Course Description:

In this seminar, we will explore political action by the largest group of ordinary people in the world -- peasants. Substantively, our topics will range from “everyday forms of resistance,” to nonviolent collective action to outright defiance and insurgency. We will consider work both in the moral economy and the choice-theoretic traditions. We will follow protest activity (mainly in developing countries) from the decision by the first activists to defy authority, through efforts to recruit (or frighten away) potential supporters, to final outcomes. Efforts will be made to draw on theoretical insights and empirical studies conducted by political scientists, historians, sociologists, anthropologists, and historians.

Books available for purchase:


2) E. J. Hobsbawm, Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries (Norton, 1965)

3) Kevin J. O’Brien and Lianjiang Li, Rightful Resistance in Rural China (Cambridge, 2006)


7) James C. Scott and Nina Bhatt (eds.), Agrarian Studies: Synthetic Work at the Cutting Edge (Yale, 2001)


9) Richard Wunderli, Peasant Fires: The Drummer of Niklashausen (Indiana, 1992)

These books are also on reserve at the Main Library. A reader, containing all the other readings listed on the syllabus that are not available on the web, will be made available for individual student photocopying at the first class meeting.

Course Requirements:

3 seminar papers--Due Monday night at 5pm of the three weeks for which a student is responsible. (Copies should be e-mailed to each seminar member and to the instructor). Each paper (approx. 3-4
double-spaced pages) should critically engage the readings assigned for that week. Students may focus on gaps or conflicts in one (or more) reading and may bring in relevant material from other courses. The purpose of these papers is to stimulate class discussion. Papers should not be a summary but rather an effort to highlight an important point, a methodological issue, and/or an assumption that underlies or permeates the reading(s). Efforts should be made to explore ways in which the reading relate to each other and how they help us improve our understanding of politics. During class, each author should be ready to answer questions about the papers and amplify points s/he raised. Hint: When preparing, pretend you are an overburdened student racing to figure out “why this book is so important” the night before your general exams. You might also consider how the readings speak to other areas of political science or peasant politics with which you are familiar (30% of course grade).

2 essays -- The instructor will distribute several essay questions near the end of the semester. Each student will choose two of these questions and will write two 8-10 page essays (2000-2500 words) to be handed in at the scheduled exam time. Most questions will require comparing and contrasting and will typically draw several readings together. Essays should not simply repeat or summarize the readings. Students are allowed (with the instructor’s permission) to replace the questions provided with questions of their own choice. Each essay will count for 20% of the student’s final course grade. Students may also, with the instructor’s permission, replace the final exam with a research paper on a suitable topic.

Class participation--All students will be expected to participate in class discussions and to come to class prepared to consider the seminar papers for that week. (30% of course grade)

**Week 1) Introduction and Ground Rules**

**Part I – Classics**

**Week 2) Who are Peasants? How do Rural People Resist Power?**

E. J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, Chapters 1-6


Seminar Papers:
1) 2) 3)

**Week 3) Rural Collective Violence: Competitive, Reactive, and Proactive Contention**


Charles Tilly, “Contentious Repertoires in Great Britain, 1758-1834,” *Social Science History* Vol. 17, No. 2 (Summer 1993): 253-80. (moving away from competitive, reactive, proactive classification scheme and defending attention to “repertoires”) (on web)

Elizabeth J. Perry, “Rural Violence in Socialist China,” China Quarterly, No. 103 (September 1985): 414-40. (applying the competitive, reactive, proactive framework to one case) (on web)

Seminar Papers:
1) 2) 3)

**Week 4) The Moral Economy Perspective**

James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant* (entire but skim more empirical parts)

Seminar Papers:
1) 2) 3)

**Week 5) Rational Peasants?**

Samuel Popkin, *The Rational Peasant: The Political Economy of Rural Society in Vietnam*, Chapters 1, 2, 6 (read closely), Chapters 3, 4, 5 (read more quickly)


Seminar Papers:
1) 2) 3)

**Week 6) Everyday Resistance**


Empirical Studies (focus on theory over details of specific cases):


Seminar Papers:
1) 2) 3)

**Week 7) Interpreting Peasant Tales and Popular Rituals**

Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre And Other Episodes in French Cultural History*, pp. 3-106.

Seminar Papers:
1) 2) 3)

**Part II – New Issues and Approaches**

**Week 8) Transnational Agrarian Movements and Globalization**

Special Issue of *Journal of Agrarian Change*, Vol. 7, Nos. 2 and 3 (April and July 2008): 169-514 (focus on the approach and theory, work through empirics quickly) (on web)

Seminar Papers:
1) 2) 3)

**Week 9) Agrarian Studies: Interdisciplinary Work, Multiple Voices, and Getting Beyond Resistance**

James C. Scott and Nina Bhatt (eds.), *Agrarian Studies: Synthetic Work at the Cutting Edge* (Yale, 2001) (entire)

Seminar Papers:
1) 2) 3)

**Part III – Empirical Studies**

**Week 10) Power Without Organization: Chinese and Vietnamese Peasants and De-Collectivization**

Daniel Kelliher, *Peasant Power in China*, Chapters 2 and 9 (in reader)


Lucien Bianco, ”Weak Weapons,” in *Peasants Without the Party*, chapter 13 (in reader)

David Zweig, “Rural People, the Politicians, and Power,” *China Journal* 38 (July 1997): 153-68 (on web)


Seminar Papers:
Week 11) Rightful Resistance


Seminar Papers:
1) 2) 3)

Week 12) Civil War


Seminar Papers:
1) 2) 3)

Week 13) Peasant Resistance and Religion

Richard Wunderli, *Peasant Fires* (entire)

Seminar Papers:
1) 2) 3)

Week 14) Statelessness


Seminar Papers:
1) 2) 3)

Week 15) Catch Up or Makeup For Instructor Out-of-Town

Scheduled Exam Day and Time – Take-Home Exam or Research Paper Due!