

Nathan Sayre

*Nathan Sayre: Reflections on James C. Scott and
the Program in Agrarian Studies at Yale University*

The Yale Agrarian Studies Oral History Project

Interviews conducted by
Todd Holmes
in 2019

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Nathan Sayre

Abstract

Nathan Sayre is a professor of geography at the University of California, Berkeley. He first encountered James C. Scott as an undergraduate when he enrolled in Scott's Peasant Politics and Revolution course. In this interview, Sayre discusses his recollections of that course and Scott's pedagogy as a teacher; the impact of the Agrarian Studies Program; and his reflections on Scott's work in the social sciences.

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Project history

By Todd Holmes
November 25, 2020
Berkeley, California

Since its inception in 1953, the Oral History Center of The Bancroft Library at UC Berkeley has been responsible for compiling one of the largest and most widely used oral history collections in the country. The interviewees within this vast collection include many of the nation's high-profile citizens, ranging from senators and governors to artists, actors, and industrialists. And standing among this distinguished list is an equally impressive group of scholars. As a research unit based at UC Berkeley, the Oral History Center (OHC) has long gained rare access to the academy and ultimately built one of the richest oral history collections on higher education and intellectual history. Interviews with Nobel laureates and university presidents fill this collection, as do those with leading scientists and pioneering faculty of color. In recent years, the OHC has sought to further expand this interview collection with ambitious projects on University of Chicago economists and the founding generation of Chicana/o studies. Thus, a project on the famed Yale University political scientist, James C. Scott, and his equally renowned Program in Agrarian Studies stood as an obvious choice in these efforts and a fitting addition to the Bancroft collection. The result was the Yale Agrarian Studies Oral History Project, a two-part series featuring the life history of Jim Scott and short interviews with nearly twenty affiliates of the Yale Agrarian Studies Program.

Part I of the series, "James C. Scott: Agrarian Studies and Over 50 Years of Pioneering Work in the Social Sciences," was released in September 2020, marking Jim's final year at Yale and the thirtieth year of the Program in Agrarian Studies. This collection of interviews with program affiliates represents Part II of the project, aptly titled, "Reflections on James C. Scott and the Agrarian Studies Program." Here affiliates relate their experience with Jim and the program, helping to document the history and impact of Agrarian Studies, as well as offer future generations a glimpse at the scholar who shaped it. As Scott himself described their approach:

This is a sort of sermon I give actually, which is, you know how the health food people say, "You are what you eat"? Well, you are what you read. And if we can encourage students to read things broadly in several disciplines bearing on their interests, and force them, as we do in the Agrarian Studies Program, to make sense across disciplinary boundaries and leave behind their esoteric vocabularies of their own little discipline; if you're reading across disciplines, if you have friends across disciplines, you're going to be an interdisciplinary scholar. . . . So, you are what you read and you are who your intellectual companions are, and if we can change that . . . we can at least make a step toward real interdisciplinary work.

For the last three decades, this interdisciplinary spirit has made the rooms of the Program in Agrarian Studies at Yale University one of the most exciting intellectual ecosystems in the academy. For both the humanities and social sciences, the program has served as a haven for heterodoxy, where casting aside boundaries and going against the grain not only proved to be the norm but a rite of passage. Officially founded by Jim Scott and collaborators in the fall of 1991,

the program brought a critical and interdisciplinary lens to the everyday experience of rural societies. With the world as its intellectual playground and the sweep of history as its scope, the Program in Agrarian Studies became *the* place for cutting-edge research. Anthropologists, historians, and political scientists filled the rooms of the weekly colloquium, as did sociologists, activists, and real-life farmers. The topics of discussion stood just as diverse. From peasant revolts in France and ancient Roman cuisine to dam-building in India and the industrial foodways of American agribusiness, nearly any topic of interest found a place within the big tent of Agrarian Studies. Few could have realized in the fall of 1991 that the newly minted program would not only last thirty years but also come to shape over two generations of scholarship and redefine the notion of interdisciplinary work.

The interviews included in this volume take stock of the program's history and achievements. They discuss how the team-taught graduate seminar, Agrarian Societies, proved the springboard for the program when first offered in 1990. The unprecedented student turnout for the course revealed an unfeigned appetite for such topics to Jim and collaborating faculty. To this day, the course continues to consistently boast the largest student enrollment of any graduate seminar at Yale. The interviews also offer highlights of the program's renowned Friday colloquium, a weekly forum that for over three decades has hosted leading scholars from around the world. Here cutting-edge research is presented to the group in a format that would become as famed as the program's founder. Unlike the typical academic lecture series, presenters at Agrarian Studies were asked to pre-circulate their papers, and after a brief framing and introduction, sit silently while the group discussed. After an hour, the author would then be "ungagged" and join the discussion, directing their responses to whatever they deemed most interesting and relevant. To be sure, it was a format that fostered vibrant intellectual exchange, one that often proved to be fruitful for authors and attendees alike. In his oral history, Jim Scott recounts how his adoption of the colloquium format was based on the Women's Studies Program at the University of Wisconsin, where he taught between 1967 and 1976. And if imitation is the best flattery, it should be noted that it was a format well-copied by other colloquia and programs around the world.

