

University of Wisconsin-Madison
Department of History
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History 574

MARX AND HISTORY IN CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

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5105 Humanities
263-1841/1800

Course Description

This seminar is an intensive reading and discussion course probing Marx and history in critical perspective. If the seminar is successful, participants will acquire a theoretical and practical appreciation of the contributions, limitations, and ambiguities of Marxian approaches to history. Assigned and supplementary readings will include classic philosophers and social critics, practicing contemporary historians, and critics of Marxism. Student papers will occasionally complement the assigned readings listed in the syllabus.

I expect all students to participate actively and thoughtfully in seminar discussion, and to avoid Talmudic textual discussions as a dominant mode of discussion. I also want us to avoid an intimidating atmosphere. These points will be discussed at greater length in the first class meeting.

Course assignments and grading are discussed after the schedule listed below. Note that the written assignments differ for undergraduate and graduate students.

Schedule

Part I. Introduction to Marx.

Week 1. Marx as Historian. Jan. 27.

Karl Marx, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte (New York: International Publishers ed., 1963).

Edward H. Carr, What is History? (New York, 1961).

Week 2. Marx as Historian-Philosopher. Feb. 3.

Karl Marx, Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations, introduction by E. J. Hobsbawm (New York: International Publishers ed., 1965).

Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, The German Ideology, intro. by C. J. Arthur (New York: International Publishers ed., 1970).

Week 3. Marx as Theorist of Capital. Feb. 10.

Karl Marx, Capital: A Critique of Political Economy (3 vols., New York: International Publishers ed., 1967), 35-93 (Chs. I-II), 146-199 (Chs. IV-VII). Optional: 579-588, 599-608 (Ch. XXIV, Sections 1, 4), 612-628 (Ch. XXV, Sections 1, 2), 713-733 (Chs. XXVI-XXVII).

NOTE: This week we will follow unusual procedure. Steve Stern will lecture during class on Capital, vol. 1; the lecture will serve mainly the informational purpose of reconstructing the critical steps in the argument of Capital, vol. 1.

Part II. Debates on Capitalist Transition and Evolution.

Week 4. The Transition to Capitalism: Debates and Frameworks. Feb. 17.

Maurice Dobb, Studies in the Development of Capitalism (rev. ed., New York, 1963), 1-32.

Rodney Hilton et al., The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism (London: Verso ed., 1978).

NOTE: The class should benefit this week also from a student paper evaluating Robert Brenner, "Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe," Past & Present, 70 (Feb., 1976), 30-75, and the debate inspired by the article in subsequent issues of Past & Present.

Week 5. The Transition to Capitalism: The "Classic Case" Challenged. Feb. 24.

Alan Macfarlane, The Origins of English Individualism: The Family, Property and Social Transition (New York, 1978).

E. P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," Past & Present, 50 (Feb., 1971), 76-136.

NOTE: Class discussion will also benefit from a student paper exploring the implications of the following articles for the Macfarlane/Thompson readings: Michael Merrill, "'Cash is Good to Eat': Self-Sufficiency and Exchange in the Rural Economy of the United States," Radical History Review, 3 (Winter, 1977), 42-66; Christopher Clark, "Household Economy, Market Exchange, and the Rise of Capitalism in the Connecticut Valley, 1800-1860," Journal of Social History, 13 (Summer, 1979), 169-189; Sean Wilentz, "Ritual, Republicanism, and the Artisans of Jacksonian New York," in Michael H. Frisch and Daniel J. Walkowitz, eds., Working-Class America: Essays on Labor, Community, and American Society (Urbana, Ill., 1982),

Week 6. Capital in Colonial and Neo-Colonial Settings. March 2.

Immanuel Wallerstein, "The Rise and Future Demise of the World Capitalist System: Concepts for Comparative Analysis," Comparative Studies in Society and History, 16 (Jan., 1974), 387-415.

Ernesto Laclau, "Feudalism and Capitalism in Latin America," New Left Review, 67 (May-June, 1971), 19-38.

Norma Stoltz Chinchilla and James Lowell Dietz, "Toward a New Understanding of Development and Underdevelopment," Latin American Perspectives, VIII: 3-4 (Summer-Fall, 1981), 138-147.

V. I. Lenin, Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism (New York: International Publishers ed., 1939).

NOTE: Class discussion will benefit from two student papers:

- 1) a paper exploring the issue of capitalist use of non-

capitalist modes of production, based on Eugene D. Genovese, The World the Slaveholders Made (New York, 1969), Part I, and other readings to be determined later; and

- 2) a paper exploring imperialism as "highest stage," based on Peter Evans, Dependent Development: The Alliance of Multi-National, State, and Local Capital in Brazil (Princeton, 1979), and other readings to be determined later.

Part III. State, Politics, and Society.

Week 7. The State in Revolutionary Settings: Instrument of Class Rule? March 9.

V. I. Lenin, State and Revolution (New York: International Publishers ed., 19).

Edward Boorstein, Allende's Chile: An Inside View (New York, 1977).

