This course will examine the ways power and privilege have been theorized, with attention to class, gender, race, and other categories, by those who go on actively to support, and also to engage in, activity that promotes political change in the world that is in line with the complexity of their own abstract reflections about engagement with the world. We will spend time looking at the relationship between education and democracy, with readings that trace the necessity of an informed citizenry, the obstacles to cultivating a life of the mind in a democracy and ways to overcome them, and the question of how best to cultivate cosmopolitanism in education. In the second section of the course, we will inquire why the habits of mind encouraged by the formation of intellect (the questioning, creative life of the mind as opposed to the goal-oriented, narrowly focused problem-solving of intelligence) so often lead, not to withdrawn contemplation but rather to progressive political engagement (and to resistance from dominant mainstream culture threatened by intellect). We will then examine theoretical and autobiographical writings by those who have both articulated and lived theories of social change across questions of class, race, culture, and sexuality and how the life of the mind informed, shaped, and altered the course of their political engagement. These figures include a diverse range of intellectuals, artists, and political figures from both within and beyond the United States.

The course takes its inspiration from an essay by Hannah Arendt, “Thinking and Moral Considerations,” which we will read in the course and in which she explores the problem of the move from theoretical discussions of justice to real political action in the world. While all recognize the need to base political action on firm philosophical principles, the life of the mind, in its constant questioning, problematizing, and reconsideration of its own foundations, does not at first glance seem to support political action, which ideally rests on commitment to firmly held convictions. And yet no thinker would want to shut down the possibility of acting for political change, broadly defined, on account of the ever-changing interrogations of what we mean by “equality,” “justice,” and so on.
Required Texts:

- Course packet (on Blackboard)
- Plato, *Gorgias* (Hackett)
- Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism* (Yale)
- Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home* (Houghton Mifflin)

Assignments and Grades

“Reading furnishes the mind only with materials of knowledge; it is thinking that makes what we read ours.” -- John Locke

“Latent in every act of complete reading is the compulsion to write a book in reply. The intellectual is, quite simply, a human being who has a pencil in his or her hand when reading a book.” -- George Steiner

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<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Homework Writing Assignments</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<td>Two Short Papers</td>
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<td>Research paper</td>
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<td>Poster assignment</td>
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<td>(10% group poster project grade, 15% individual contribution to the project)</td>
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<td>Final Exam</td>
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Course Objectives

--to examine the ways in which some people have theorized political engagement, race, class, and/or sexuality, obstacles to change, and ways to overcome those obstacles to promote positive change.

--to foster an active learning style in relation to the required readings for the class and to continue to develop the ability to outline and evaluate complex arguments

--to encourage and model good critical thinking skills

--to assess and improve writing skills through practice and feedback

--to foster confidence and respect in class discussions

--to create an enriching intellectual community and work collaboratively in large and small-group settings

**Note on late work**: Late work will incur a penalty of one letter grade per day: an A becomes a B after one day late, etc.
Note on attendance: Attendance at all class sessions is required except in cases of documented serious illness or emergency. For all other situations, you are allowed two absences, after which your final grade for the course will be lowered by two grade points for each additional absence. You should always come to class on time and well prepared. Make-up exams are given only in the case of documented emergency.

Note on laptops and phones: Use of laptops in class is not permitted.

Note on respect: Please turn off cell phones and refrain from eating during class.

This syllabus attempts to be complete, but the instructor reserves the right throughout the course to make appropriate changes in a timely way.

About your professor:

Originally from Syracuse, New York, I lived more recently in New Haven, Connecticut where I completed a doctorate in French literature at Yale University before coming to Vermont in 2003. I specialize in nineteenth and twentieth-century literature, with particular emphasis on lyric poetry and the novel as well as relations among music, philosophy, and literature. I am the author of five books, French Symbolist Poetry and the Idea of Music (2006), Crusoes and Other Castaways in Modern French Literature: Solitary Adventures (2012), The Fall out of Redemption: Writing and Thinking Beyond Salvation (2015), Proust, Music, and Meaning (2017), and Poetry’s Knowing Ignorance (forthcoming 2019). Besides French, I have studied Spanish, Polish, Latin, and Old French. In my free time I am a voracious reader. I enjoy taking long walks as well as listening to and making music of many kinds, but especially classical, jazz, and folk. I am proud not to drive or watch television and to own neither a cell phone nor a laptop.