As the interviews in this volume also attest, Agrarian Studies was more than just a seminar and colloquium; it was an intellectual community. From Friday lunches to evening potlucks at his farm, Jim Scott understood the bonds that could be built over a good meal and conversation. He not only built this understanding into the program but would also generously open his home to guests and affiliates throughout the year. Longtime affiliates such as Bob Harms, Helen Siu, Michael Dove, Peter Purdue, and Paul Freedman (just to name a few) also played vital roles in the Agrarian Studies community, creating an environment of friendship that transcended disciplines, generations, and one's academic ranking. So too did the program's ever-growing family of postdoctoral fellows. Cared for by program coordinator—and designated "mother hen"—Kay Mansfield, the fellows created a new group of scholars-in-residence each year that offered both a freshness and stability to the program. This fraternity of *Agraristas* also added to the program's diverse and cosmopolitan nature, with the list of fellows representing nearly 40 countries.

Moreover, it is hoped that these interviews with affiliates provide some measure of the program's impact. In the university environment, where academic programs come and go with the changing seasons of disciplinary trends, Agrarian Studies celebrating thirty years of operation is a clear

testament to its continued contribution and importance. These interviews help bring such attributes into clearer focus, as affiliates detail the program's influence on their own work and careers. In some cases, they even discuss efforts to replicate Agrarian Studies in one form or another at their home institutions. Above all, many affiliates offer their observations on the success of Agrarian Studies, namely how a program on rural societies has remained adaptable, relevant, and popular in an ever-changing academic environment. To do so for a decade is an achievement; to do so for thirty years is nothing short of remarkable.

As a graduate student at Yale, I had the privilege of working for the Agrarian Studies Program for four years. That experience left an indelible mark on me, both intellectually and professionally. It also inspired the idea of using oral history to document and capture intellectual history. Reading the works of James C. Scott is much different than having Jim Scott discuss the aims and struggles of writing those works. Thus, the same could be said for capturing the history and importance of programs like Agrarian Studies. I hope the interviews conducted for the project do justice to that intended goal.

Interview 1: February 25, 2019

01-00:00:00

Holmes: All right. This is Todd Holmes with the Oral History Center at UC Berkeley. Today's date is February 25, 2019. I am sitting down with Professor Nathan Sayre for an interview for the Yale Agrarian Studies Oral History Project. We are here at his office in the geography department, McCone Hall, here at the beautiful campus of UC Berkeley. Nathan, thanks so much for sitting down.

01-00:00:33

Sayre: My pleasure.

01-00:00:34

Holmes: As you know, this is for a project on the Agrarian Studies Program at Yale University and its founder James C. Scott. But before we begin on that, why don't you tell us a little bit about yourself and how you came here to Berkeley.

01-00:00:51

Sayre: How I came to Berkeley. I grew up in Iowa City, Iowa. I grew frustrated with high school. I dropped out after spending a summer after my junior year of high school at Deep Springs College as part of a Telluride Association summer program. I went back to Iowa and I just couldn't put up with high school after that. So I dropped out. I went to the University of Michigan for one semester because I thought that would be the ticket. And it was fun but it felt a little bit too much like high school, so I actually applied and went to Deep Springs for two years after that. And then I transferred to Yale. I took a semester off in between and I went to France. I did an immersion language program. I arrived at Yale having just turned twenty-one years old in December of 1989. Got there on the first day. I was a transfer student. Yale doesn't have a lot of transfer students. Turned out they had not told the students in the suite I was supposed to share with them that I was coming and I had an excuse thereby to slip out of campus housing and just get an apartment on my own. So I did two years at Yale without ever being sort of involved with the residential college program and everything that that entails, which is a big part of the life of an undergraduate at Yale. But I was perfectly happy with that. Deep Springs is the smallest school in the country. It's only got twenty-four students. To have a big huge library and a long list of classes and faculty from all over the map that I could take classes with, all I wanted to do was take classes and read.

