

SOCI 168 Marxism
Professor Charles Thorpe

Instructor: Professor Charles Thorpe

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Office hours: Mondays 1-3pm

Class schedule: M, W, F 10-10.50am

Location: WLH 2206

Final Exam: Week 11, Monday June 9, 8-11am in WLH 2206

Course Description

This course examines Marxism as social theory and social movement. It covers the origins and historical development of Marxist ideas, the history of Marxist movements and organizations, and the interaction between theory and political practice.

The readings are selected in order especially to provide a sense of the development of Marxist theory in action, in other words how Marxist theory has been involved in the orientation of Marxist politics, political programs, parties and movements and how Marxists have responded with the development of theory to the great events and social transformations from the nineteenth century to the present. The course gives most attention to the theorization of the Russian Revolution and the subsequent development of the Soviet Union, the rise of fascism, and the emergence and development of US imperialism. The course brings this history to the present with a consideration of Marxist analyses of globalization, the New Left and identity politics. The class cannot encompass all varieties of Marxist thought. Another course on different aspects of Marxism from those covered here is offered in the Political Science Department: POLI 114B or 114BR Marxist Political Thought in the Political Science Department.

Marxism is a voice in academic sociology, anthropology, philosophy, political theory and, to a lesser extent, economics. Some of the texts assigned are written by academics. But Marxism is primarily a movement for social and political change and this course aims to examine the place of theory and the development of theory in that political movement and to understand the schisms, arguments, and different positions within that movement (if indeed it can be regarded as a single movement). The majority of texts selected are therefore drawn not from academia, but as was the case for classical Marxism, from politically engaged Marxist revolutionary groups and intellectuals associated with them. Contemporary texts are selected from existing Marxist groups, organizations, and publications in the US and the UK. In this way, it is hoped that the course will present Marxist theory as a living theory and practice oriented to the issues and struggles of the day. Unlike most texts you will read in university, Marxist writing is often polemical and the polemic is a key mode of argumentation through which Marxist theory develops. The method is dialectical, i.e. one of conflict. Hence the polemic is the conflict of ideas through which Marxist theory develops. It should not be thought that the polemic is necessarily irrational, nor that if Marxism is ideology this is necessarily outside of and opposed to science. As the sociologist Alvin Gouldner (*The Dialectic of Ideology and Technology*) argued, science and ideology share in the “culture of critical discourse.” I think you will find that

Marxist polemic goes along with careful analysis and a commitment to reason. You should not make the mistake of thinking that Marxist designations such as 'bourgeois', 'petit-bourgeois', 'revisionist', 'opportunist' are epithets (mere insults), which is how they are often dismissed by non-Marxists. Rather, these are analytic categories that have particular analytic meaning and purpose in the context of Marxist theory.

You are asked to approach reading and discussion with an open mind, and that is all. How you assess them and whether and how they come to inform your own social-theoretical and political understanding of the world is your own responsibility to determine. The class is organized so as to emphasize discussion and it is essential that we listen, discuss, consider, and respond respectfully to all points of view.

This course is reading intensive. Being able to read, assimilate, and synthesize large quantities of text is an important skill for a sociologist that develops with practice. Do your best to get through the readings and come to class prepared. In recognition of the reading-intensiveness of the course, a large proportion of the grade is based on reading annotations.

Attendance:

Attendance in class sessions is compulsory and a roster will be taken at the start of each session. If you arrive more than 15 minutes late, you will be marked absent.

You must make sure to attend the final exam. This cannot be rescheduled (only relevant OSD accommodations and medically documented illness excepted).

Assessment:

50%: Annotations

Every session, you will submit an annotation.

Each annotation will be scored on a pass/no-pass basis. If you do all the annotations satisfactorily, you will receive the full 50%.

40%: Final paper

In-class exam during exam period, with no electronic devices, books or notes.

You will need to bring two blue books and an ink pen (ballpoint, fountain pen etc.) to the exam. You will write your answer in longhand (relevant OSD accommodations excepted).

You will write essay answers to three questions from a selection of questions. Questions will cover the entire course.

10% Attendance

This will be based on your attendance in class, and your attendance at office hours.

Office hours

You are required to attend office hours at least once during the quarter.

Participation/discussion:

Each class session will be based on discussion. It is crucial that you do the reading for each session prior to the class. You have until midnight on the day of the class to upload the annotation on the readings for that day.

