

# Revolutions

WILLIAMS COLLEGE  
SPRING 2019  
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OFFICE: SCHAPIRO 212  
OFFICE HOURS: TUESDAY 2:00 – 5:00  
AND BY APPOINTMENT

“I will not see the Revolution in my lifetime.” Vladimir Lenin, January 1917

“It is too early to say.” Zhou Enlai’s (apocryphal) assessment of the  
French Revolution, February 1972

“WE WANT A COUNTRY OF INSTITUTIONS.” Revolutionary graffiti, Libya, June 2011

Why do revolutions occur, or perhaps more to the point, why do they *fail* to occur? When do they end and what do they actually achieve? What, in other words, is so revolutionary about revolutions?

This course considers whether and how revolutions differ from social movements, coups d'états, and armed rebellions by looking at a broad range of uprisings, from the “colored revolutions” and liberating “springs” of recent years to the classical examples of the French, American, Mexican, Chinese, Cuban, and Iranian revolutions, as well as the challenging cases of Haiti and South Africa.

Throughout the term we’ll examine the linkages between the beginnings and endings of revolutions (and everything in between) by returning time and again to four principal thematic oppositions:

**Rupture and Continuity**--Do revolutions mark a comprehensive break with the past? Or does history repeat itself as tragedy, or, to borrow from Marx, as farce?

**Violent and Non-Violent Struggle**---Must revolutions pass through violent crucible in order to be successful? Does the manner in which successful revolutions are made have consequences for the regimes that they produce?

**Ideological and Non-Ideological Movements**---What role do revolutions play in a world seemingly exhausted with ideological struggle, a world at the “end of history?” Are we witnessing in the social movements of the Arab Middle East and other parts of the world the end of revolutions and the rise of non-movements and “refolutions,” mass movements that paradoxically seek reforms in and through the institutions of the state that they oppose?

**Endogenous and Exogenous Change**---In plain English, is reform better achieved by working within “the system” or from a position of externality? Can incrementalism and the appropriation of existing political, social, and discursive structures ever be transformative? What is lost by working inside of power? What is gained by stepping outside? Into, as Havel lyrically puts it, a life lived “in the truth?”

“And afterward? What happened afterward? What should I write about now? About the way that a great experience comes to an end? A melancholy topic, for a revolt is a great experience...”

Ryszard Kapuściński, *Shah of Shahs*

This class seeks a subversive politics of its own. There is a certain, shiny allure to revolutions, particularly within political science. In a field committed to the dry study and explanation of social phenomena, revolutions are the sexy exception, the example of politics *par excellence*. Our goal ought to be to call the allure into question, to ask whether this is a merit of undeserved distinction, particularly given tragic developments in Egypt and Syria, as well as the ongoing consequences of revolutions in Russia, Iran, China, many years after the fact, after the last triumphant regiments rolled through capital streets.

## **Requirements:**

### **Participation in class, plus discussion outside of class via blogs (20%)**

What in class participation means: “Demonstrates good preparation, knows case or reading contents well, has thought through their implications (the ‘so what?’), brings readings to class, annotated with questions and complaints. Is curious, above all skeptical, about the material and the assumptions that undergird its various claims and propositions. Speaks, or writes, fearlessly and in good faith.”

The work of participation includes blog entries (approximately 250 words or one single-spaced page of text) assigned regularly as a directed reading and in reaction to a particular film, reading, or lecture. My intention is to encourage engagement through the written word, fostering discussion and debate in a context that may be more comfortable for some students.

The blogs will be due **at noon on Friday**, followed by a very brief “response-to-a-response” to a classmate’s posting (you can pick whomever you want). Response postings are expected to be respectful of the dignity and efforts of other students, and to provide constructive criticism or praise on the structure, style, and content of the essay. These will be due **at noon on Sunday**.

The best way to produce good words is to slog through the bad ones, to set down a writing routine that will generate inspiration. In this vein, we will be writing consistently, for improvement as well as for assessment.