01-00:02:31

My first semester, one of the classes I signed up for was called "Peasant Politics and Revolution." I actually have the syllabus here. And it was Jim Scott's undergraduate seminar. I honestly don't remember why I found it, or how I found it, or why I signed up for it. But I really enjoyed the class. It was a really formative experience. I did two years at Yale. I was a philosophy major but I took a lot of classes in political science. I participated as an

undergraduate in the Agrarian Studies colloquium pretty regularly for the following year and a half.

01-00:03:21

Then I moved to Arizona and I worked for several years with the Conservation Corps building fences and trails. I sort of wanted not to be a student. Did that for two and a half years. Then I went to the University of Chicago, got a PhD in anthropology. My dissertation project took me back to Arizona. And then I got a postdoc with the Agricultural Research Service out of Las Cruces, New Mexico. That postdoc gave me the time I needed to turn my dissertation into a book, and then I got a job here in the geography department and I've been here ever since. I only ever got two job interviews and they were both at Berkeley [University of California, Berkeley] and one of them I didn't get and one of them I did. So it's the only job I've ever been offered and I'm still here.

01-00:04:11

Holmes:

Well, that's not a bad job to get offered. [laughter]

01-00:04:15

Sayre:

No, it's not bad.

01-00:04:17

Holmes:

Discuss the class a little bit and your first impressions of Jim Scott. That was the spring semester, correct?

01-00:04:27

Sayre:

January of 1990. It met on—here, I can tell you [referencing the class syllabus]—Tuesdays from 1:30 to 3:20. Jim had office hours Tuesday afternoon and Wednesday morning. So, I mean, it's probably worth mentioning Deep Springs is a really small college and all the classes are seminars. So, I came in basically accustomed to really small, really intense seminar-type discussions. And Jim was in his element in that type of context, that kind of format. I don't remember how many students were in the class, probably twelve or fifteen. You know, he's very charismatic and he's very engaged. You could tell that he loved teaching and he loved being able to have a room full of students and really engage them. He told a lot of stories. He had just published *Weapons of the Weak* and he was soon to publish books like *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*. And when that book came out and I looked at it, I was like, "Oh, these are all the stories that Jim Scott tells in seminar." I got the impression that that was sort of his pedagogy, was to captivate students with anecdotes from his own life and his own experience and also great books. I mean, I still remember many of the books that we read.

01-00:06:13

I never got the impression that we were really seeing quite eye-to-eye. I actually had big beefs with the argument that he made in the last chapter of *Weapons of the Weak*. I thought he had totally misread Gramsci. And so I'm like this smart-ass, twenty-one-year-old, full-of-himself kid, and I don't think

he's done justice to Gramsci in the closing chapter of his obviously quite influential book. And it sort of felt that way frequently. I was just looking actually at the comments he wrote and I'll tell this story in a few minutes about the paper I wrote. But he could distinguish between agreement and engagement. He didn't need you to agree, he needed you to engage. And if he disagreed with you, that was just an opportunity to push and to see if you would push back or how you would push back. I think that's part of his genius. He's smart and he's got his ideas and he's very emphatic about his ideas but he's not dogmatic.

And what else? I think it was just once, but it may have been twice, when he invited the class out to his farm and sort of had us out for lunch. I remember him bringing a goose egg to class and like giving it away as a gift to somebody. Yeah. Big personality. Very engaged and dedicated and very, very good teacher. And it's funny, actually. When I published my last book¹ just two years ago now, Jon Christensen, whom you probably know, he was like, "Why don't you talk more about *Seeing Like A State*? This is all about *Seeing Like A State*." And I realized that he's not wrong. There is a lot of stuff in there that is very much a product, or at least affected by the fact that I spent those couple of years in that one seminar and then the Agrarian Studies colloquium. That has had more of an effect on me than I think I even realize because Jon's right. I'm using a lot of those ideas. I'm in dialogue with a lot of those ideas but they have become just so given to me in my take on things that I could do it without even noticing I was doing it, and I could fail to cite him. It probably has happened to him a lot. Hopefully he doesn't hold it against me.

01-00:09:10

Holmes:

[laughter] I don't think he would. The colloquium was also beginning that fall and the program itself was getting off the ground. Discuss your interaction with the colloquium and some of your thoughts and observations.

01-00:09:31

Sayre:

Yeah. I wonder if I don't have the schedule. I might even have that in there, in the filing cabinet somewhere. I mean, there's one in particular that I really, really clearly remember and that was Bill Cronon. On the one hand, it was fantastic because we read the chapter about the Chicago Board of Trade and grain trading. He sent that to us ahead of time and we read it and we discussed. And it was a fascinating conversation and a brilliant chapter, right. And I think Jim gave him a little bit of a hard time about this, but he also sent us the galley proofs. It was done. He'd already finished. There was no opportunity for us to affect the outcome of that writing project by telling him what we thought of it. And I remember there was a sense in the room that like that was a poor use of the format, right. The whole point was to actually

¹ Nathan Sayre, *The Politics of Scale: A History of Rangeland Science* (Chicago, 2017).

enable somebody to improve something and Bill Cronon had sent us something that was already polished and finished and on its way to print.

