

Race, Caste, and the University: B. R. Ambedkar at Columbia BC3825/GR 6998

B. R. Ambedkar is arguably one of Columbia University's most illustrious alumni, and a democratic thinker and constitutional lawyer who had enormous impact in shaping India, the world's largest democracy. As is well known, Ambedkar came to Columbia University in July 1913 to start a doctoral program in Political Science. He graduated in 1915 with a Masters degree, and got his doctorate from Columbia in 1927 after having studied with some of the great figures of interwar American thought including Edwin Seligman, James Shotwell, Harvey Robinson, and John Dewey.

This course follows the model of the Columbia University and Slavery course and draws extensively on the relevant holdings and resources of Columbia's RBML, [Rare Books and Manuscript Library] Burke Library (Union Theological Seminar), and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture among others to explore a set of relatively understudied links between Ambedkar, Columbia University, and the intellectual history of the interwar period. Themes include: the development of the disciplines at Columbia University and their relationship to new paradigms of social scientific study; the role of historical comparison between caste and race in producing new models of scholarship and political solidarity; links between figures such as Ambedkar, Lala Lajpat Rai, W. E. B. Du Bois and others who were shaped by the distinctive public and political culture of New York City, and more.

This is a hybrid course which aims to create a finding aid for B. R. Ambedkar that traverses RBML private papers. Students will engage in a number of activities towards that purpose. They will attend multiple instructional sessions at the RBML to train students in using archives; they will make public presentations on their topics, which will be archived in video form; and students will produce digital essays on a variety of themes and topics related to the course. Students will work collaboratively in small groups and undertake focused archival research.

This seminar inaugurates an on-going, multiyear effort to grapple with globalizing the reach and relevance of B. R. Ambedkar and to share our findings with the Columbia community and beyond. Working independently, students will define and pursue individual research projects. Working together, the class will create digital visualizations of these projects.

Learning Outcomes

- Understanding the relationship between archive, evidence, and subaltern or understudied history with specific focus on locally available institutional archives. Students will thus learn to evaluate the nature of archival evidence, to work laterally across different kinds of evidence, and to construct a new archive from existing documents.

- Learning about the history of caste and race as these were shaped analytically by disciplines, individuals and global contexts of transmission and engagement, while fore-fronting the unique and underexplored relationship between Columbia University, the cities of New York and Bombay/Mumbai, the idea of democracy as it took shape globally, and B. R. Ambedkar.
- Learning collaboratively and digitally to develop methods in the digital humanities for presenting research in new formats.

Breakdown of Grades:

a) Research Paper: Using primary and secondary sources, students will each research and write a 25-page paper on an aspect of the relationship between Columbia University, New York city, and B. R. Ambedkar. Students will work with faculty support to investigate a topic of their choosing. Research will be conducted at Columbia University's Rare Book & Manuscript Library and other relevant repositories in the metropolitan area. Students should expect to devote at least one morning or afternoon each week to working on the research project.

This final paper will constitute 30% of your grade.

b) Digital Project: Over the course of the semester, we will collectively participate in the creation of a website on the history of Columbia University and Ambedkar. This project will combine digitized archival exhibitions with visualizations of historical data. For example, you might want to create a map that shows Ambedkar's time in New York and the course he took during this time. You might want to map the area of Columbia, Morningside and Harlem between 110 and 116th streets, so that we can see the distances between the University and various social justice associations in Harlem, as well as people associated with them. To support this work, we will learn how to create and structure a digital repository, examine the standards for creating metadata, and consider different ways to visualize and interpret our sources. The creation and use of archival metadata is the key mechanism by which unique historical artifacts, texts, and images become usable in a digital platform context. These skills will be useful to students beyond the boundaries of the course.

We will be using an archival curation platform tailored to create digital exhibitions of archival objects. The final project will be accomplished in a series of interim steps. These waypoints will develop skills and content necessary for the completion of the end product. Finished digital projects will be evaluated for accurate representation of historical evidence, creative use of sources, and the relationship between digital presentation and theoretical argument.