### **Short Essay, 5-7 pages (25%)**

### **Presentation and Précis, 5-7 pages (25%)**

### **Research Paper, 15-20 pages (30%)**

## **Final Project**

The course ends with our own version of an academic conference (#nerdfest). This is an opportunity to workshop your final research project as well as to practice providing critical feedback and analysis to your fellow classmates.

Here’s how it works: Two weeks prior to our final class session you’ll circulate a précis of your final paper to the entire class, a first-cut brief of no more than five pages. The précis should include a clear thesis statement and paragraph, followed by a page or two outlining the existing literature on your topic (if any exists) and how your research fits into that body of evidence. You’ll then lay out a rudimentary plan of action as well as any questions or challenges facing your project. Try to point to the broader implications of your research, the proverbial “so what?” question (we’ll talk more about this piece in class).

The final project is open-ended but must be cleared with me, **no later than the end of Week Six**. Your précis is due on **Friday, April 26**. Keep in mind that the précis and presentations are expected to be works in progress. The work should be raw but legible, filled with the promise of good and original research!

Use your resources! I can't emphasize enough the excellence of the Writing Workshop at Williams. Here's the link explaining how to schedule an appointment as well as drop-in hours:

[HTTPS://WRITING-PROGRAMS.WILLIAMS.EDU/WRITING-WORKSHOP/](https://writing-programs.williams.edu/writing-workshop/)

**Get to know Hale Polebaum-Freeman**, the reference librarian for political science at Sawyer. Williams has an outstanding array of resources—Hale is one of them, among its best. Seriously. *Get to know Hale*.

### Readings:

The following texts are available for purchase at the bookstore. All other readings are available on Glow.

- Ryszard Kapuściński, *Shah of Shabs*
- Charles Kurzman, *The Unthinkable Revolution*
- Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution*
- Laurent Dubois, *The Aftershocks of History*
- Kate Crehan, *Gramsci, Culture, and Anthropology*
- Mary Kay Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution: Teachers, Peasants, and Schools in Mexico, 1930-1940*
- Arthur Koestler, *Darkness at Noon*
- Jeff Goodwin, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945-1991*
- Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*
- Joel Andres, *Rise of the Red Engineers: The Cultural Revolution and the Origins of China's New Class*
- Sarah Sarzynski, *Revolution in the Terra do Sol*
- Mark Engler and Paul Engler, *This is an Uprising: How Nonviolent Revolt Is Shaping the Twenty- First Century*

### Optional

- Jack Goldstone, *Revolutions: A Very Short Introduction*
- Jeremy D. Popkin, *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution*

## WEEK ONE

### Two Narratives of the “Last Great Revolution”

Which text better explains the 1979 Revolution in Iran, Kapuściński's lyrical account? Or Kurzman's “anti-explanation?” What theoretical approach do you find to be most convincing? What is your assessment of Kapuściński's description of fear and religion in Iran?

### Wednesday, February 6

- Ryszard Kapuściński, *Shah of Shabs*
- Charles Kurzman, *The Unthinkable Revolution*, in addition to introduction and conclusion, pick, at least one become an expert on one “failed” explanation for the Iranian Revolution
- Clemens Höges, “Self Immolation Survivor Looks Back at Arab Spring”

## WEEK TWO

### Haiti and the Price of Revolution

Was revolution in Haiti inevitable? Morally justified? How do we measure the value and meaning of revolution? What is the role of contingency and chance?

#### Wednesday, February 13

- Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution*
- Jeremy D. Popkin, *You Are All Free*, pp. 1-22, 217-250 (skim), 376-396
- Haiti is one of the most confounding revolutions we will study. This will help:  
[HTTP://WWW.KHANACADEMY.ORG/HUMANITIES/HISTORY/1600S-1800S/HAITIAN-REVOLUTION/V/HAITIAN-REVOLUTION--PART-1](http://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/history/1600s-1800s/haitian-revolution/v/haitian-revolution--part-1)

Recommended:

- C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins*, Pp. 67-84
- Jeremy D. Popkin, *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution*

## WEEK THREE

### Tocqueville, Burke, and Marx Walk Into a Revolutionary Situation: Classical and Modern Approaches

How might we move beyond binaries of material versus immaterial explanations for revolution, or the designation of a privileged class, proletariat or otherwise, as a vessel for change? What is the relationship between revolutions and war? What is your assessment of the literature on revolutions?

