

# GOVT/AMST 3785: CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

Professor A. Livingston. Dept. of Government, Cornell University.



**Course Description:** This course examines the political theory of civil disobedience. Do citizens have obligations to obey unjust laws? What makes disobedience civil rather than criminal? How do acts of protest influence public opinion and policy? Do disruptive protests endanger democracy or strengthen the rule of law? How is the distinction between violence and non-violence political constructed and contested? And how has political dissent transformed in a digital era? We will study classical writings and contemporary scholarship in pursuit of answers to these questions and related debates concerning the rule of law, conscience, justice, violence and non-violence, whistleblowing, direct action, riots, and hacktivism.

**Prerequisites:** There are no prerequisites required for this course. GOVT 3785 is a 4 credit course and qualifies for the Government Major, the Minor in Crime, Prisons, Education and Justice, and the College AS-KCM distribution.

**Required Textbooks:** Books are available for purchase at the Cornell Store.

Plato, *The Trial and Death of Socrates*. 3rd edition. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2001.

Sophocles, *Sophocles 1: Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus, Antigone*. David Grene and Richmond Lattimore, eds. 2nd edition. Chicago University Press, 1991.

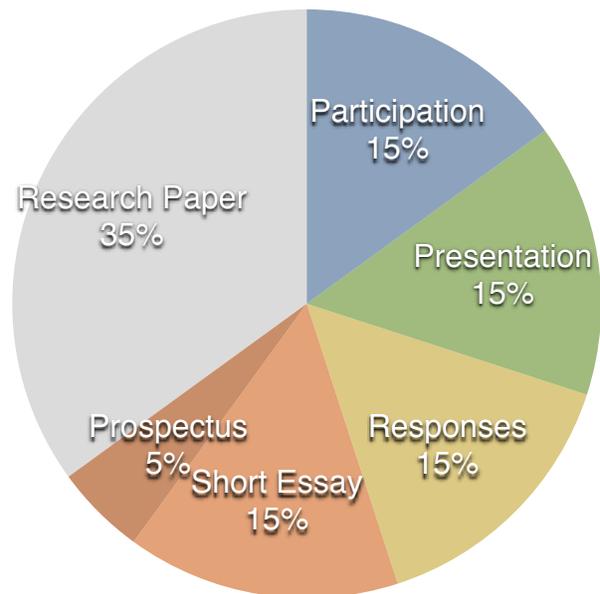
Mahatma Gandhi, *The Essential Gandhi*. Judith M. Brown, ed. New edition. Oxford: Oxford University, 2008.

Molly Sauter, *The Coming Swarm: DDOS Action, Hacktivism, and Civil Disobedience on the Internet*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2014.

**Learning Objectives:** The learning objectives of this course are to develop careful and rigorous reading habits, to sharpen interpretive and analytical writing skills, to cultivate skills for effective oral communication, to broaden your understanding of political theory, and to foster critical thinking. By the end of this semester, students should be able to demonstrate competency in (1) defining political theories and concepts; (2) applying a broader knowledge of political theory; (3) identifying an author's argument and restating it in your own words; (4) interpreting and comparing theoretical arguments and cases; and (5) analyzing and evaluating the normative and conceptual premises of historical and contemporary debates surrounding civil disobedience.

**Assignments and Grading:** Final grades will be calculated on the basis of aggregate scores in the following assessments:

- *Participation* (15%): Your participation grade will reflect your presence and contribution to our common dialogue in seminar. It is therefore expected that all students come to class prepared to discuss the assigned readings and have a point of view that demonstrates a strong command of, and sophisticated engagement with, the assigned texts. Merely being present in class does not count towards this portion of your final grade. This means that while attendance is a necessary condition for participation, it is not a sufficient one.