01-00:10:40

So, I remember feeling lucky to be able to participate because it was clearly a colloquium aimed at graduate students more than undergraduates. Even other faculty more than undergraduates. And I felt like I was lucky that I had taken the undergrad seminar in the spring and so that gave me a kind of entrée to participate. Basically you had to do the reading and you had to show up and listen to the discussion. And it was reliably as good as any class as far as the quality of the dialogue and the readings and so forth. Again, I should probably remember more of the other speakers from that year and a half that I was there before I finished. But I'm old enough now that I've forgotten a lot of the details of college. [laughter] Pardon me.

01-00:11:40

Holmes: [laughter] We all are.

01-00:11:42

Sayre: Yeah, yeah.

01-00:11:44

Holmes: What strikes you about the format? Because that's one of the things that when people look at the Agrarian Studies colloquium it's been a format which has become revered. Jim in his oral history gives us the whole background of where—

01-00:11:58

Sayre: Yeah, where did he come up with that?

01-00:12:00

Holmes: The women studies department at the University of Wisconsin was one influence, and I think there's another influence as well.

01-00:12:10

Sayre: So, they came up with the gagging thing?

01-00:12:11

Holmes: Yeah.

01-00:12:13

Sayre: Okay, okay.

01-00:12:13

Holmes: But what did you think of the gagging and the colloquium format? It was very rare at that time. Now it's been replicated in many places, but Agrarian Studies was certainly unique as far as colloquiums go.

01-00:12:24

Sayre: I don't think I knew enough to really be struck one way or the other by it. Jim was always very demonstrative about it when he introduced it to the speaker.

And he emphasized that it wasn't optional. This was a requirement, right. I had never participated in anything like that kind of a format. So it was just brand new and whatever, that must be the way you do it, right. And it seemed like a good idea if what that meant was that people felt more free to really articulate their reactions. I guess some authors maybe had a hard time keeping their mouth shut for the time that they were gagged. I don't know, it seemed like a good arrangement. It seemed like it forced the audience to speak first and keep the author from setting the entire agenda the way they might have otherwise done. And I think I only realized later that it was noteworthy, that it really did have an effect on the kinds of exchange that you could generate in a seminar.

01-00:13:41
Holmes:

What attracted you to the Agrarian Studies Program? The colloquium, as well as the class?

01-00:13:48
Sayre:

Like I said, I was a nerd, right. I wanted nothing more than to find the kind of intensity of intellectual exchange that I had gotten used to at this weird college in eastern California. And that was the kind of mood that I was looking for. I'll never forget this. You had to write a paper for the seminar, right, and there was some point early in the semester when you were supposed to tell Jim what you were going to work on when you have a meeting with him, probably in office hours. So I told him what I had in mind and it was this plan to talk about Hannah Arendt and Antonio Gramsci and hegemony through the lens of some of the readings from the semester. And he was like, "Yeah, great. Okay. That sounds good, that sounds good." A month later or so I got a chance to talk to him. I don't think it was in office hours, it may have just been in class. And I said, "You know, this paper, I'm really enjoying it. I'm super engaged with this paper." My girlfriend at the time couldn't believe how much I was obsessing about this paper. And I told him, "I think it might end up being kind of long. Just to warn you, I think it might be pretty long." And he said, "It's okay if it's long, as long as it's no longer than it needs to be." I took him dead literally on that. I was like, "Okay, I can go as long as I want as long as it's not longer than it needs to be."

01-00:15:36

So, I handed him this paper. It says draft on the cover. Sixty-seven pages long. And I think he was a little surprised when I handed it in, but then he read it. He read the whole thing. And he called me. He was like, "Okay, yeah. We should meet and talk about this." I walked into his office in whichever college it was. I think it might have been Berkeley, which was actually my college but I didn't set foot there very much. I remember he encouraged me to smoke as we met in his office because he had recently quit and he loved the chance to pick up some nicotine from kids in his office smoking. So, I sat there in his office smoking cigarettes and talking to him about my paper. And he looked at me and he said, "This is an excellent piece of undergraduate work." It was the perfect comment to make to me because I totally deserved it, right. And it