Discussion sessions are loosely based on the Learning Through Discussion (LTD) method. See especially 'Group Roles and Member Skills' on p. 31 of the following document:
https://www.insightassessment.com/var/ezflow_site/storage/pdf/LTD.pdf

For more detail on this mode of learning, see also "The Learning Through Discussion Process Plan," from William Fawcett Hill's *Learning Through Discussion, Third Edition*, in Canvas under Modules – Resources.

Annotations:

You will complete a reading outline due on each discussion session, covering the readings set for that session. These annotations are graded on a **pass/no-pass** basis and are meant to prepare you for discussion and solidify the material in your mind as preparation for the mid-term and final exams.

For each class session, write one page double-spaced of prose answering the question, What did you find most interesting and significant about the readings? Make sure to address all readings (and films if these are set).

Annotations may be submitted no more than one week late. Annotations submitted more than one week late will not be accepted. You will find it best to submit annotations on time because if you delay you will quickly fall behind and become swamped.

Please note that these are not commented on by Professor Thorpe, unless you specifically ask for feedback by going to office hours.

Grading criteria for annotations

Meeting the requirements = P (you get full points for the assignment, i.e. A [but not A+])

Not meeting the requirements = NP (you get zero points for the assignment).

If you complete all the annotations satisfactorily, you will receive the full 50% for this portion of the course grade.

All work must be turned in *before the end of the final exam period.*

Students with disabilities

If you have a disability documented with the Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD, <https://osd.ucsd.edu/>), please make the instructor aware as early in the quarter as possible and at least **at least 72 university business hours, excluding holidays and weekends, (3 business days) in advance** of the exam.

Electronic devices

No electronic devices will be allowed in class. You should put all electronic devices away in backpacks, handbags etc for the duration of the class.

Canvas

Articles and chapters will be available via Canvas, Modules.

You are encouraged to print out articles and chapters and underline, highlight and mark-up these print-outs as you read. If you are using books that you own (i.e. not library books) then you are encouraged to also underline and markup these texts.

The Canvas site also contains an archive of weblinks with articles, websites, and videos relevant to the course. These are not required reading but you may find it interesting and useful to browse this material.

Course schedule

Week 1: Overview

Monday: Introduction and Overview of Syllabus

Wednesday: Overview of Marxism: The work of Marx and Engels

Barbara Goodwin, *Using Political Ideas* (Wiley, 2014), Chapter 4: "Marxism" pp. 73-96 (end of section on 'Criticizing Marx'). Instead of regular annotations, answer Goodwin's discussion questions 1-5 (on p. 106) providing for each question at least one relevant quotation from Goodwin's chapter (total 2 pages double-spaced).

Friday: Overview of twentieth-century Marxism

Goodwin, *Using Political Ideas*, pp. 96-103. Instead of regular annotations, answer Goodwin's discussion questions 6-10 (on p. 106) providing for each question at least one relevant quotation from Goodwin's chapter (total 2 pages double-spaced).

Week 2: Labor, Capital, Class Struggle, and Ideology

Monday: Marx's concept of alienation and Marx and Engels' concept of ideology

"Alienated Labor," pp. 3-10 of Peter Kistivo, *Social Theory: Roots and Branches* (Oxford, 2011).

Hannah Dickinson and Curry Malott, "What is Alienation? The Development and Legacy of Marx's Early Theory," *Liberation School* (Party for Socialism and Liberation, USA) (December 7, 2021), <https://www.liberationschool.org/13-what-is-alienation-html/>

The German Ideology, extract in Kistivo pp. 11-16.

Derek Ford, “What is Ideology? An Introduction to the Marxist Theory of Ideology,” *Liberation School* (September 7, 2021), <https://www.liberationschool.org/what-is-ideology/>

Wednesday: Marx and Engels on class struggle and the base-superstructure model

Manifesto of the Communist Party, extracts in pp. 17-24 of Kistivo.

Film: *The Young Karl Marx* (2018)

https://www.amazon.com/Young-Karl-Marx-August-Diehl/dp/B07DP6SMG9/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=young+karl+marx&qid=1617072444&sr=8-1

Include the film in your annotation: what does it show about how *The Communist Manifesto* arose from Marx and Engels’ rejection of earlier ‘utopian’ forms of socialism?

