Political Science 8480:  
Transitional Justice and the Politics of Memory

Fall 2014  
Professor Jelena Subotic  
Tuesdays, 1:00-3:30 PM  
330 Classroom South  
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Course Description
How should states and societies deal with the legacies of mass atrocity? What are appropriate mechanisms to address gross human rights violations of the past? Should states institute war crimes trials, truth commissions, reparations or should they move on and forget about the violent past? Over the past two decades we have seen an increasing attention paid to transitional justice - the processes of dealing with the past. More and more states are instituting some model of transitional justice – domestic trials, international trials, truth commission. We have even witnessed the establishment of the permanent International Criminal Court, an institution designed to deal specifically with genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. In this context of increasing transitional justice institutionalized, new questions emerge about what are the proper ways to deal with past crimes. How are transitional justice mechanisms accepted locally? What are the benefits and consequences of these projects? Is it possible to find the “truth” about past violence? How do societies remember the violent past? This course will address these and other issues in the fields of memory politics and transitional justice. The course will first provide a philosophical and theoretical framework for thinking about memory and transitional justice. Then, we will focus on specific transitional justice institutions such as the Nuremberg Trials, the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, the International Criminal Court, as well as selected domestic and hybrid trials and truth commissions in many regions of the world. Finally, we will place the theoretical debate about transitional justice in the context of the ongoing discussion in the US about how best to approach the legacies of slavery and human rights abuses in the US.

Key dates
Slavery reparations thought piece: 9/30
Paper topic approval: 10/29
In-class presentations: 11/18
Final paper/exam due: 12/11
Requirements and Grading

You are expected to attend all seminars and come to each session having read the assigned readings and with comments and questions prepared for discussion. Course requirements consist of:

Truth commission thought piece: 20%
Paper presentation/discussant: 20%
Final paper or final exam: 40%
Class participation: 20%

Thought piece

You are required to write a “thought piece” discussing whether the United States should pay reparations for slavery. This piece should be no longer than 5 pages, and should be your original argument, drawing on relevant course and additional information. I will provide more information about this requirement in class.

Final paper/exam

The final paper should be on a topic we discussed in class, and approved by me by October 29. Your topic submission should be in written form, and should include a brief (one-two paragraph) proposal, as well as an illustrative (1-2 pages) bibliography of major works you plan to use.

The final paper should be 20-25 pages long.
The take-home exam is open to all students, but is especially recommended to PhD students preparing to take their comprehensive exams. The exam will be modeled after actual comps. You will receive the exam by email, and will have 8 hours at home to complete it and email it back.

Class presentations

You will have the opportunity to present your research to the class on November 18. If you plan to take a final exam, you will be assigned as a discussant for another student presenter. I will discuss in more detail how this presentation will run as the semester progresses.

If you are presenting the paper, you will present your draft paper (5-10 pages) – the more polished the paper draft, the more useful discussant comments will be.
If you are the discussant, you will submit a one page single spaced evaluation with comments on the paper – submit it through D2L and email the paper author.

ALL WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS SHOULD BE UPLOADED TO DESIRE2LEARN ONLINE PORTAL. NO PAPER COPIES WILL BE ACCEPTED.

Class participation means more than just attending the seminars. The more you actively participate in class discussions, raise questions, and share your informed comments, the higher your participation grade will be.
Readings

The following resources are the required reading material for the course:


- Most articles are available electronically through our library or through Interlibrary Loan (usually available within 24 hours of request). I will provide pdfs of articles unavailable at the library.

General Course Policies

Here are some common-sense course policies that I will adhere to consistently in order to ensure fairness and equal opportunity for all students. If you have any questions about these policies, please ask me for clarification.

- Make sure to attend the seminars and take notes. If you have questions regarding content or analysis during the seminar, I strongly encourage you to immediately raise them.
- There will be no make-up exams or extra credit to replace missed assignments. Dates for assignments are clearly listed on the syllabus. If you have unavoidable scheduling conflicts, now is the time to clear them. I will make exceptions to this rule only in cases of clear, unexpected and serious medical or family emergencies. If any such cases arise, you need to clear them with me and provide appropriate documentation.
- I work closely with the staff of the Disability Resource Center. If you have special needs for attending the seminars or taking exams, let me know immediately so that I can arrange for your needs to be accommodated.

Note on Academic Conduct

I will expect all students in this class to adhere to the highest standards of academic honesty and conduct. You must fully and unambiguously cite all work that is not your own in written assignments and give credit to those whose ideas or language you are using. Failure to do so constitutes plagiarism, penalty for which may include failing the course or academic dismissal. Also, turning in parts of someone else’s work, cheating during the exams, or giving answers to others during the exam will also result in a failing grade and academic dismissal. Please avoid this at any cost. If you are ever in doubt about what constitutes proper citation, please ask me.
Incompletes
As a matter of university policy, I can give an incomplete only when a student has a “nonacademic reason beyond his or her control” for failure to complete all assignments. I **strongly** discourage incompletes. However, if you choose to ask for an incomplete, you have to provide me with a compelling reason in writing. Based on your written request, I will decide whether or not to grant the incomplete.

Changes in the Syllabus
This syllabus is subject to change and may not be final. The version of the syllabus on ULearn is the official syllabus for the course. This syllabus indicates dates for seminar topics. These are target dates, and will occasionally have to change. You should always know where we are in the syllabus. You should do the assigned readings for the next topic before it is discussed in class.
Course Schedule

PART I. THEORY AND PRINCIPAL DEBATES IN TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE

8/26 Class overview

9/2 What is transitional justice?


9/9 Banality of Evil


9/16 Guilt and Denial


9/23 Apologies and Forgiveness


9/30 Reparations

9/30 Slavery reparations thought piece due

10/7 Human Rights Trials


10/14 Truth Commissions


10/21 International Criminal Justice


10/28 The Victims

10/29 Final paper proposals due

11/4 Alternative approaches to transitional justice


11/11 Does Truth Lead to Reconciliation?


11/18 In class presentations

11/25 Thanksgiving – No Class

12/2 Transitional Justice: Curb Our Enthusiasm?


12/11 Final exam or final paper due