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.


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


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.
History 574--page two.

Part II. Debates on Capitalist Transition and Evolution.


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.


NOTE: Class discussion will benefit from two student papers:

1) a paper exploring the issue of capitalist use of non-
History 574--page three.

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.


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.


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.


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


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.


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).


Possibly to be supplemented by a reading chosen by the class.

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


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.


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 10:30 am 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.