

LP² STUDY GROUP PROPOSAL FOR FALL 2022

THE NEW YORK REVIEW OF BOOKS DISCUSSION GROUP

Coordinator: Howard Levi

The New York Review of Books is one of the premier intellectual periodicals in the U.S. With an array of highly accomplished and renowned writers and scholars, its issues brim with luminous book reviews and essays on topics as varied as history, art, politics, literature, social issues, and science, among others. We will do a close read of *NYRB* articles (mainly from its extensive archive) on a wide variety of subjects, focusing on two or so pieces per session. We will occasionally supplement articles with additional (non-*NYRB*) readings. And we hope to have a guest speaker.

[**N.B.** An *NYRB* study group was offered for several years until 2020 by a different coordinator; this *NYRB* study group will differ somewhat in form and approach.]

Howard Levi is a retired attorney. He founded a *New York Review of Books* reading group in 2010, which still regularly meets.

Type of Study Group: Mostly discussion.

Readings and other Materials/Online Services:

Members will be provided access to the assigned *NYRB* articles. Additional (non-*NYRB*) readings, when assigned, will be distributed by the coordinator.

******* SYLLABUS - A WORK IN PROGRESS *******

WEEK 1

TOPICS: History/Race; Art/Intellectual History

History/Race (comparing Germany's working through of its Nazi past with America's working through of its legacy of slavery and Jim Crow);

Art/Intellectual History (art and thought in the West during the Cold War).

READINGS:

"A Heritage of Evil" by Michael Gorra, (11/7/19, reviewing *Learning from the Germans: Race and the Memory of Evil* by Susan Neiman; a book on the South today; and a book on Emmett Till);

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“Freedom for Sale” by Fintan O’Toole, (7/22/21, reviewing *The Free World: Art and Thought in the Cold War* by Louis Menand).

QUESTIONS:

Gorra article: Has Germany been more successful in confronting its past than the U.S.? If so, why, and what would it take to have America emulate the German example?

O’Toole article: Do you agree with Menand’s assertion about the role that the Cold War played in American art in the 1950s and 1960s? What explains why the idea that the artist should disappear and become anonymous never took hold?

WEEK 2

TOPICS: Literature/Public Intellectuals; Crime and Justice

Literature/Public Intellectuals (Camus and Algeria);

Crime and Justice (mass incarceration in the U.S.)

READINGS:

“Camus & Algeria: The Moral Question” by Claire Messud, (11/7/13, reviewing *Algerian Chronicles* by Albert Camus);

“Less Punishment, More Justice” by David Cole, (7/23/20, reviewing two books on mass incarceration).

QUESTIONS:

Messud article: Was Camus’s stance on Algeria an instance of moral purity, as Messud asserts? Does Camus’s position on Algeria present any lessons for our time?

Cole article: Do you agree with Cole’s critique of the American system of incarceration? Do you agree with his prescriptions for reform?

WEEK 3

TOPICS: Architecture; Technology

Architecture (Philip Johnson);

Technology (Artificial Intelligence)

READINGS:

“Prince of the City” by Martin Filler, (12/22/94, reviewing four books on architect Philip Johnson);

“The Human Costs of AI” by Sue Halpern, (10/21/21, reviewing three books on artificial intelligence).

QUESTIONS:

Filler article: Do you agree with Filler’s assessment of Johnson’s architectural output? Could a figure like Johnson attain the same acclaim

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today as he did in his time?

Halpern article: Is Halpern evenhanded in her assessment of AI's benefits and downsides? What kind of future for AI do you foresee?

READINGS FOR WEEK 4 to WEEK 6:

Additional *New York Review of Books* articles

WEEK 4: Memoir; Philosophy

WEEK 5: Music; Science

WEEK 6: Economics; Politics

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