- *Seminar Presentation* (15%): Each student will be responsible for delivering one oral presentation on the day's readings. A presentation should be a critical synthesis of central themes or concepts in the readings rather than a simple summary. It should enter into dialogue with the authors in order to assess the strengths and weaknesses of their position. You are encouraged draw critical comparisons between the reading(s) under discussion with previous thinkers/texts/arguments examined in seminar. Additionally, do not hesitate to draw on your own background knowledge to introduce new concepts and cases where relevant. Please be sure to conclude your presentation with three or four questions to guide class discussion. Presentations should be no shorter than 10 minutes and no longer than 15 minutes. A sign-up sheet will be circulated on the second week of class.

- **Reading Responses (15%):** Each student is required to write five readings response over the course of the semester. Responses should be between 250 and 500 words in length. A response might consist of a critique of the reading, a comparison of the perspectives of the author(s) under consideration, an original intervention in the arguments taking place in and between the readings, or a novel illustration of the themes and concepts discussed. It is up to you to decide which five classes you would like to write your reflection papers for. Please note that students can only submit one response paper per class and cannot submit one for the same class as your seminar presentation. Reading responses must be submitted directly to your instructor via email by 10pm the evening before seminar at [pal229@cornell.edu](mailto:pal229@cornell.edu). Note: Reading responses will be graded on a four point scale: Excellent; Good; Satisfactory; Unsatisfactory. Students can elect to write additional reading responses to improve this part of their course grade. Only your five strongest response papers will be counted towards your final grade.
- **Short Essay (15%):** The short essay is intended to test your comprehension of course materials, motivate thoughtful interpretation of texts, and encourage the development of original insights. Your essay must be between 2000 and 2500 words in length (citations, notes, & bibliography included). All assignments must be submitted in hard copy, during class time, and on the assigned date. Essay format requirements will be include in the the assignment prompt distributed by the instructor. The essay deadline is included in the course schedule below.
- **Research Paper Prospectus (5%):** A research paper should be an original piece of scholarship that explores a course theme, topic, or author in some depth. The aim of the prospectus is to get you started thinking about your research paper early, help you organize your thoughts, and provide you with early feedback on your project. A prospectus identifies the topic you plan to examine and charts a preliminary outline for how you plan to do it. In 500 words you should: (a) *define your argument*: come up with a working thesis statement or research question, (b) *motivate your thesis*: briefly describe the significance of your topic in terms of its contribution to debates we have considered in seminar or broader questions in political science; (c) *develop a research plan*: identify the primary and secondary sources you plan to draw on and briefly explain how you plan to use them to support your argument. Please also include a short bibliography of no less than 3 secondary sources.
- **Final Research Paper (35%):** The research paper must be between 4000 and 4500 words in length (citations, notes, & bibliography included), and be submitted in hard copy to your instructor by the date and time indicated in the course schedule. Remember that writing a good research project means drawing on all of five of the skills identified in the course's learning objectives.

## Grade Explanation

**A+:** Outstanding work. Paper or presentation offers a focused and compelling thesis statement; thesis is persuasively supported by appropriate evidence; organization is logical; argumentation is valid and sound. A+ work shows evidence that the author has developed her or his own original ideas about the topic on the basis of a deep understanding of the material and rigorous and well-documented research. Interpretations of theories are sophisticated and demonstrate a very strong grasp of the material. Possible objections are considered and answered. Writing is elegant; grammar is impeccable. In short: flawless.



**A-/A:** Excellent work. Paper or presentation makes a compelling argument in support of a clear and important thesis. The author considers appropriate evidence and organizes material in a clear and persuasive fashion. Interpretations are well grounded in textual evidence and demonstrate a strong grasp of the material. The paper shows some original insight but may also contains minor flaws in argumentation, interpretation, or evidence. Organization is tight; writing is very good; grammar contains only minor errors.

**B/B+:** Very good work. Paper or presentation offers a clear thesis supported for the most part by a well-organized presentation of evidence. B/B+ papers/presentations typically fall under one of the following three categories: work shows some interpretive depth but also a limited grasp of the materials; work shows some original insights along with more substantial flaws in organization, argumentation, and evidence; the paper or presentation is well-organized and tightly argued but lacks deeper insight or originality. Writing and grammar are solid. Sources are documented with only minor errors.

