

## POS 453 Marxist Theory

Spring 2009  
Class #8968 and 10813 Honors  
TuTh 9:35-10:50  
SBS 237  
Credit Hours: 3

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& by appt.

### Description of the course

Official description: "Critically examines key concepts and arguments in the political theory of Karl Marx, as well as other important Marxists such as Engels, Lenin, Mao, and C.L.R. James." Along with Darwin, Einstein and Freud, Marx is one of the most important thinkers in the last two centuries. At one point, one-third of the world lived under regimes that called themselves Marxist. With the fall of communism in the 1990s, Marx's influence waned. But ironically, the death of Stalinism and the spread of globalization have led many people to take a fresh look at Marx. This course studies Marx's own writings as well as those of some of the most influential Marxist thinkers. One emphasis of the class will be the relevance of Marxian analyses to the United States. The aim of the class is not to convert people to Marxism—Marx once said he was no Marxist—but to study the ideas of a challenging and sometimes difficult thinker, whose interests spanned the range of human activity.

### Books

The following books are required for the course:

1. *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd edition, edited by Robert C. Tucker (W.W. Norton 1978)
2. V.I. Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (International 1939)
3. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (International 1971)
4. Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labor* (Zed 1999)

The total cost of the required books is about \$75 new. (I do *not* recommend getting these books online.) There are also a number of articles assigned, which are available on Vista.

### Course web site: <http://vista.nau.edu>

Much of the course content (assignments, syllabus, roundtable teams, readings, links for further study, etc.) is available on Blackboard Vista. This course will show up when you go to <http://vista.nau.edu> and log on. You will be checking this site regularly.

### Attendance policy

Political theory is a participatory subject. It is learned not only by reading and writing but also through discussion and debate. For this reason, attendance is important. As you would with any other missed appointment, call or email me if you will be absent for a class. You are responsible for all material missed due to absences.

## Course objectives

By the end of the course you will be able to:

- Understand the basic arguments of Marx, including his critique of liberalism, analysis of class struggle, the labor theory of value, the historical materialist method, and his notion of politics and democracy
- Understand the main arguments of various Marxist thinkers
- Evaluate the relevance of these arguments in understanding political and social conditions in the U.S. and globally
- Compare and contrast the arguments of the texts assigned
- Think critically and effectively communicate your own ideas on Marxian political theory, and compare them to others'

## Assignments

1. A 5-8 page paper, due **February 24** (50 points)
2. A 5-8 page paper, due **March 26** (50 points)
3. A research paper proposal, due **April 9** (10 points)
4. A 12-15 page research paper, due **May 5** (70 points)
5. Weekly response papers (20 points)
6. Revision and expansion of three response papers (30 points)
7. Two roundtables (10 points)
8. Two "ruthless criticisms" (10 points)

There are no exams.

- **Total points** possible for the course: 250. Final grades will be determined according to the following: 225-250 points = A, 200-224 = B, 175-199 = C, 150-174 = D, 149 or below = F.
- **Late papers:** Please contact me *in advance* if you anticipate problems turning in your papers. Otherwise, late papers will be marked down one grade.
- **Response papers:** Every week (except weeks when papers are due) you will turn in a one-page paper (typed, handwritten, or submitted to Vista) in response to a question I have posed to you about the reading. The purpose of the response papers is to help you understand the main argument of the text and develop your criticisms of it. Each response is worth 2 points. I will count your best 10 out of a possible 12 response papers for the whole semester, for a total of 20 points. *No late response papers accepted.*
- **Revision papers:** Of the ten response papers you write, you will choose three of them to revise and expand. You will a) correct any errors in it, b) expand its analysis, and c) *discuss how the topic applies (or doesn't) to a contemporary social or political issue of your choosing.* The revisions will be 2-3 pages long (single-spaced, typed, handed in), and are worth ten points each. You can choose which response papers to revise, but one revision is due before spring break and two are due after spring break.
- **Plagiarism:** If you plagiarize any part of any of your written work, you will fail the course. Plagiarism means the deliberate use of someone else's language, ideas, or other original material (i.e. material that is not common knowledge) without acknowledging the source.
- **Roundtables:** Each person will participate in two roundtables. A roundtable is a small group that leads class by presenting the key issues of a text, discussing its significance, and facilitating class discussion. The total possible points for each roundtable is 5, or 10 points for the semester. Missed roundtables cannot be made up without prior arrangement.