was. It was totally undergraduate work. But I, of course, had it in my head that I was really operating at a much more advanced level than that. I mean, why would you write a sixty-seven-page paper if you didn't think you were somehow up to something really more important than that, right. But of course, it wasn't. It was exactly the right thing to say to me because it wasn't graduate-level work even if I somehow thought maybe it could be—and now of course I realize that I wasn't doing anything like graduate-level work. This is not at all the kind of thing you try to get your graduate students to write. It was just me in my head getting excited about ideas, right. And the fact that he read it and didn't just give me a bad grade because I'd turned in something so much longer than he needed to have, to read. What did he say? He said [reading comments on paper], "A terrific paper. You really hurled yourself at this issue and the Hegelian turn at the end is OK though, I think mistaken. In any case one might quibble about whether your concept of hegemony (materialist + institutionalist) and which slights habits, norms, values (mere subjectivity!) catches the essence of Gramsci's view but you have made it into a powerful floodlight on the Zimbabwean revolution. You write lucidly and argue well." Yeah. I had a big gripe with his take on hegemony and he was able to let me make my case. And look at that [referencing the paper]. This is my diagram of my responses to his. Anyway, it was a memorable college experience, to have this conversation, to have that feedback over cigarettes in Jim Scott's office.

01-00:18:55

Holmes:

Are there any other memorable stories that you remember about Jim that you recall?

01-00:19:05

Sayre:

You know, give me several weeks to mull that over. I might dredge one up. I mean, the goose egg, the cigarettes, the paper. Yeah, maybe I should look a little bit more closely at that syllabus. No, I think I didn't realize at the time how much of an influence he was having on me and maybe I was even somewhat resistant to that idea. I mostly worked with David Apter after that and I felt more of a kind of mentorship relationship with David, although I think it was mostly because he was more fatherly about it. Jim Scott, he's not trying to be your father. He wants to argue and he wants to talk about anarchism basically. It's funny. I don't think he ever used that term in class. I don't think he ever said this is about anarchism. I came away deeply impressed by the importance of self-sufficiency and sort of autarchy. The fact that if you're a peasant and you can provide for your own needs as far as food and essentials, like you have got something that will serve you well in attempting to resist whatever outside force may be trying to mess with you and that that was really what this all hinged on. And I was interested in capitalism. Like how does capitalism—well, capitalism gets you once you need it, right, once you can't provide for yourself. If you're indebted or you're dependent, you're screwed. And that was kind of the lesson for the class.

01-00:21:04

Holmes:

What are some of the unique aspects that strike you now, and even looking back, about the Agrarian Studies Program?

01-00:21:17

Sayre:

One thing that's worth mentioning is the name: Agrarian Studies. It's hard to coin a name for something in academia and have it both stick and not become kind of calcified or old-fashioned. And I think Agrarian Studies definitely has an identity. You say those words, put them together like that, and everyone knows you're talking about that program. And yet it's also not somehow been formulitized or whatever the term would be. It hasn't taken on an element of like, "Whoa, well, you're an Agrarian Studies-ist right." It's not like so many other kind of fashionable trends in academia where it's kind of like a fashion rather than a place for thinking. And I guess the eclecticism. Jim Scott, he's coming out of Southeast Asian peasant rebellion. That's one area of scholarship. But he's got Bill Cronon there talking about the Chicago Board of Trade. The program over the years has brought in all kinds of different people. They had artists; they had people from all kind of different social science and humanities disciplines. So it had an openness about it that I think helped keep it from becoming too narrowly understood and defined. It's made a huge mark without becoming just another little sub, sub, subfield the way such happens with so many things in academia.

01-00:23:11

So, I think that was really quite remarkable. And goodness knows that Jim's influence extends across pretty much all of the interpretative social sciences at this point. Big chunks of history and probably even into parts of philosophy. Again, I still don't feel like his ideas add up to some theory that you can subscribe to or reject. I mean, I honestly don't think he's got as much in there about capitalism and Marx's political economy as I personally would like. But at least it's generative and at least it doesn't feel stale, it doesn't feel trapped in some kind of school of a discipline. And he keeps writing books, one after another. And they're fun to read. His newest book, *Against the Grain*, I really enjoyed reading it. It's great to see him branching out into deeper history. He's basically turned into a geographer. He doesn't want to admit it, or at least, he can't quite admit it, perhaps for other reasons. And there's some stuff in there that, as a geographer, I think I could take him to task if I really wanted to, but at this point I just appreciate the chance to let him teach.

01-00:24:44

Holmes:

You've been around higher education long enough to see many programs come and go.

01-00:24:53

Sayre:

They never go. They always just come.

01-00:24:55

Holmes:

Yes, indeed. But to think of Agrarian Studies now almost encroaching thirty years, which as many typically remark, there's not many programs that could

still be that vibrant and still last. Have you seen Agrarian Studies influence other programs that you've come across?