**B-:** Good work. Paper or presentation is on topic and attempts to support a simple or underdeveloped thesis on the basis of evidence. Interpretations of theories demonstrate a fair grasp of the material but lack depth or originality. Evidence is, for the most part, relevant to the thesis it supports. The work tends towards summary. Stylistic, grammatical, and citational errors are plentiful.

**C/C+:** Satisfactory work. This work satisfies the minimal expectations of the assignment but needs substantial improvement. Minimal thesis with little argumentative support. Interpretations are misguided and demonstrate a poor grasp of the material. Contains substantial errors. Organization is unclear. Not all evidence provided clearly support the thesis. Major grammatical and stylistic flaws. Adequate and only that.

**C-/D:** Unsatisfactory work. Lacks clear thesis; provides little evidence or evidence substantially irrelevant to the argument. Demonstrates superficial grasp of material. Evidence is irrelevant or insufficient to prove your argument. Writing and organization so poor as to obscure meaning. Fails to satisfy the requirements outlined in the assignment prompt.

**E:** Failing work. Rushed, sloppy, or incomplete work; shows total lack of effort and/or no familiarity with the topic.

### Instructor Contact Information

Email: [pal229@cornell.edu](mailto:pal229@cornell.edu) Office: 215 White Hall Office Hours: Thursdays  
12pm-2pm

#### Course Policies:

Office Hours and Communication: Office hours are held on Thursdays from noon to 2pm in 215 White Hall. A sign-up sheet for office hours is available online at <http://drlivingston.youcanbook.me>. I will do my best to respond to student emails in a timely fashion, but please know that I only check my email twice a week during the semester.

Blackboard.com: All course documents are available on through Blackboard ([blackboard.cornell.edu](http://blackboard.cornell.edu)). If you are unfamiliar with how to access Blackboard, please consult the Cornell Information Technology website ([bbhelp.cit.cornell.edu](http://bbhelp.cit.cornell.edu)). Because important messages and updates concerning the course will be posted regularly on Blackboard it is imperative that students enable their account to send announcements directly to their @cornell.edu email accounts.

Electronic Devices: *The use of computers and tablets in class is discouraged.* Surfing the Internet in seminar is distracting to both you and your fellow students, and there is strong evidence that your brain is more actively engaged in learning when you take notes by hand. If you do chose to use a computer in class, please be sure to also bring additional stationary and some sort of analogue writing tool. Phones must be turned off in seminar. Off means off – not vibrate.

Recording devices: Audio and video recording devices are prohibited in the classroom unless required for accessibility purposes. This is to create a safe space where all students feel comfortable expressing their opinions without the possibility of their contribution to class being reproduced and replayed without their consent.

Classroom Climate: One aim of studying political theory is to unsettle our received convictions and upset our unexamined beliefs. Because of the controversial and sensitive nature of some of the materials we will be studying this semester, I ask that all students exercise respect and generosity towards one another in our conversations. It is always welcome to criticize an idea, but never to attack the person who holds it. If at any point in the semester a student feels uncomfortable with the climate in class or disrespected in any way, please do not hesitate to come speak with me directly.

Late Assignments: Please consult the course schedule for information about assignment due dates. Permission to submit late work will only be granted in extenuating and unavoidable circumstances outlined to the instructor in writing prior to the due date. Such circumstances include medical, family, or personal emergencies. Multiple assignments scheduled for the same date do not constitute an acceptable reasons for extensions. Late assignments will be penalized 2% of their final grade per day late. Extensions will not be granted in any case after the submission deadline.