- **Ruthless criticisms:** Twice during the semester you will make a very brief (5 minutes tops) analysis of a current political, social, or cultural event. This could include things such as newspaper clippings, magazine articles, TV shows, movies, popular music, sports, etc. (I encourage you to bring the item to class if possible.) Each critique will interpret the event through a Marxian framework and argue whether the interpretation is persuasive. You can do a criticism at any time during the semester and you don't have to schedule it in advance; just let me know at the beginning of class that you have something to present. I welcome partnered or group criticisms. You can post *one* of your ruthless criticisms on the discussion boards on Vista rather than present it in class. To get full credit for the Vista posting, at least two students must post a comment on it. Each materialist moment is worth 5 points, for a total of 10 points. Note: by "ruthless criticism" I do *not* mean a malicious attack on something or somebody. Rather, I mean it in the spirit in which Marx used the term: a careful criticism that gets to the root of a matter and that does not shrink from the implications it raises.
- Course content may vary from this outline to meet the needs of this particular group.
- Please turn off all cell phones and other electronic devices when in class. Laptops are permitted for note taking and other classroom uses, but *not* for surfing the web or multitasking. If you use your laptop for purposes outside of this course, I will prohibit you from bringing it to class.
- **Safe Working and Learning Environment Policy:** Safe Working and Learning Environment, Students with Disabilities, Institutional Review Board, and Academic Integrity policies all apply to this course. These policies are available at <http://www4.nau.edu/diversity/swale.asp>.
- **Evacuation Notice:** In the event of an alarm, you must leave the building immediately by the nearest exit, and move away from the building. Do not use the elevators. Please help those who may need assistance in exiting.

## COURSE OUTLINE AND SCHEDULE OF READINGS

Please have the day's assignment read *before* class. Your ability to participate and do well in the class depends on staying caught up on the readings.

\* Unless noted otherwise, all Marx texts are in Tucker's *Marx-Engels Reader* 2nd edition. Page numbers refer to this edition.

\* (V) = Available on Vista. (Click on the "Course readings" link.)

Date	Topic	Reading
	<b>I. Reading Marx politically</b>	
January 13		
15		<i>The Communist Manifesto</i> (1848) (pp. 469-500)
20		"For a Ruthless Criticism of Everything Existing" (1843) (pp. 12-15) "On the Jewish Question" (1843) (pp. 26-52)

Date	Topic	Reading
January 22		“Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s <i>Philosophy of Right</i> ” (1843) (pp. 16-25) “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts” (1844) (pp. 66-93)
27		“Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts” (1844) (pp. 93-125) <i>Grundrisse</i> (1858) (pp. 292-293) “Theses on Feuerbach” (1845) (pp. 143-145)
<b>II. The materialist method</b>		
29		<i>The Communist Manifesto</i> , reread <b>Roundtable</b>
February 3		<i>The German Ideology</i> (1846) (pp. 146-188)
5		<i>The German Ideology</i> (1846) (pp. 189-200) <i>The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte</i> (1852) (pp. 594-617) Preface to the <i>Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy</i> (1859) (pp. 3-6)
<b>III. The critique of capitalism</b>		
10		<i>Capital</i> (1867) chap. 32 (pp. 436-438), prefaces (pp. 294-302), chap. 1 (pp. 294-328), chap. 4 (329-336)
12		<i>Capital</i> chap. 6 (336-343), chap. 10 (pp. 361-376), chap. 13 (pp. 384-388), chap. 14 sections 4-5 (pp. 392-403)
17		<i>Capital</i> chap. 15 (pp. 403-417), chap. 25 (pp. 419-431), chap. 26 (431-434), chap. 27 (434-435), chap. 31 (435-436), chap. 32 (pp. 436-438) (V) <i>Capital</i> , chap. 33
<b>IV. Communism, political strategy, radical democracy</b>		
19		“Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League” (1850) (pp. 501-511) <i>Marx on the U.S. Civil War</i> (V) “The North American Civil War” (1861) (V) “The Civil War in the United States” (1861) (V) “Address of the IWMA to President Lincoln” (1864) <i>Marx on Ireland</i> (V) “Confidential Communications with the General Council of the IWMA” (1870) (Continued on next page →)

