
MARXISM AND AMERICAN CULTURE

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INTRODUCTORY ESSAY

I designed "Marxism and American Culture" with three entwined goals in mind. First, I wanted to introduce students to the interdisciplinary practices and habits of mind typical of American Studies scholarship. Second, I wanted to develop a lower-division course that would provide students with ample opportunities to practice the analytical and writing skills they would need throughout their academic careers, building upon those imparted in first-year composition courses. Third, as a scholar of the history and arts of the American Left, I thought it was important to develop a course that would help students understand and contextualize leftism in the United States, something that seemed necessary given the visible rise of anti-capitalist movements like Occupy Wall Street. Accomplishing this third goal required accomplishing the previous two. If students were to make sense of Marxism's American history, they would need to develop their critical reading and writing skills, as well as become comfortable with interdisciplinary scholarship.

This course required an approach to Marxism consonant with the aforementioned goals. One of my primary concerns when developing this course and its syllabus was avoiding the construction of anything resembling a canon of Marxist thought. While I believed it was important that students develop an understanding of Marxism throughout the course, I had no interest in providing a comprehensive survey of its ideas or implicitly participating in any debate about its "true" character. The former would be impossible in a fifteen-week course and the latter seemed needlessly doctrinaire. The goal of the course was not to impart any particular approach to Marxist theory, whether defined by a leftist sect or a scholarly discipline, but to give students the tools to understand and historicize it in all its diversity. I took a cue from historian Paul Buhle, who wrote in the introduction to his history of Marxism in America, "Marxism is as Marxism does," and adopted a broadly cultural approach influenced by the work of American Studies scholars like Alan Wald, Michael Denning, and Julia Mickenberg.¹ "Marxism and American Culture" thereby explores Marxism and the ways it was revised and developed in response to the exigencies of time and space. It considers how individuals, groups, and institutions interpreted Marxism and made it their own, foregrounding its fluidity and the different ways it can be used as an analytical lens. If students can understand such phenomena, they can develop their own arguments about Marxism and its place in American culture while cultivating the critical reading and writing tools they need throughout their college careers. They can begin the work of constructing their own canon of Marxist thought. Furthermore, such a broad approach to Marxism opens the doors to include a range of literary

¹ Paul Buhle, *Marxism in the United States: Remapping the History of the American Left*, Revised edition (New York: Verso, 1991), 16. For examples of such an approach, see Alan M. Wald, *Writing From the Left: New Essays on Radical Culture and Politics* (London; New York: Verso, 1994); Alan M. Wald, *American Night: The Literary Left in the Era of the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso, 1998); Julia L. Mickenberg, *Learning from the Left: Children's Literature, the Cold War, and Radical Politics in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2005).

and artistic material in addition to the philosophical and political texts one might expect to find in a class about Marxism. In this sense, it is a class firmly in the American Studies tradition.

Such an approach to Marxism directly shaped the form of the course. Its students dive into Marxist theory, its history in America, and the ways Marxism has served as a lens through which individuals have analyzed American culture. Each topic is the basis of a distinct unit intended to impart specific skills and prepare students for the unit to follow. Each unit culminates in a major assignment that asks students to practice those skills in writing, providing me with opportunities to assess their understanding of course content while cultivating their analytical and writing abilities.

Unit One focuses exclusively on Marxist theory, laying a foundation that the rest of the course refers to repeatedly. Here, we focus on topics I understand to be central to Marxist theory, as well as those that preoccupied American Marxists during the late nineteenth and twentieth century. We tackle dialectics, critique, materialism, consciousness, ideology, labor, class, class struggle, alienation, commodities, and capitalism as a mode of production. We discuss and analyze primary texts by Marx and a select few other commentators. This material requires teaching students how to read and explicate dense theoretical texts, skills most freshman and sophomores are just developing. In class, I use guided reading activities, explication exercises, and informal exploratory writing assignments to cultivate such skills. To practice them in writing, students write an "Auto-Critique," a short essay in which they analyze their own experience in terms of one of the concepts covered during the unit.