01-00:25:22

Sayre:

Yes, the Environmental Politics Workshop here at [UC] Berkeley, which isn't around anymore, was clearly conceived in some kind of emulation. I think it had a similar sort of atmosphere, similar kind of attitude, and provided a similar community for people to sort of meet and talk and enjoy each other's company while they were debating ideas. And, yes, the format of the seminar was modeled directly on it. But as far as programs, basically the whole concept of legibility is now everywhere in the social sciences, the notion that the state requires or imposes this kind of an epistemological agenda onto subjects and landscapes and phenomena as part of its effort to rule. Again, it's different from Foucault. And a lot of people would say, "Well, Foucault's a lot richer and more interesting and thicker and stuff." But Jim, to his credit, doesn't care to have that kind of thing. He keeps doing his thing. Probably through both the Agrarian Studies colloquium and his teaching, I think he's had influence on probably thousands of young students and aspiring academics. And that influence is really widespread and enduring. Again, it's really nice that it's not about you have to have this idea about this theory or this book you have to read. It's much more open than that. It's kind of anarchism, right.

01-00:27:57

Holmes:

You've touched on this a little bit, but looking back, how did the program impact you as a scholar?

01-00:28:35

Sayre:

Well, it gave me a bunch of really helpful points of reference or bearings, right. It gave me a sense of what fieldwork in the developing world was about. I had read plenty of Marx and Weber and those types of classics of the western sociological tradition and political science. But I had very little exposure prior to that with the kind of ethnographic settings where Jim had worked and where most of the readings were from. And as I said earlier, I mean in many ways I continue to be obsessed with similar issues, right. The question of the state and how it relates to capital. What's the relationship between those two phenomena, which we separate for sociological or philosophical reasons but which in practice are almost always pretty intimately related, right? And what does that mean for people actually on the ground? What does it mean for actual communities and cultures and landscapes in terms of, you name it, their religion or their politics or their livelihoods or even like their literatures or their landscapes? I've done all my work in the developed world rather than the developing world, mostly in the US West. And that's a story that, when I was coming through college, I might have thought is pretty far removed from peasant politics and revolution, right. But in fact, the more you think about it, the more you push it, the more those eighteenth, nineteenth century settlement and conquest dynamics of the American West are stories about capital and the state, finding ways to

territorialize space, extract resources, order people and societies and communities and so forth. Again, it gave me a tool kit that was capable of application in a lot of different settings. I mean, I got it from a number of faculty at Deep Springs as well, in important ways. Jack Schaar was probably as influential in terms of my overall trajectory. He taught my summer seminar at Deep Springs when I was seventeen years old. But Jim is in that same league. He's in that sort of remarkably powerful pedagogical—he shapes your perspective on things. And you can disagree with him but that's part of the process, right. It's not about agreeing, it's about arguing with him. And I've got colleagues who've known him longer than I have and who know perfectly well that that's what it is—it's fun to argue with Jim Scott.

01-00:31:48
Holmes:

Nathan, this has been wonderful and I really appreciate your time. Is there any final thoughts that you'd like to say before we wrap up?

01-00:31:54
Sayre:

I just wish Jim all the best. [laughter] He deserves a lot of credit for doing something that not many could. It's one thing to found something and have it work. That's hard. But to walk away and have it keep working is really hard and that's really unusual. And the fact that he has managed that is actually a credit to him even though, of course, somebody else had to step in and take over the reins. But that said, he put something together that's going to stick around. I assume Yale's also got the resources to recognize and support what it's got and not let it wither on the vine, which is what might happen at a place like Berkeley, where there's no money.

01-00:32:45
Holmes:

[laughter] We can both attest to that.

01-00:32:50
Sayre:

I could dig around a little bit more. I might find some more paraphernalia.

01-00:32:53
Holmes:

Oh, fantastic.

01-00:32:57
Sayre:

Yeah. Like the fact that he let me sort of hang around, show up, be involved. I kept getting the mailing with the schedule for years and years and years. They would show up in the mail. I was still on a mailing list. The fact that he had that kind of generosity and just instincts about how to run something like that. Again, at the time I probably didn't recognize what that represented or how valuable it was, but in retrospect it's not easy to do.

01-00:33:32
Holmes:

All right, Nathan. Hey, thank you so much.

01-00:33:35
Sayre:

My pleasure. Thank you.