Marx, Preface to a Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-pol-economy/preface.htm>

Begin at paragraph 5, second sentence: “My inquiry led me to the conclusion that neither legal relations...” Read to end of paragraph 8: “The prehistory of human society accordingly closes with this social formation.”

Derek Ford, “The Base-Superstructure: A Model for Analysis and Action,” *Liberation School*, November 22, 2021, <https://www.liberationschool.org/base-superstructure-introduction/>

Friday: Foundations of Marx and Engels’ Economic Critique: Exchange value and surplus value

“Commodities” and “The General Formula for Capital” (extracts in Kistivo pp. 25-37).

Karl Marx, letter to Ludwig Kugelmann, London, July 11, 1868, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Letters* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1977), 33-35.

Derek Ford and Mazda Majidi, “Surplus Value Is the Class Struggle: An Introduction,” *Liberation School* (Party for Socialism and Liberation, USA), <https://www.liberationschool.org/03-what-is-surplus-value-html/>

Week 3: Materialism as Basis for Revolutionary Politics

Monday: Materialism

Lenin, “In Lieu of an Introduction,” *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*

<http://marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1908/mec/intro.htm#v14pp72h-022>

Wednesday: Materialism cntd.

Lenin, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*

Ch. 1.4: “Did Nature Exist Prior to Man?”

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1908/mec/one4.htm>

F: Ch. 1.5: “Does Man Think with the Help of the Brain?”

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1908/mec/one5.htm>

Ch 6.4: “Parties in Philosophy and Philosophical Blockheads.”

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1908/mec/six4.htm>

Friday: The Dialectic in Marxism

Frederich Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, section on “Dialectics”

<https://www.wsws.org/en/special/library/socialism-utopian-scientific/04.html>

George Plekhanov, “Dialectic and Logic,”

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/plekhanov/xx/dialectic.htm>

Trotsky, “The ABC of Materialist Dialectics”

<http://marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1939/12/abc.htm>

Read up to “... a spark of hope for an after-life” before section on “The Nature of the USSR”

Week 4: The Revolutionary Party in the Epoch of Imperialism

Monday: Must Marxism be Revolutionary?

Rosa Luxemburg, *Reform or Revolution*. Read all.

Wednesday: The Organization and Role of the Marxist Party

Lenin, *What is to be Done?*, Parts I-II,

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1901/witbd/>

Lenin, *What is to be Done?*, Part III.A, C-F.

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1901/witbd/>

Friday: Ideological pressures on the revolutionary party in a bourgeois society

James P. Cannon, *The Struggle for a Proletarian Party*, Parts I

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/cannon/works/1940/party/ch01.htm>

Week 5: Imperialism and the Class Essence of the State

Monday: Economic foundations of imperialism

Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, Preface to the French and German editions, and chapters I-V

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/imp-hsc/>

Wednesday: Imperialist geopolitics

Lenin, *Imperialism*, Chapters VI-VII

Friday: Imperialism and the decline of capitalism

Lenin, *Imperialism*, Chapters VIII-X

Week 6: Marxist Theory in The Russian Revolution

Monday: Why Proletarian Revolution Must Abolish the Bourgeois State and Establish the Dictatorship of the Proletariat

Lenin, *State and Revolution*, Preface and Chapter 1

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/staterev/>

Wednesday: From the Dictatorship of the Proletariat to the Withering Away of the State

Lenin, *State and Revolution*, Chapters 2 – 5.

Friday: Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution

Trotsky, "Three Conceptions of the Russian Revolution" (1939)

<https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2008/10/rrev-o21.html>

Film, *Tsar to Lenin*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O4mb2l0nzVE>

David North, "Why Study the Russian Revolution?"

<https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2017/03/13/nort-m13.html>

Week 7: The Soviet Union: Socialism, Degenerated Worker's State, or State Capitalism?

Monday: David North, "The Place of the October Revolution in World History and Contemporary Politics," <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2017/11/13/lect-n13.html>

Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, Introduction and Chapters 3, 5, 6 section 4 "The Social Physiognomy of the Ruling Stratum," <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1936/revbet/>

Wednesday: Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, 9, 11.

Friday: "What Was the USSR? Part 1: Trotsky and State Capitalism," *Aufheben* 6 (Autumn, 1997), <https://libcom.org/article/what-was-ussr-part-i-trotsky-and-state-capitalism>

Albert Szymanski, "The Red Flag Still Flies: Workers' Power in the USSR" in *The Soviet Union: Socialist or Social-Imperialist?, Part II: The Question is Joined – Full Text of the New York City Debates, May 1983* (Chicago: RCP [Revolutionary Communist Party, USA] Publications), 13-36.