#### Wednesday, February 20

Classical Theories

- Plato, *The Republic*, Book 8 \*
- Edmund Burke, "Reflections on the Revolution in France"
- Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*, Preface and Book I; Book II, Chapters 5-6, 8, 14, 16-18, 20
- Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party"
- Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, "Why Great Revolutions Will Become Rare"

Modern Theories (First and Second Wave)

- Jack Goldstone, "The Comparative and Historical Study of Revolutions"
- Samuel Huntington, "Revolution and Political Order"
- Charles Tilly, "Does Modernization Breed Revolution?"
- Theda Skocpol and Ellen Kay Trimberger, "Revolutions: A Structural Analysis"
- Eric Selbin, "Agency and Culture in Revolutions"
- Goldstone, "Revolutions in Modern Dictatorships"
- Goldstone, "Understanding the Revolutions of 2011"

Wars and Civil Wars

- David Armitage, "Civil War in an Age of Revolutions, in *Civil Wars: A History in Ideas*
- Hannah Arendt, "War and Revolutions" and "The Meaning of Revolution," in *On Revolution*
- Adam Gopnik, "The Fires of Paris"

Short essay assigned this week. **Due Friday, March 8.**

## WEEK FOUR

### Hearts and Minds and the War of Position, More Propitious than the War of Maneuver

What is the greater predicate for revolution, the triumph of ideas and culture, or the mobilization of force in the streets and over the parapets?

#### Wednesday, February 27

- Kate Crehan, *Gramsci, Culture, and Anthropology*
- Stuart Hall, “The Toad in the Garden: Thatcherism among the Theorists”
- James C. Scott, “Normal Exploitation, Normal Resistance” and “False Consciousness or Laying It on Thick?” in *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Resistance*

Strongly Recommended:

- James C. Scott, “A Saturnalia of Power: The First Public Declaration of the Hidden Transcript,” in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*

## WEEK FIVE

### Molding the New Citizen in Mexico

How does Mary Kay Vaughan’s account of cultural revolution help us to understand the formation of postrevolutionary identity and authority? Who shaped the revolution more, the subaltern or postrevolutionary elites? How does the case of Mexico, in which the state was utterly destroyed by the revolutionary process, compare to a country like Iran, where the state remained intact?

#### Wednesday, March 6

- Mary Kay Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution: Teachers, Peasants, and Schools in Mexico, 1930-1940*
- William Roseberry, “Hegemony and the Language of Contention”
- Nader Sohrabi, “Revolution and State Culture: The Circle of Justice and Constitutionalism in 1906 Iran,” pp. 253-254, 271-286

Recommended as applied examples of the “shared grammar” framework:

- Arang Keshavarzian and Kaveh Ehsani, “The Moral Economy of the Iranian Protests”
- Shervin Malekzadeh, “On-going Protests in Iran Are an Extension of the Islamic Republic’s Founding Ethos”

## WEEK SIX

### The Cold War, Revolutions in an Age of Disappointment

Was the demise of radical guerilla movements a function of the Cold War? Why the decadence of groups such as the Baader Meinhof gang?

#### Wednesday, March 13

- Jeff Goodwin, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945-1991*, Parts 1 and 3
- George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, Chapters I, V, and IX
- Lawrence Weschler, short excerpt on the Uruguyan Tupamaros, in *A Miracle, A Universe: Settling Accounts with Torturers*

#### Spring Break, March 16-31

Please read *Darkness at Noon* by Arthur Koestler. Watch *The Baader Meinhof Complex*.

What happens when revolutionaries *believe*?

## **WEEK SEVEN**                      **A Revolution by Other Means: The Case of Chile after Cuba**

Was the parliamentary path to revolution a viable one? What is the relationship between revolutionary failure and the rise of reactionary regimes and governments?