NOTE: Class Discussion will benefit from two papers exploring the uses and limits of Lenin's approach:

- 1) a paper looking at the Chilean experience critically by reading books which offer alternatives to Boorstein's vision of state and revolution in Chile, 1970-1973; and
- 2) a paper that looks at the Russian Revolution itself as a case study by which to assess Lenin's merits and defects as theorist of state and revolution.

Week 8. Class Rule as Education. March 16.

Antonio Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, eds. and trans. (New York, 1971), 3-23, 206-276.

NOTE: Class discussion will benefit from two student papers:
Gramscian notions in Eugene D. Genovese's work on the U.S. South.

- 1) a critical analysis of the use of Gramscian notions in Eugene D. Genovese's work on the U.S. South; and
- 2) a paper that looks at L. Althusser's approach to "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" in light of a particular case study.

Week 9. Class Conflict and Political Trajectories. March 30.

Barrington Moore, Jr., Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World (Boston: Beacon Press ed., 1967).

NOTE: Class discussion will benefit from student papers looking intensively and critically at one or two of Moore's case studies.

History 574--page four.

Part IV. Class Formation as Historical Experience.

Week 10. The Experience of Class Transformation: Classic Case. April 6.

E. P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (New York, 1963).

NOTE: Class discussion will benefit from a student paper critically assessing Thompson's vision of 19th century England and the reception of his book by historians.

Week 11. The Experience of Class Transformation: Unorthodox Case. April 13.

Florencia E. Mallon, The Defense of Community in Peru's Central Highlands: Peasant Struggle and Capitalist Transition, 1860-1940 (Princeton, 1983).

NOTE: Class discussion will benefit from a student paper looking at the post-Civil War U.S. South as of capitalist transition. A good starting point is Steven Hahn, The Roots of Southern Populism (New York, 1983).

Week 12. Class and Culture. April 20.

Raymond Williams, Marxism and Literature (New York, 1977).
Possibly to be supplemented by a reading chosen by the class.

Part V. Beyond the Prism of Class: Gender-Based Critiques.

Week 13. "The Woman's Question" in Classic Marxist Thought. April 27.

Frederick Engels, The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State (New York: International Publishers ed., 1972).

V. I. Lenin, On the Emancipation of Women (Moscow: Progress Publishers ed., 1974).

Week 14. Reassessments and Critiques. May 4.

Maxine Molyneux, "Androcentrism in Marxist Anthropology," Critique of Anthropology, 55-81.

Karen Sacks, "Engels Revisited: Women, the Organization of Production, and Private Property," in Rayna R. Reiter, ed., Toward an Anthropology of Women (New York, 1975), 211-234.

Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," in Ibid., 157-210.

Heidi Hartmann, "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union," in Lydia Sargent, ed., Women and Revolution (Boston, 1981), 1-41.

NOTE: Class discussion will benefit from papers that discuss:

- 1) the place of gender in the analysis of social hierarchy, using the debate about Hartman in Sargent, ed., Women and Revolution, as a point of departure; and
- 2) the use of race and colonialism as a vantage point from which to criticize Marxism, using a forthcoming book on Native Americans and Marxism as a point of departure.

Week 15. Theoretical Rethinking. May 11.

Mary O'Brien, The Politics of Reproduction (London, 1981).

Course Assignments and Grading

The most important assignment is active, thoughtful, and bold oral participation on a week-to-week basis. Read the material, think about the issues it poses, come ready to articulate and defend your thoughts, dare to disagree with peers and so-called experts. To facilitate discussion, I will expect each student to turn in a short "Comment for Discussion" paragraph, in a box in the History Department (3211 Humanities) no later than 10:30am on the Friday morning of the seminar meeting. I will use these comments in preparing for discussion.

Written assignments vary for undergraduate and graduate students. Graduate students will write a medium-length paper (ca. 10-12 pages, and by no means longer than 14 pages) that complements the assigned readings for a given seminar meeting (see schedule above for possible papers). This paper will use a modest amount of supplementary readings, and should be available by Wednesday at noon for students to read before the Friday seminar meeting. Undergraduates are expected to write a short (4-5 pages) think-piece on any aspect of a given week's assigned readings (including any supplementary papers) and discussion. Short papers are due the Monday following the Friday seminar to which the paper is relevant. I will also ask undergraduates to keep a weekly journal recording their reflections on and reactions to the readings, and to write, at the end of the semester, a short-to-medium essay (6-9 pages) analyzing their intellectual evolution during the course of the semester. Pages from the journal should be submitted to me at the beginning of class on a week-to-week basis as the semester proceeds. The completed journal and essay are due on Friday, May 11.

Grading for graduate students will be weighted as follows: paper 35%, oral participation 65%. Grading for undergraduate students will be weighted as follows: short paper 15%, journal-essay 35%, oral participation 50%. I will consider the weekly "Comment for Discussion" paragraphs as part of the oral participation assignment.