While Unit One asks students to develop a preliminary understanding of Marxism, Unit Two asks them to think about how and why it changed in American history. Here, we explore a series of case studies arranged roughly chronologically, constructing a history of Marxism's American past that emphasizes the ways the material realities and ideologies of race, gender, sexuality, and nation shaped its interpretation. Again, this history is not comprehensive. These case studies sketch the contours of Marxism in America by highlighting the different ways leftist thought has been interpreted and revised. We cover immigrant radicalisms of the late 1800s, modernists enthused with the Russian Revolution, the Communist Party of the United States of America, the Popular Front of the 1940s, Cold War attitudes about communism, the New Left, revolutionary nationalisms, intersectionality, and contemporary resistance to neoliberalism. We dwell on concepts covered in Unit One. For instance, we explore how modernist understandings of the Russian Revolution relate to Marx's own conception of revolution. We ground in-class discussions in a set of primary sources and secondary texts that contextualize them. Primary sources include political pamphlets, speeches, novels, and essays. Class discussion focuses on explicating and historicizing such texts, analyzing primary sources and connecting them to secondary ones. I initially model such activities for students with the intention of creating intellectual and practical scaffolding so they can take over leading them later in the course. This unit's major essay asks students to historicize a primary text in two senses: they need to make an argument that situates it in the moment of its production and in relation to previous iterations of Marxism. This essay thus requires them to make a claim about Marxism's history in the United States, developing their argumentation skills, as well as their ability to identify and explain connections between texts with a critical eye towards history and ideology.

Unit Two focuses on Marxism *in* American culture. Unit Three focuses on how critics can use Marxism to shed light *on* American culture. We turn away from strict exercises in historicization towards Marxist literary and cultural criticism, focusing on aesthetic ideologies, political aesthetics, popular culture, social movement culture, and labor in the culture industries. Here, students need to marshal their critical reading and writing skills, as well as their ability to think historically about a variety of cultural forms. We read and discuss, for instance, Clifford Odet's *Waiting for Lefty* (1935), Steven Spielberg's blockbuster *Jaws* (1973), and Teju Cole's Twitter-based short story "Hafiz" (2014). This asks students to develop an analytical flexibility attuned to different critical lenses, an effective primer for interdisciplinary practice.

This unit's major assignment, the capstone for the course, asks students to marshal the various skills they have practiced all semester by picking one of three assignment options: they can analyze a cultural text of their own choosing using one of the Marxist theories of art and culture discussed in class in a traditional essay; they can develop their own work of Marxist theory in the form of a political pamphlet; or they can develop a creative piece that illustrates a Marxist theory of art. This last option can take a variety of forms. In the past, students have submitted short stories, poetry, visual collages, and short films. The multiple options are intended to give students the opportunity to apply and use Marxist analytical frameworks in a variety of forms, enacting the course's implicit argument that understanding Marxism's history and development requires attending to multiple spheres of philosophical, political, and artistic production. Regardless of the option they choose, students need to use a specific Marxist concept as an analytical lens, doing the work of Marxist theory and critique.

"Marxism and American Culture" is an admittedly difficult course. It is writing-intensive and the readings are challenging. This is by design. I believe students are entirely capable of grappling with difficult material assuming they are taught how to. Frequent composition is a part of this teaching process. The extensive use of writing assignments in this class stems from my commitment to Writing Across the Curriculum pedagogy, specifically the notion that writing is intricately connected to learning and critical thinking.² While the writing assignments in "Marxism and American Culture" provide assessment opportunities, they are also an essential means of cultivating students' ability to grapple with challenging and unfamiliar texts. If, as John Bean has argued, writing serves as "a means of thinking," then each assignment in this course is an opportunity to practice thinking through and with Marxist theory, history, and culture.³ They serve as means of developing students' understandings of complex concepts and prepare them to navigate Marxist discourse as independent learners.

Such pedagogical commitments animated this course's emphasis on process and revision. In addition to the major assignments, there are a series of short writing assignments that function as formal pre-writing activities for each major assignment. In that sense, all assignments explicitly roll into each other. Furthermore, two of the three major assignments can be revised in response to my feedback. Such assignment sequences require students to return to and practice a key of set of skills repeatedly. The emphasis on revision culminates in an assignment I call the "Auto-Critique Reflection," a short essay that requires students to return to their initial auto-critique and reassess their conclusions based on later course material.

My pedagogical decisions here are consistent with my goals. I am not expecting mastery of course content on students' part. As I tell students on the first day of class, while I hope they develop a strong understanding of the various topics and texts we discuss throughout the semester, I am more interested in helping them develop the skills necessary to immerse themselves in Marxism's theoretical and historical terrain, something facilitated, I believe, by an interdisciplinary approach of the sort American Studies prides itself on. Given the longstanding biases against Marxism in American culture, this itself is a significant breakthrough and will allow them to make better sense of contemporary social movements and oppositional ideas, as well as study Marxism further elsewhere in the university or on their own time.

² This is frequently referred to as "Writing to Learn" Theory. See Charles Bazerman et al., *Reference Guide to Writing Across the Curriculum* (West Lafayette, IN: Parlor Press, 2005), 57–65; John C. Bean, *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom*, Second Edition (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011); Anne J. Herrington, "Writing to Learn: Writing Across the Disciplines," in *Writing Across the Curriculum: A Critical Sourcebook*, ed. Terry Myers Zawacki and Paul M. Rogers (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2012), 118–27.

