COURSE DETAIL

ATLANTIC AND GLOBAL HISTORY OF MODERN POLITICAL CONCEPTS
Country Italy
Host Institution University of Bologna
Program(s) University of Bologna
UCEAP Course Level Upper Division
UCEAP Subject Area(s) History European Studies
UCEAP Course Number 114
UCEAP Course Suffix
UCEAP Official Title ATLANTIC AND GLOBAL HISTORY OF MODERN POLITICAL CONCEPTS
UCEAP Transcript Title ATLANTIC HIST & POL
UCEAP Quarter Units 6.00
UCEAP Semester Units 4.00

Course Description

This course is part of the Laurea Magistrale degree program and is intended for advanced level students. Enrollment is by permission of the instructor. At the end of the course, students have the methodological and theoretical tools of 'Atlantic History,' which redefines the spatial limits of modern politics, considering Europe, Africa, and the Americas as part of one and the same global experience. This perspective, well-developed in North American universities, is extended to the history of political concepts, with a special attention to antagonistic political cultures and resistance movements, but also to the colonial dimension embedded in the great classics of modern and contemporary political thought. The course deals with the history of modern political thought, with a special focus on the development of fundamental concepts such as sovereignty, state, rights, property and war, in a global perspective, which assumes the opening of the new Atlantic political space and the problems involved in European expansion overseas as a crucial background for understanding the emergence of new discursive strategies and new political categories in the early modern age.

After an initial lecture designed to provide a general overview of the methodology, the subsequent weeks of classes are divided into three distinct but interconnected units. The first unit deals with the theoretical and methodological tools of conceptual history and its redefinition from a global and oceanic perspective. It is argued that the history of concepts has provided an essential framework for understanding and criticizing the foundations of modern politics, but the Eurocentric coordinates underlying the traditional versions of this approach must be radically revised in order to grasp the genealogy of our global present. The second unit addresses the emergence of the Atlantic space and its distinctive phenomena and actors as a decisive factor of historical transformation that radically displaced the traditional coordinates of politics. On this basis, the development of a new political framework and the modern theory of state sovereignty is understood as a response to this crucial challenge. This is illustrated through a close reading and discussion of relevant passages from classical thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Thomas Paine. The third unit offers a spatial reading of the work of the legal scholar Hugo Grotius in the light of

the perspective outlined in the first two units. Grotius – who has been traditionally considered one of the founding fathers of modern international law and modern maritime law, but who was also a crucial figure in the context of the creation of the Dutch "seaborne" empire in the East and West Indies – constitutes a compelling case study because his legal and political theory can be situated in a transitional moment between the medieval and humanist tradition on the one hand and the emergence of a modern outlook on the other, while reflecting the entanglements between states and colonies, land and sea, the territorialized order of sovereignty, and the fluid power of commercial empires and trading companies. An analysis of his work can therefore allow us both to grasp the complex origins and characteristics of modern political space and to elucidate the global genealogy of European modernity.

Language(s) of Instruction
English

Host Institution Course Number
81719

Host Institution Course Title
ATLANTIC AND GLOBAL HISTORY OF MODERN POLITICAL CONCEPTS (1) (LM)

Host Institution Course Details
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Host Institution Campus
BOLOGNA

Host Institution Faculty

Host Institution Degree
LM in GLOBAL CULTURES

Host Institution Department
History and Cultures

Course Last Reviewed
2025-2026

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