Schedule of Readings and Assignments:

“Think before you speak. Read before you think.” --Fran Lebowitz

THEORIZING EDUCATION, DEMOCRACY, AND PLURALITY

January 14  Introductions, revisiting “Thinking and Moral Considerations”

January 16  Louis Menand, “Why Do All Professors Think Alike?” from The Marketplace of Ideas
Slavoj Žižek, “Don’t Act, Just Think”
   http://bigthink.com/videos/dont-act-just-think
Žižek, “More Than Ever, We Need Thinking”
   http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MtPghWHAQfs

January 18  Jacques Rancière, “Ten Theses on Politics”
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>January 21</td>
<td>Martin Luther King Day: No Class</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 23</td>
<td>Plato, <em>Gorgias</em> through page 50</td>
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<td>January 25</td>
<td><em>Gorgias</em> to end</td>
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<td>January 28</td>
<td><em>Gorgias</em> discussion continued</td>
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<td>January 30</td>
<td>Sandy Grant, “Enjoy!”</td>
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<td>February 1</td>
<td>Alexis de Tocqueville, “Why the Americans Are More Addicted to Practical than to Theoretical Science” from <em>Democracy in America</em></td>
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<td>February 4</td>
<td>John Dewey, “The Democratic Conception in Education”</td>
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<td>February 6</td>
<td>Isaiah Berlin, “The Pursuit of the Ideal”</td>
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<td>February 8</td>
<td>Benjamin Aldes Wurgaft, “The Call to Theory”</td>
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<td><a href="https://wp.nyu.edu/therevealer/2017/07/25/the-call-to-theory/">https://wp.nyu.edu/therevealer/2017/07/25/the-call-to-theory/</a></td>
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<td><strong>ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM: THOUGHT AS RESISTANCE</strong></td>
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<td>February 11</td>
<td>Noam Chomsky, “The Responsibility of Intellectuals”</td>
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<td>February 13</td>
<td>Richard Hofstadter, excerpt from <em>Anti-Intellectualism in American Life</em></td>
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<td>February 15</td>
<td>Hofstadter continued</td>
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<td>Short paper #1 due</td>
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<td>February 18</td>
<td>Presidents’ Day: No Class</td>
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<td>February 20</td>
<td>Hofstadter continued</td>
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<td>February 22</td>
<td>Susan Jacoby, from <em>The Age of American Unreason</em></td>
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<td>February 25</td>
<td>Jacoby continued</td>
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February 27  Jacoby continued
        Short paper #2 due

March 1  Berkeley in the 60s: film
         https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cvideo_work%7C2543721?utm_source=aspresolver&utm_medium=MARC&utm_campaign=AlexanderStreet
         Mario Savio, Sproul Hall speech
         Geoffrey Stone, “Darfur and the Kalven Report: A Personal Journey”

March 4  Berkeley discussion continued
        Annotated bibliography due

March 6  Alex Ross, “The Frankfurt School Knew Trump Was Coming”
         https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/the-frankfurt-school-knew-trump-was-coming
         Andreas Huyssen, “Breitbart, Bannon, Trump, and the Frankfurt School”
         Theodor Adorno, “Resignation”

March 8  Adorno continued

               “SPRING” BREAK

THEORIZING FREEDOM AND REVOLT

March 18  Nina Eliasoph, excerpt from Avoiding Politics: How Americans Produce Apathy in Everyday Life

March 20  Eliasoph continued

March 20  Poster Plenary, Billings Lecture Hall

March 22  Cass Sunstein, Republic.com 2.0  1-18, 212-224

March 25  Jean-Paul Sartre, Existentialism is a Humanism

March 27  Sartre continued

March 27  Actors of the London Stage, Music Recital Hall
March 29  Sartre continued

THE INFORMED LIFE: EDUCATION AND POLITICAL TRANSFORMATION

April 1  Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home*

April 3  Bechdel continued

April 3  Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst, Billings Lecture Hall

April 5  Bechdel continued

*Posters due by email attachment on Sunday, April 7 by 11:59 PM

April 8  Bechdel continued / Presentation Rehearsal
        Research Paper Due

April 10  Peter Sloterdijk, “‘The Observer Has Come’: The Creation of Persons Fit
          for Epoché” from *The Art of Philosophy: Wisdom as a Practice*

April 10  Research Presentations I, Aiken Center 102

April 12  Martin Luther King, “My Pilgrimage to Nonviolence”

April 15  Presentation Rehearsal Day

April 17  James Baldwin, “Many Thousands Gone”
          James Baldwin on *Florida Forum, 1963*  
          https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FpRziHGxeEU

April 17  Research Presentations II, Aiken Center 102

April 19  Audrey Lorde, “Poetry is Not a Luxury”

April 22  Andrew Douglas, *In the Spirit of Critique* 1-13, 43-63

April 24  Douglas, 91-117

April 24  First-Year Research Symposium, UVM Alumni House, 61 Summit Street
April 26  Jonathan Lear, excerpt from *Radical Hope* 1-63

April 29  *Radical Hope* 103-149

May 1  William Deresiewicz, “Solitude and Leadership”

May 3  Conclusions

Final Exam: May 6, 1:30-4:15 PM