The digital project will comprise 30% of your grade.

c) Class Participation including Public Presentation (25%)

d) Weekly Assignments such as brief postings as students work towards their final projects (15%)

Academic integrity

Scholarship, by its very nature, is an iterative process, with ideas and insights building one upon the other. Collaborative scholarship requires the study of other scholars' work, the free discussion of such work, and the explicit acknowledgement of those ideas in any work that inform our own. This exchange of ideas relies upon a mutual trust that sources, opinions, facts, and insights will be properly noted and carefully credited.

In practical terms, this means that, as students, you must be responsible for the full citations of others' ideas in all of your research papers and projects; you must be scrupulously honest when taking your examinations; you must always submit your own work and not that of another student, scholar, or internet agent.

Any breach of this intellectual responsibility is a breach of faith with the rest of our academic community. It undermines our shared intellectual culture, and it cannot be tolerated. Plagiarism or dishonesty and unethical behavior is unacceptable and you will face punitive measures. Students failing to meet these responsibilities should anticipate being asked to leave Barnard, or Columbia.

For further information, please refer to the *Barnard Honor Code*:

“We, the students of Barnard College, resolve to uphold the honor of the College by engaging with integrity in all of our academic pursuits. We affirm that academic integrity is the honorable creation and presentation of our own work. We acknowledge that it is our responsibility to seek clarification of proper forms of collaboration and use of academic resources in all assignments or exams. We consider academic integrity to include the proper use and care for all print, electronic, or other academic resources. We will respect the rights of others to engage in pursuit of learning in order to uphold our commitment to honor. We pledge to do all that is in our power to create a spirit of honesty and honor for its own sake. “established 1912, updated 2016.

Classroom Etiquette constitutes best practices of your academic and social lives: be considerate in class; listen well; interact with respect and compassion; and turn off your phone.

Disability-Related Accommodations:

In order to receive disability-related academic accommodations, students must first be registered with Disability Services (DS) Faculty must be notified of registered students' accommodations before exam or other accommodations will be provided. Students who have (or think they may have) a disability are invited to contact Disability Services for a confidential discussion.

If you believe you may encounter barriers to the academic environment due to a documented disability or emerging health challenges, please feel free to contact me and/or the Center for Accessibility Resources & Disability Services (CARDS).

Any student with approved academic accommodations is encouraged to contact me during office hours or via email. If you have questions regarding registering a disability or receiving accommodations for the semester, please contact CARDS at (212) 854-4634, cards@barnard.edu, or learn more: barnard.edu/disabilityservices. CARDS is located in 101 Altschul Hall

OR

disability@columbia.edu

Recommended Texts:

Note: Readings marked with * will be provided as PDF

The texts below should accompany specified readings, and function as guides to the social historical context of the period. They are on order at Book Cutlure.

Robert McCaughey, *Stand Columbia*

Daniel Rogers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age*

Sharon Egretta Sutton, *When Ivory Towers Were Black: A Story about Race in America's Cities and Universities* New York: Fordham University Press 2017.

Nico Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism*

Robert Vitalis, *White World Order, Black Power Politics: The Birth of American International Relations*, 1-23. Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 2015

SYLLABUS

Please Note: Essays are listed in the order in which I would like them to be read, and not in alphabetical order.

Week One

Introductory Session with Prof. Thai Jones and Tommy Song (student researcher and TA) for a discussion of Ambedkar-related holdings at the Rare Books and Manuscripts Library and research template for the course

For a model of what we are trying to do:

a) Columbia and Slavery website: <https://columbiaandslavery.columbia.edu>

b) The LSE digital archive is here: <https://digital.library.lse.ac.uk/browse#beaver>. There is a section on “Fabian Society and the Young Fabians,” which contains a number of digitized Fabian tracts from Ambedkar’s time at the school. A handful of the publications deal directly with India (“Problems of Indian Poverty,” etc.). While Ambedkar may not be mentioned directly in the documents, the collection gives a good sense of the kind of education he received at the LSE.

c) Example of an essay using RBML:

<https://www.borderlines-ssaaame.org/posts/2020/1/31/b-r-ambedkar-and-the-study-of-religion-at-columbia-universit>

Readings:

Fran Pritchett’s online site on B. R. Ambedkar (biography, writings, time@Columbia)