**Course Policies Continued:**

**Plagiarism and Academic Ethics:** Students should review Cornell University's policy towards plagiarism and violations of academic ethics ([plagiarism.arts.cornell.edu](http://plagiarism.arts.cornell.edu)). The strength of the university depends on academic and personal integrity. Ethical violations include cheating on exams, plagiarism, reuse of assignments, improper use of the Internet and electronic devices, unauthorized collaboration, alteration of graded assignments, forgery, and falsification, lying, facilitation of academic dishonesty, and unfair competition. The university has a zero tolerance policy towards plagiarism. All suspected cases of plagiarism will be passed on to the Academic Integrity liaison for disciplinary review. If you any questions about the appropriate use of secondary sources, your instructor is available to discuss best practices.

**Accessibility Needs:** If you have a condition that affects your ability to participate fully in class or to meet all course requirements, please speak with me after the first day of class so that we can work together to arrange appropriate accommodations. This syllabus and other course materials can be made available in alternate formats. Any student with a disability who may need accommodations in this class can obtain an accommodation letter from Student Disability Services, 420 CCC, Garden Ave Ext ([sds.cornell.edu](http://sds.cornell.edu)).

**Appealing Grades:** Any student who feels that their assigned grade does not reflect his or her 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. I ask that petitioners *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.

**Writing Center Deadline Extension:** I will grant a 2-day extension for all essay assignments (both short and research) to students who elect to meet with a tutor at the Writing Walk-In Service to discuss a draft of your assignment prior to the due date. The WWIS provides free, one-on-one consultation to discuss specific pieces of writing or answer questions you may have concerning writing. To take advantage of this extension you must (1) inform me *before* the due date that you are meeting with a tutor at WWIS and (2) attach a 250-word reflection of your experience at the WWIS with your final paper, explaining (a) how you revised your draft into the submitted essay, (b) how your consultation with the tutor impacted your essay, and (c) what forms of feedback you received where most/least useful and why. To learn more about this resource and schedule a meeting with a tutor see their website: ([http://www.arts.cornell.edu/knight\\_institute/walkin/walkin.htm](http://www.arts.cornell.edu/knight_institute/walkin/walkin.htm)).

<b>Course Schedule</b>		Readings marked with an asterisk (*) are posted on Blackboard.
<u>A: What is Civil Disobedience?</u>	Tuesday (8/23)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intro. No readings</li> </ul>
	Thursday (8/25)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Read this whole syllabus carefully before coming to class</i></li> <li>• Henry David Thoreau, 'On Civil Disobedience'*</li> </ul>
	Tuesday (8/30)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mahatma Gandhi, <i>The Essential Gandhi</i>, pp. 1-10, 39-65</li> </ul>
	Thursday (9/1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mahatma Gandhi, 'Brute Force'*</li> <li>• Mahatma Gandhi, <i>The Essential Gandhi</i>, pp. 309-341</li> </ul>
	Tuesday (9/6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Martin Luther King, Jr., 'Letter from a Birmingham Jail'*</li> </ul>
<u>B. Justifying Civil Disobedience</u>	Thursday (9/8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sophocles, <i>Antigone</i>, in <i>Sophocles I</i></li> </ul>
	Tuesday (9/13)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• John Rawls, <i>A Theory of Justice</i>, pp. 293-343*</li> </ul>
	Thursday (9/15)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>Seminar Presentations Begins</b></li> <li>• Tommie Shelby, 'Justice, Deviance, and the Dark Ghetto'*</li> </ul>
	Tuesday (9/20)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jurgen Habermas, 'Civil Disobedience: Litmus Test for the Democratic Constitutional State'*</li> </ul>
	Thursday (9/22)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Daniel Markovits, 'Democratic Disobedience'*</li> </ul>
	Friday (9/23) * Optional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alex Gourevitch (Brown University), 'Why Strikes are More (and Less) Dangerous than Civil Disobedience'. 404 Morrill Hall. 12pm.</li> </ul>
	Tuesday (9/27)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Luis Cabrera, 'Mobile Global Citizens'*</li> </ul>

