geontopower, Energopower, Environmentality

Elizabeth Povinelli, "The Rhetorics of Recognition in Geontopower," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 48(4).

Dominic Boyer, "Energopower: An Introduction," *Anthropological Quarterly* 87(2).

Arun Agrawal, "Environmentality: Community, Intimate Government, and the Making of Environmental Subjects in Kumaon, India," *Current Anthropology* 46(2).

Nicholas Mirzoeff, "It's Not the Anthropocene, it's the White Supremacy Scene. Or, the Geological Color Line," *After Extinction*.

### **Part Three: Ethnographic and Archival Explorations**

#### 11/4: Pharmaceutical Industrial Complex

Beatriz Preciado, *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*

#### 11/11: The Clinic

Michelle Murphy, excerpts from *The Economization of Life*.

Dorothy Roberts, excerpts from *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*.

- *Skim* introduction;
- Chapter 2
- *Skim* chapter 4
- Chapter 6

#### 11/18: Technoscience

Natasha Myers, *Rendering Life Molecular*.

#### 11/25: Genetics

Kim Tallbear, *Native American DNA: Tribal Belonging and the False Promise of Genetic Science*.

#### 12/2: Intersectional Governmentality

Michelle Murphy, excerpts from *Seizing the Means of Reproduction: Entanglements of Feminism, Health, and Technoscience*.

Chinyere Oparah, Linda Jones, Dantia Hudson, Talita Oseguera and Helen Arega, Executive Summary, *Battling Over Birth: Black Women & The Maternal Health Care Crisis in California*.

#### 12/9: Queer Life

Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*.