<http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00ambedkar/timeline/index.html>

V. Geetha, “Unpacking a Library”

<https://thewire.in/caste/unpacking-library-babasaheb-ambedkar-world-books>

Ambedkar’s journalism, *Mooknayak*, started January 31, 1920:

The Hindu, February 01, 2020

<https://www.thehindu.com/books/in-a-tower-without-a-staircase-an-extract-from-the-inaugural-issue-of-br-ambedkars-journal-mooknayak/article30700662.ece>

Prabodhan Pol, The Wire, January 31, 2020

<https://thewire.in/media/mooknayak-ambedkar-newspaper>

Goldy M George, Countercurrents.org, January 31, 2020

<https://countercurrents.org/2020/01/ambedkars-ideological-journalism-in-a-brahminical-republic-100-years-of-ambedkars-journalism>

Exactly 100 years ago Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar started his first newspaper named *Mooknayak* on 31 January 1920. Once Ambedkar entered into the world of newspapers as a journalist in 1920, it continued over the period of next 36 years with some breaks in between. *Mooknayak* ceased publication in April 1923 due to financial crisis and a dispute between Ambedkar and Gholap. Closure of *Mooknayak*, didn’t prevent Ambedkar from pursuing his journalistic fervour. He went on to establish three more newspapers – *Bahishkrut Bharat* (1927-1929), *Samta* which was later renamed as *Janata* (1928-56), and *Prabuddha Bharat* (1956). Both *Bahishkrut Bharat* and *Janata* were fortnightly, while *Prabuddha Bharat* was a weekly.

Week Two: The Problem of Biography

*Session at the Empirical Research and Learning Center (Barnard) on thinking digitally

*Discussion on the problem of biography (comparing different iterations of Ambedkar's "biography")

Readings:

**Dhananjay Keer, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Life and Mission* (Selections will be provided as PDF, book is out of print)

*Eleanor Zelliot, *Ambedkar's World* (Selections)

*Nanak Chand Rattu, *Reminiscences and Remembrance of B. R. Ambedkar* (Selections will be provided as PDF, book is out of print)

Discussion of Khairmode's 12-volume biography of Ambedkar by Prof. Rao

Week Three: Interwar American Intellectual Culture (Race and Caste)

Daniel Immerwahr, "Caste or Colony? Indianizing Race in the United States," *Modern Intellectual History*, 4, 2 (2007), pp. 275–301

<http://faculty.wcas.northwestern.edu/daniel-immerwahr/Caste%20or%20Colony%20%28MIH%20pdf%29.pdf>

Nico Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism* (selections)

Jesus Chairez, "B. R. Ambedkar, Franz Boas, and the Rejection of Racial Theories of Untouchability," *South Asia*, Vol. 41, #2, 2018, pp. 281-296

*Kamala Visweswaran, *Uncommon Cultures* (selection on Franz Boas, caste and race)

Recommended:

Atlantic Crossings (select chapters)

Week Four: Interwar American Intellectual Culture

Arun Prabha Mukherjee, "B. R. Ambedkar, John Dewey, and the Meaning of Democracy," *New Literary History*, 2009

Scott Stroud, select essays on Dewey and Ambedkar

*Gail Omvedt, *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution* (discussion of the radical 1930s, and Ambedkar's *Janata*)

*Tejas Parasher, "Ambedkar and Social Democracy," in Anupama Rao and Shailaja Paik eds. *Cambridge Companion to Ambedkar* (forthcoming)

Madeleine Woker, "Edwin Seligman, Initiator of Global Public Finance," *Journal of Global History*, Volume 13, Issue 3, November 2018, pp. 352-373

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-global-history/article/edwin-seligman-initiator-of-global-progressive-public-finance/02C6F41727B71445657F0DAB0F3DDE62>

Week Five: Research

Metadata Task Due

Instructional Session with Thai Jones

Week Six: City and Social Difference

You will take the Alternative Tour of CU campus on your own

Vivek Bald, *Bengali Harlem* [excerpts]

*G. R. Pradhan, *Untouchable Workers of Bombay City* (with Foreword by B. R. Ambedkar), Bombay: Karnatak Press, 1938

Anupama Rao, "Introduction," *Memoirs of a Dalit Communist: The Many Worlds of R. B. More*. New Delhi: Leftword, 2019.