Date	Topic	Reading
		(V) "Marx to Ludwig Kugelmann, 11/29/1869" (V) "Marx to Engels, 12/10/1869" (V) "Marx to Sigfrid Meyer and August Vogt, 4/9/1870" <b>Roundtable</b>
February 24		<b>FIRST PAPER DUE</b> "Class Struggle and Mode of Production" (1852) (p. 220) <i>The Civil War in France</i> (1871) (pp. 618-652)
26		"The Possibility of Non-Violent Revolution" (1872) (pp. 522-524) "Critique of the Gotha Program" (1875) (pp. 525-541) "Marginal Notes on Bakunin's <i>Statism and Anarchy</i> " (1875) (pp. 542-548) <b>Roundtable</b>
<b>V. Lenin, imperialism, and the party</b>		
March 3		Marx "On Imperialism in India" (1853) (pp. 653-664) (V) Marx, "Letter to Vera Zasulich" (1881) Marx, Preface to the Russian Edition of the <i>Communist Manifesto</i> (1882) (pp. 471-472) Lenin, <i>Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism</i> prefaces, chaps. 1 and 2 (pp. 7-46)
5		Lenin, <i>Imperialism</i> chaps. 3-7 (pp. 47-98)
10		Lenin, <i>Imperialism</i> chaps. 8-10 (pp. 99-128) (V) Rosa Luxemburg, <i>The Russian Revolution</i> chaps. 1 & 2
12		(V) Luxemburg, <i>The Russian Revolution</i> chaps. 3-8 <b>Roundtable</b>
March 16-20	SPRING BREAK	
<b>VI. The totalitarian turn</b>		
24		(V) Joseph Stalin, <i>Concerning Questions of Leninism</i> , chaps. 1, 2, 5, 6 (1926)
26		<b>SECOND PAPER DUE</b> (V) Mao Zedong, "Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan" (1927) (V) Mao Zedong, "Some Questions Concerning Methods of Leadership" (1943)  <i>(Continued on next page -&gt;)</i>

Date	Topic	Reading
		(V) Mao Zedong, "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People" (1957) (V) CCP, "Decision Concerning the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution" (1966)
<b>VII. Hegemony and politics</b>		
March 31		Gramsci, <i>Selections from the Prison Notebooks</i> pp. 5-23, 123-168
April 2		Gramsci, <i>Prison Notebooks</i> pp. 169-173, 192-203, 206-218, 229-253
7		Gramsci, <i>Prison Notebooks</i> pp. 257-264, 275-276, 277-306, 316-318
9		<b>RESEARCH PAPER PROPOSAL DUE</b> Gramsci, <i>Prison Notebooks</i> pp. 321-357 <b>Roundtable</b>
<b>VIII. C.L.R. James and an American Communism</b>		
14		(V) C.L.R. James, <i>Every Cook Can Govern</i> (1956) (V) James, "Introductory" and "Individuality 1776-1876," from <i>American Civilization</i> (1950)
16		(V) James, "The Americanization of Bolshevism" (1944) (V) James, "The Revolutionary Answer to the Negro Problem in the USA" (1948) (V) James, "Negroes, Women, and the Intellectuals," from <i>American Civilization</i>
21		Marx, <i>Grundrisse</i> (pp. 244-246) (V) James, "Freedom Today" and "Popular Arts and Modern Society," from <i>American Civilization</i> (V) James, "Three Black Women Writers" (1981) <b>Roundtable</b>
<b>IX. Patriarchy and globalization</b>		
23		Maria Mies, <i>Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale</i> chap. 1
28		Mies, <i>Patriarchy and Accumulation</i> chaps. 2-3
30		Mies, <i>Patriarchy and Accumulation</i> chaps. 4, 7 <b>Roundtable</b>
May 5	Final Exam date (7:30-9:30 am)	<b>THIRD PAPER DUE</b> , by 5:00 pm No class