[End of Interview]

Appendix: James C. Scott Peasant Politics and Revolution syllabus, 1989-90

No CLASS 20th
 Afternoon 27th : J. Rodriguez (Latin America)
 Evening 27th : Soviet Union
 7:00 pm
 hsk about McIlroy article

1

Political Science 386b
 Instructor: James C. Scott
 Meeting: Tuesday, 1:30 - 3:20 p.m.
 Spring Term, 1989-90

Office in Berkeley
 20512

Hel # 23431
 Seminar Room 2975 Evans Hall in the Tower
 Office T 3:30-5 pm. 209 70 Sachse
Peasant Politics and Revolution
 W 9-10

Most modern revolutions from the French Revolution in 1789 to the Mozambique Revolution in this decade have depended, for their success, on the participation of the peasantry. To understand the revolutionary process requires an understanding of how this class (the largest in the world still) has come to shape history in this way.

Our attempt is both to demystify and to de-romanticize a class which seldom speaks for itself. Only rarely do peasants rebel, and when they do so, they are almost always crushed. For the most part peasants survive -- day-to-day, season-to-season -- and we shall hope to understand the rare occasions of peasant radicalism in the context of their struggle to survive.

The course has the following logic: We begin with some basic social, economic, and cultural facts about peasant life. We then examine six "revolutionary" events from the vantage point of the peasantry. Students are expected to become something of an expert in at least one of these events. Each event will be the subject of a focused discussion, led by students, who are encouraged to work from such cases to a more general view of peasant rebellion or revolution. There is one shared reading for each of these events and then supplementary readings for which the experts are responsible. You will note that an effort is made to include in every set of readings, items that provide a participant's (often a peasant's) view of events. We begin, then, with the assumption that any explanation of political action must take into account the self-understandings of those who are acting.

Students are required to write a paper which may be either a conceptual paper on analytical issues in the reading or a research paper on a particular case. Outlines of the papers are due by February 13th at the latest and the paper itself is due no later than May 1st (May Day!)

The following books have been ordered and should be available at Book Haven, 290 York Street:

- ✓ Eric Wolf, Peasants
- ✓ Karl Polanyi, The Great Transformation
- ✓ Eric Hobsbawm, Primitive Rebels
- ✓ John Womack, Zapata and the Mexican Revolution
- ✓ P.M. Jones, The Peasantry in the French Revolution
- ✓ Robert Conquest, Harvest of Sorrow
- ✓ Barrington Moore, Jr., Social Basis of Dictatorship and Democracy
- ✓ Terrence O. Ranger, Peasant Consciousness and Guerilla War in Zimbabwe
- ✓ Theodore Rosengarten, All God's Dangers: The Life of Nate Shaw
- ✓ James C. Scott, Weapons of the Weak

Week 1 Introduction
 January 16th

Week 2 Peasant Society
 January 23rd

Reading: Eric Wolf, Peasants, all

Week 3 Peasant Economy
 January 30th

Reading: Karl Polanyi, The Great Transformation
 pp. 33-end

A.V. Chayanov, On the Theory of Peasant Economy, pp. 1-194

Week 4 Elementary Forms of Rebellion
 February 6th

Reading: Eric Hobsbawm, Primitive Rebels



3

ARCHIVO CASASOLA

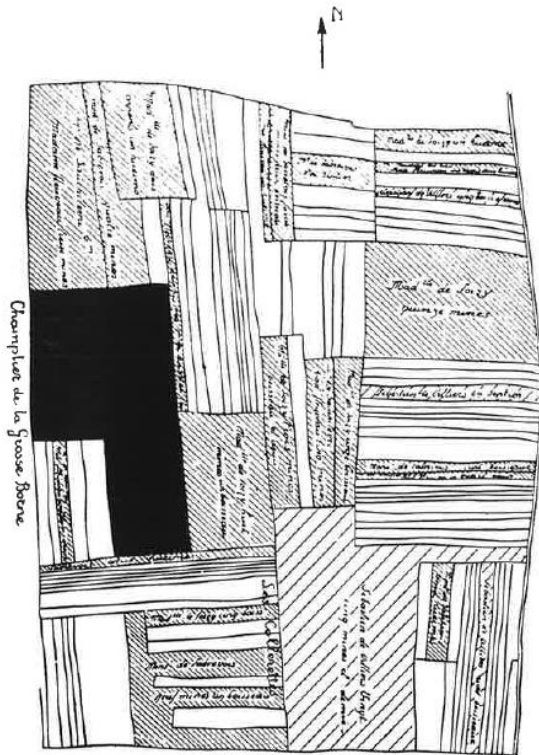
Zapatista troops breakfasting at Sanborn's restaurant, after occupying Mexico City for the first time.