Raymond Lotta, "Realities of Social-Imperialism Versus Dogmas of Cynical Realism: The Dynamics of the Soviet Capital Formation," in *The Soviet Union: Socialist or Social-Imperialist*, 37-63.

Week 8: Culture, Consciousness, and Superstructure

Monday: Is art ideological?

Alexandr Voronsky, "On Art," (1925) from *Art as the Cognition of Life*

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/voronsky/1925/art.htm>

Trotsky, "What is Proletarian Culture and is it Possible?" (1923),
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1923/art/tia23c.htm>

Trotsky, "Culture and Socialism" (1927), <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2008/10/cult-o23.html>

Wednesday: Antonio Gramsci and the concept of hegemony

Gramsci, Antonio. 1971. "The Intellectuals", in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Translated and Edited by Q. Hoare and G. N. Smith. New York: International Publishers, page 3-23, https://www.marxists.org/archive/gramsci/prison_notebooks/problems/intellectuals.htm

Dan Jacopovich, "Revolution and the Party in Gramsci's Thought: A Modern Application," *International Viewpoint* (November 17, 2008),
<https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article1555>

Chantal Mouffe, "Hegemony and Ideology in Gramsci" (orig. 1979) In Mouffe ed. *Gramsci and Marxist Theory* (Routledge, 2014), 168-204.

Nigel Todd, "Ideological superstructure in Gramsci and Mao Tse-tung," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 35(1) (1974): 148-156.

Friday: Is Mass Culture Deception?

Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*,
<https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/adorno/1944/culture-industry.htm>

David Walsh, "Film, History, and Socialism" *World Socialist Web Site* (January 22, 2007),
<https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2007/01/york-j22.html>

Week 9: Imperialism, Fascism, War, and Globalization

Monday: Memorial Day: No Class

Wednesday: Fascism and War

Trotsky, *Fascism, What it Is and How to Fight It*,
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/works/1944/1944-fas.htm>

Trotsky, 1934. "War and the Fourth International," (June 10), The Trotsky Internet Archive,
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1934/06/warfi.htm>

David North, "Preface to *A Quarter Century of War: The US Drive for Global Hegemony 1990–2016*," <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2016/07/11/pref-j11.html>

Friday: Globalization, Super-Exploitation, and the Rise of China

Nick Beams, "The Significance and Implications of Globalization: A Marxist Assessment" *World Socialist Web Site* (1998), <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/1998/01/glob-j04.html>

Raymond Lotta, *The "Industrialization" of Sexual Exploitation, Imperialist Globalization and the Descent into Hell* (Revolutionary Communist Party USA, 2021).

Minqi Li, "China: Imperialism or Semi-Periphery?" *Monthly Review* 73(3) (July-August 2021), <https://monthlyreview.org/2021/07/01/china-imperialism-or-semi-periphery/#lightbox/0/>

Week 10: Marxism and the Politics of Race

Monday: Trotskyism versus Black Nationalism

The Workers League, *Black Nationalism and Marxist Theory*, Bulletin Pamphlet Series (Labor Publications), 1 (1973) (first published 1969).

Wednesday: Is 'racial capitalism' a Marxist idea?

Kevin Anderson, "Revisiting Marx on Race, Capitalism, and Revolution," *Monthly Review* (March 2022), <https://monthlyreview.org/2022/03/01/revisiting-marx-on-race-capitalism-and-revolution/>

Ken Olende, "Cedric Robinson, Racial Capitalism and the Return of Black Nationalism," *International Socialism Journal* 169 (January 2021), <http://isj.org.uk/cedric-robinson-racial-capitalism/>

Friday: Marxism versus the racial discourse of left-liberalism

Esme Choonara and Yuri Prasad, "What's Wrong with Privilege Theory?" *International Socialism Journal* 142 (April 2013), <http://isj.org.uk/whats-wrong-with-privilege-theory/>

Tom Carter, "The Ideological Foundations of Critical Race Theory," *World Socialist Web Site* (August 30, 2021) <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2021/08/30/crit-a30.html>

Neil Larsen, "The Jargon of Decoloniality," *Catalyst* 6 (2) (Summer 2022).