<u>C. The Function of Civil Disobedience</u>	Thursday (9/29)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>Short Essay due in class.</b></li> <li>• Plato, <i>Apology</i>, in <i>The Trial and Death of Socrates</i></li> </ul>
	Tuesday (10/4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Etienne de la Boetie, <i>Discourse on Voluntary Servitude</i>*</li> </ul>
	Thursday (10/6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hannah Arendt, <i>Eichmann in Jerusalem</i>, pp. 21-55, 135-150*</li> </ul>
	Tuesday (10/11)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>FALL BREAK. NO CLASS.</b></li> </ul>
	Thursday (10/13)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hannah Arendt, 'Civil Disobedience'</li> </ul>
	Tuesday (10/18)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hannah Arendt, 'Civil Disobedience'</li> <li>• George Kateb, 'Political Action: Its Nature and Advantages'</li> </ul>
	Thursday (10/20)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lisa Guenter, 'Political Action at the End of the World: Hannah Arendt and the California Prison Hunger Strikes'</li> </ul>
<u>D. Civility</u>	Tuesday (10/25)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Linda Zerilli, 'Against Civility: A Feminist Perspective'</li> <li>• Dora Apel, 'Hands Up, Don't Shoot: Surrendering Liberal Illusions'</li> </ul>
	Thursday (10/27)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cristina Beltran, 'Undocumented, Unafraid, and Unapologetic: DREAM Activists, Immigrants Politics, and the Queering of Democracy'</li> </ul>
	Friday (10/28) * Optional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Erin Pineda (University of Chicago), 'Civil Disobedience, Civil Rights, and American Exceptionalism'. 404 Morrill Hall. 12pm.</li> </ul>
<u>E. Punishment</u>	Tuesday (11/1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• William Scheuerman, 'Whistleblowing as Civil Disobedience: The Case of Edward Snowden'</li> </ul>
	Thursday (11/3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Erin Pineda, 'Civil Disobedience and Punishment: (Mis)Reading Justification and Strategy from SNCC to Snowden'</li> </ul>

<u>F. Nonviolence</u>	Tuesday (11/8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mahatma Gandhi, <i>The Essential Gandhi</i>, pp. 341-373</li> <li>• Mahatma Gandhi, 'The Doctrine of the Sword'*</li> <li>• Mahatma Gandhi, 'The Jews'*</li> <li>• Mahatma Gandhi, 'Some Questions Answered'*</li> </ul>
	Thursday (11/10)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>Research Prospectus due in class</b></li> <li>• Robert F. Williams, <i>Negroes with Guns</i>, pp. 110-125*</li> <li>• Martin Luther King, Jr., 'Black Power'*</li> </ul>
	Tuesday (11/15)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raven Rokia, 'Black Riot'*</li> <li>• Etienne Balibar, 'Uprisings in the Banlieues'*</li> </ul>
	Tuesday (11/17)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maria J. Stephan and Erica Chenoweth, 'Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict'*</li> </ul>
	Friday (11/18) *Optional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brandon Terry (Harvard University), 'TBA' 404 Morrill Hall. Time TBA</li> </ul>
<u>G. Digital Disobedience</u>	Tuesday (11/22)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Molly Sauter, <i>The Coming Swarm</i>, pp. 1-75</li> </ul>
	Thursday (11/24)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Thanksgiving NO CLASS</b></li> </ul>
	Tuesday (11/29)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Molly Sauter, <i>The Coming Swarm</i>, pp. 76-162</li> </ul>
	Thursday (12/1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• William Scheuerman, 'Digital Disobedience and the Law'*</li> <li>• Robin Celikates and Daniel de Zeeuw, 'Botnet Politics, Algorithmic Resistance and Hacking Society'*</li> </ul>
	Tuesday (12/6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>Final Research paper due.</b> Submit a hardcopy by 12pm to 215 White Hall</li> </ul>