*G. K. Gaonkar, *Socio-Cultural Study of the Labour Community in Greater Bombay with Special Reference to BDD Chawls are Delisle Road* (MA Thesis, 1959) excerpts

Week Seven: Initial Presentation of Topics

Having met with instructor, students will each present a five-minute summary of their topic and research plan. These reports will include a working thesis, a description of how the work will add to our knowledge of the history of Columbia and slavery, and a bibliography of primary and secondary sources.

Instructional Session with Thai Jones

Week Eight: City and Social Difference (contd.)

Juned Shaikh, "Imaging Caste," *South Asia*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2014: 491-514.

W. E. B. Du Bois's *Data Portraits: Visualizing Black America* (excerpts)

Saidiya Hartman, "The Terrible Beauty of the Slum," *Brick*
<https://brickmag.com/the-terrible-beauty-of-the-slum/>

Oliver Cox, *Caste, Class and Race@70*
<https://www.publicbooks.org/caste-class-and-race-70/>

Ramani, film on the BDD Chawls

Week Nine: Digital Group Task Due

Instructional Session with Thai Jones

Week Ten: Ambedkar's Religion

Gitanjali Surendran, "The Rediscovery of Buddhism in India," in Rao and Paik eds. *Cambridge Companion to Ambedkar* (forthcoming)

Aakash Singh Rathore and Ajay Verma eds. . Delhi: Oxford University Press
The Buddha and His Dhamma: A Critical Edition

Scott Stroud on textual differences between Ambedkar's *Buddha and His Gospel* and *The Buddha and His Dhamma*

Discussion of D. T. Suzuki private papers@Burke

Week Eleven: The Indian University and Intellectual Emancipation

Aniket Jaaware, "The Subaltern Student in the Classroom"

Ajantha Subramaniam, *The Caste of Merit* (excerpts)

Deepa Dhanraj's film on Rohith Vemula

Invited Speaker, Gaurav Pathania, Georgetown

Recommended:

Emejulu, Akwugo. "[Another University is Possible](#)." Verso blog, 12 January 2017.

Pluto Press: "Radicals in Conversation," [Episode 12: Decolonising the University](#),
Gurminder Bhambra and Dalia Gebrial in conversation, 20 August 2018.

Weeks Twelve and Thirteen: Presentation of Final Projects

Week Fourteen: Final Digital Project Due

Final Research Paper Due
(end of reading week)

Additional policies and information:

Affordable Access to Course Texts Statement

All students deserve to be able to access course texts. The high costs of textbooks and other course materials prohibit access and perpetuate inequity, and Barnard librarians are partnering with students, faculty, and staff to increase access. By the first day of advance

registration for each term, you should be able to view on CourseWorks information provided by your faculty about required texts (including ISBN or author, title, publisher and copyright date) and their prices. Once you have selected your classes, here are some cost-free methods for accessing course texts, recommended by the Barnard Library. I have placed the texts on reserve at Barnard Library, otherwise look for course texts using CLIO (library catalog), Borrow Direct (request books from partner libraries), Interlibrary Loan(request book chapters from any library), and NYPL. Students with financial need or insecurity can check items out from the FLIP lending libraries in the Barnard Library and Butler Library and can consult with the Dean of Studies and the Financial Aid Office about additional affordable alternatives for getting access to course texts. Talk with your librarian and visit the Barnard Library Textbook Affordability guide(library.barnard.edu/textbook-affordability) for more details.

Class Attendance Policy

Be punctual: respect means also to be timely. I will tolerate up to 10 minutes of delay. If such delay becomes recurrent, it will affect your grade. Class discussion and participation are a fundamental component of this class. Do not miss class! Your grades will be affected. If needed, please justify your absence in advance.

Late assignments

Assignments that are overdue will not be accepted. Exceptions must be certified by medical evidence. If you have any specific concern about meeting a deadline for an assignment, you should contact me at least three days in advance for an extension.