**Wednesday, April 3**

- Arturo Valenzuela, “The Move to a Socialist Society and the Erosion of the Political Center,” in *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes: Chile*
- Régis Debray, *The Chilean Revolution: Conversations with Allende*, excerpts
- Ernest Ché Guevera, “General Principles of Guerilla Warfare” and “The Guerilla Band,” in *Guerilla Warfare*
- James C. Scott, “The Revolutionary Party: A Plan and a Diagnosis,” in *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*

Recommended:

- Shervin Malekzadeh, “Notes on a Revolution, Cuba”

Please remember to meet with me in office hours this week to discuss your final project. Your précis must be circulated to the entire class by the close of business on **Friday, April 26** (no exceptions!).

## **WEEK EIGHT**                      **The Failure of the Landless Movement in Brazil during the Cold War**

What lessons of continuity and change does Brazil’s “failed” landless movement provide? How significant was the Cold War as an obstacle to revolution, given the persistence of tropes surrounding *o homem nordestino*? What is the relationship, if any, between failed revolutionary and social movements of the left and the emergence of military and far-right regimes?

**Wednesday, April 10**

- Sarah Sarzynski, *Revolution in the Terra do Sol*
- Watch *April in the Sun*

## **WEEK NINE**                      **The Crucible of Violence: Anti-Colonial Struggle**

Was Fanon correct? Or Camus? What is the relationship between revolutionary moments and the desire for catharsis, for “re-enchantment?” Must catharsis be achieved, and must it be done violently?

**Wednesday, April 17**

- Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Pp. vii-51, 63-144
- Todd Shephard, Introduction, *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France*
- Watch the classic portrayal of the Algerian Revolution, *The Battle of Algiers*
- Joshua Hammer, “Why is Albert Camus Still a Stranger in His Native Algeria?”

- Claire Messud, “Camus & Algeria: The Moral Question”
- Albert Camus, *Algerian Chronicles*, Chapters 8, 11-14, 17-18, 26-27
- Timothy Garton Ash, “Velvet Revolution: The Prospects”

## WEEK TEN

### Schooling the New Citizen in China and Iran

How did China’s “second” revolution produce its present? How durable is the legacy of the Chinese Cultural Revolution? What role, or use, do “elites” serve in postrevolutionary settings?

#### Wednesday, April 24

- Joel Andreas, *Rise of the Red Engineers: The Cultural Revolution and the Origins of China’s New Class*
- Shervin Malekzadeh, “Children without Childhood, Adults without Adulthood: Changing Conceptions of the Iranian Child in Postrevolutionary Iranian Textbooks (1979-2008)”
- Watch *Farewell My Concubine*

## WEEK ELEVEN

### From Non-Violence to Violence and Back Again: South Africa

How much can a revolution or social movement really change? Why do we remember the anti-apartheid movement as non-violent? Are “virtuous” revolutions non-violent? What was the relationship of Biko’s Black Consciousness movement to the success of the ANC? How might we reassess the revolutions in Haiti and in France in light of the South African experience?

#### Wednesday, May 1

- Michael MacDonald, *Why Race Matters in South Africa*, Introduction and Chapters 1, 3, 5, 7-8
- Martin Legassick, “Armed Struggle and Democracy: The Case of South Africa, Chapter 1”
- Nelson Mandela, *The Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela*, pp. 258-275
- For a sharply critical counter-narrative to the myth of non-violence associated with the anti-apartheid movement, see Gay Seidman, “Guerrillas in their Midst: Armed Struggle in the South African Anti-Apartheid Movement”

## WEEK TWELVE

### The End of Ideology, The State No Longer the Prize

What was it all worth? The Arab Spring, Occupy, social nonmovements? Does the non-ideological, prefigurative life constitute the future of protest? Is nonviolent revolt the path forward?

#### Wednesday, May 8

- Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan, “Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict”
- Mark Engler and Paul Engler, *This is an Uprising: How Nonviolent Revolt Is Shaping the Twenty-First Century*
- Albert Camus, *The Rebel*, Pp. 1-22, 105-114

Recommended:

- Gene Sharp, *From Dictatorship to Democracy*

Presentations and class dinner, TBD.

**Final essay due May 15.**