Week 5 Mexico
February 13th

Reading: John Womack, Zapata and the Mexican Revolution

Supplementary Readings:

Oscar Lewis, Pedro Martinez: A Mexican Peasant and His Family
Arturo Warman, We Come to Protest
M.L. Guzman, The Memoirs of Pancho Villa



XIV. FORMATION OF LARGE-SCALE PROPERTIES IN THE BEAUCHE: I.
 After part of the map of Monnerville (Seine et Oise, cant. Merville),
 1699-1702. (Arch. Seine et Oise D, fonds St. Cyr.)

- Seigneurial farm, attached formerly to the *mensa* of the Abbot of St. Denis, transferred with the *seigneurie* to the house of the Dames de St. Cyr.
- Noble estates } heirs of Mme Fleureau, lady of Millourdin
 Mlle de Choisy or Soizy
 M. de Sabrevois, squire of Bleury
- Sebastien de Villiers, 'marchand et laboureur', living at Monnerville.

4

Week 6 France
 February 20th

Reading: P.M. Jones, *The Peasantry in the French Revolution*

Supplementary Readings:
 R.C. Cobb, *The Police and the People: French Popular Protest 1789-1820*

Georges Lefebvre, *The Great Fear of 1789: Rural Panic in Revolutionary France*

Maurice Agulhon, *La Republique au village*

Week 7 Russia/USSR: Revolution and After
 February 27th

Reading: Robert Conquest, *Harvest of Sorrow*

Supplementary Readings:
 Lev Timofeev, *Soviet Peasants (or: The Peasants' Art of Starving)*
 Orlando Figes, *Peasant Russia, Civil War: The Volga Countryside in Revolution, 1917-1921*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989)
 Daniel Field, *Rebels in the Name of the Tsar*

Возстающая Украина

*ex Redivivus:
"Insurgent"
(c. 1918)*



УКРАИНСКИЙ КРЕСТЬЯНИНЪ. Вы требуете мой хлебъ? Такъ ротъ же вамъ хлебъ!

Week 8
March 6th

China

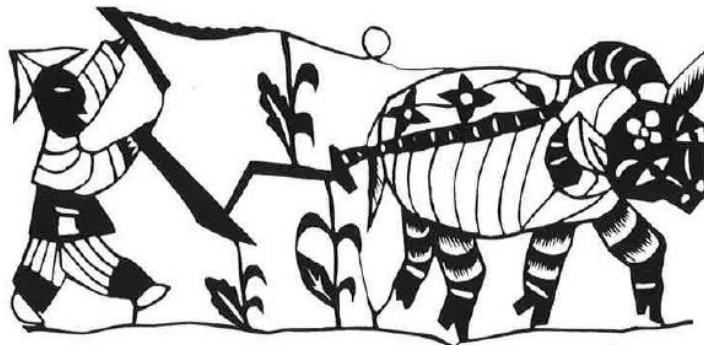
Reading: Barrington Moore, Jr., *Social Basis of Dictatorship and Democracy*, chs. 4 and 9

Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, pp. 51-66, 147-157, 236-283

Supplementary Readings:

Helen Siu, *Agents and Victims in South China*
David Zweig, *Agrarian Radicalism in China, 1968-1981*

Anita Chan, Richard Madsen, and Jonathan Unger, *Chen Village: The Recent History of a Village Community in Mao's China*



Music

Shankar - ML3260 5794 A2

Collins - ML3502-5 C712 A2

P 022637
A12 N513

6

Week 9 Zimbabwe - Kenya
March 27th

Reading: Terrence O. Ranger, Peasant Consciousness and Guerilla War in Zimbabwe

Supplementary Readings:

David Lan, Guns and Rain: Guerillas and Spirit Mediums in Zimbabwe
Donald L. Barnett and Karari Njama, Mau Mau from Within: An Analysis of Kenya's Peasant Revolt
Tabitha Kanogo, Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau

432 3436



Weeks 10-11 Some Theories of Peasant Radicalism
April 3rd
April 10th

Reading: James C. Scott, Moral Economy of the Peasant, pp. 13-55, 157-192

SMC
JC 575 M66 1987 (cc) *
LT 2405 M66 1984 (cc)

Samuel Popkin, The Rational Peasant, pp. 1-82, 133-183, 243-267

Hoyes
959 0329

Barrington Moore, The Social Basis of Dictatorship and Democracy, pp. 3-108, 159-227, 414-523

cc
BJ 1431 W65 (cc)
HM 201 M66 1965 (cc) * Power

Theda Skocpol States and Social Revolution, pp. 3-147

Week 12
April 17th.

Would Nate Shaw Recognize Himself?

Reading: Theodore Rosengarten, All God's Dangers:
The Life of Nate Shaw



Week 13
April 24th

Resistance Rather than Rebellion

Reading: James C. Scott, Weapons of the Weak,
pp. 28-47, 241-350