³ Bean, *Engaging Ideas*, 38.

SYLLABUS

MARXISM AND AMERICAN CULTURE

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Over the past century, perhaps no "ism" has been more debated, misrepresented, celebrated, and denounced in the United States than that bearing the name of Karl Marx. The word "Marxist" is often tossed around haphazardly, setting off a chain reaction of images and ideas: Communists, working-class activists, student radicals, Un-American, radical democracy, authoritarian regimes, Cold War, Groucho, revolution, utopia, and so on and so forth. What is this Marxism? What does Marxism have to do with America?

A more pointed question to ask might be, "What are these Marxisms?" The tradition bearing Marx's name exists only insofar as people practice it. If people practice something, they will transform it in the process, making it their own. As the variety of images Marxism conjures suggests, it would do us good to think of Marxism in the plural sense, as a coherent, though always changing, political and philosophical tradition that people have adopted and remade as they saw fit in a variety of contexts. This includes individuals in the United States. Americans have embraced Marxism in a variety of ways since the late 1800s, expanding and revising it to accord with their own experiences, seeing the tradition as a way to do philosophy, think historically, conceive of political action, and create art.

This semester, we will explore these visions and revisions of Marxism in America. This course is neither a comprehensive historical survey of Marxist thought nor a recounting of sectarian debates. It is an extended meditation on the different ways individuals in America have imagined, practiced, and revised Marxism. This means we will think of Marxism not as a dogmatic ideology, but as a product of culture, a mode of critique, a type of writing, and a perspective on the world that emerges through such practices. We will probe Marxism and the myriad ways individuals and groups living in America have understood it, and done so in opposition to and in solidarity with Marxisms across the globe. In Unit 1, we will examine key writings by Karl Marx, paying close attention to concepts later Marxists would take up. In Unit 2, through analysis of primary texts and occasional secondary readings, we will investigate the different ways individuals and groups have understood these ideas and sought to make them their own in America by expanding and revising them, processes inevitably entwined with ideologies of race, gender, class, and nation. In Unit 3, we will think through Marxism, using it to analyze literature, film, music, and various other cultural forms.

COURSE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

BY THE END OF THIS COURSE, STUDENTS WILL BE ABLE TO:

1. Interpret key Marxist concepts and trace their development via engagement with primary sources rooted in multiple of scholarly disciplines and political contexts.
2. Participate in intellectual conversations about Marxism, as well as its role in American history and culture as a transnational mode of theoretical practice shaped by a variety of material and ideological contexts.
3. Use Marxist analytical frameworks to critically interpret a diverse array of cultural forms.

Students will also develop and practice several academic skills relevant to American Studies and related disciplines across the university curriculum. These include:

1. The ability to interpret a wide variety of primary texts as historical and cultural artifacts.
2. The ability to think methodologically and theoretically from different disciplinary standpoints.
3. Critical and recursive writing skills transportable to other fields and academic contexts.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Please purchase the following texts:

1. Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. *The Communist Manifesto*. New York: Penguin Classics, 2011.
2. Olsen, Tillie. *Yonondio: From the Thirties*. Lincoln: Bison Books, 2004.

All other readings will be distributed by the instructor electronically.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING PROCEDURES

GRADES WILL BE BASED ON:

Three Unit-Based Short Writing Assignments	15%
Auto-Critique	
Initial Auto-Critique	15%
Auto-Critique Reflection	10%
Essay 1	20%
Essay 2	20%
Discussion	10%
Reading Quizzes	10%

Students may revise the Auto-Critique and Essay 1 based on instructor feedback and resubmit them for a higher grade within one week of assignment return. If you choose to revise your work, you cannot receive a lower grade than that which you earned on the initial assignment. Incomplete assignments may not be revised. That is, do not submit a half-finished essay with the intention of revising and completing it upon assignment return. A complete essay is one with an introduction, developed argument, and conclusion. It should satisfy the minimum requirements of the assignment. This policy is intended to encourage the idea that writing is a process, one shaped by critical feedback and revision. It is not designed to give students extra time on assignments.

ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS

Unit-Based Short Writing Assignments: In each unit of the course, you must complete a 1-2 page writing assignment. Consider them formal pre-writing exercises. They are “formal” in the sense that I expect you to follow the norms of academic writing (e.g. citing your sources, featuring a coherent thesis statement and organizational structure, the strategic use of evidence, etc.), and they will be graded as independent assignments. They are “pre-writing exercises” in the sense that they are designed to help you practice the theoretical, argumentative, and writing skills you will need to deploy for that unit’s major writing assignment. These may be submitted at any point in the unit before the final due date, which can be found in the Daily Schedule. *I highly encourage you to submit these early. They are early opportunities for critical feedback. Such opportunities are invaluable.*

Unit 1 Short Writing Assignment: For Unit 1's Short Writing Assignment, you must explicate (summarize and explain) one idea or claim from one of the readings from Unit 1. You do not need to summarize the entirety of a given reading – this is extremely difficult to do in the space of two pages, especially when you are dealing with complex writings such as those of Marx. For this assignment, you are not to editorialize. That is, rather than evaluate one of the readings, focus on accurately recounting it. Deeply focus on one line of argument or idea. Pick it apart. Explain how it works. Here, I am evaluating your ability to understand and recount complex theoretical arguments, a skill relevant to every assignment in this course (and the entirety of your college career for that matter). The major assignment of Unit 1 asks that you do this and take it one step further, applying such ideas to your own life.

Unit 2 Short Writing Assignment: For Unit 2's Short Writing Assignment, you must compare two readings from Unit 2. You can do this any way you see fit. You could explore how two texts make similar arguments. You could consider their theoretical differences. You could detail the very different contexts from which they emerge. However you choose to do this, you must briefly explicate each reading and make a coherent argument about whatever relationship you identify between the two texts. Again, you do not have to say everything about your chosen texts: explore one or two issues deeply rather than several superficially. I want to see you think historically, contextually, and comparatively. The major assignment of Unit 2 asks you to draw upon these skills.

Unit 3 Short Writing Assignment: For Unit 3's Short Writing Assignment, you must write a proposal detailing what you intend to accomplish in Essay 2. As described below, for Essay 2 you must develop your own analytical, theoretical, or creative project. This short essay should feature four sections: one detailing your argument, one describing your sources (which sources you describe will depend on which essay option you pick), one describing how and why you came to this topic, and one describing its significance. Whatever topic you propose here is not binding – you are free to change your mind about Essay 2. Consider this a formal brainstorming exercise, and an opportunity to receive feedback at an early stage in the writing process.

Auto-Critique: This is a two-part assignment. As we will learn this semester, Marxism holds that "social being determines consciousness," meaning the ways we think, the ways we imagine ourselves and the world are tightly bound to the various structures (real and imaginary) that organize the world and those that inhabit it. Thus, it follows that consciousness is an important source of information about social being. Our thought processes and understandings of ourselves are always entwined with larger ideologies and structures of power (e.g. capitalism). In Part One of this assignment, you must consider your own "social being" in terms of the concepts introduced in Unit 1. You can approach this assignment any way you see fit, but I am not interested in anecdotes about your life and personal habits *unless you treat them as evidence to analyze*. I am interested in seeing you critically consider yourself as an active agent within a particular social system, one of possibilities and limits. For instance, you could analyze ways you are alienated from the fruits of your labor, or you could analyze the role of commodities in your life and the implications thereof. The goal here is to think dialectically about yourself, the way you imagine the world, and the way you move through it, considering these things as contradictory, changeable, and historical. This assignment must be 3-4 pages long. A more detailed description of this assignment will be provided in class. Once completed, students may revise this assignment based on instructor feedback and resubmit it for a higher grade within one week of assignment return.

In Part Two of this assignment, students will return to their Auto-Critique at the end of the semester. Students will be required to critically reflect on their initial Auto-Critique, detailing specifically how later course materials have lead them to rethink some of their initial understandings of themselves as historical agents within particular social structures. Again, how you do this is up to you, but you must critically

examine your immediate past within this class, critiquing your own auto-critique, so to speak. For example, you could describe how a primary reading complicated your understandings of yourself as an alienated laborer. You could explain why later readings strengthened your initial conceptions of yourself. However you approach this assignment, you must put your auto-critique into dialogue with at least one reading from Unit 2 or 3. This assignment must be 2 pages long. A more detailed description of this assignment will be provided in class.

Essay 1: In this essay, the culminating assignment of Unit 2, you will be required to closely and contextually analyze one of your primary source readings, either from the syllabus or of a relevant primary source of your own choosing. If you choose your own primary source, you must clear your selection with me. You will need to think about your chosen primary source as it relates to the Marxist tradition and the historical moment of its production. In short, this is an exercise in historicization: you must historicize your text in terms of its Marxism, and its connection to historical movements, ideologies, or events, demonstrating how your primary text fits into or relates to a broader historical narrative. *Think about the specific argument it makes. Think about how that argument is a product of its time and place. Think about how it relates to the Marxist tradition as we have discussed it in class.* I expect you to push yourself here: a rehash of class lectures or discussion will not cut it, meaning you will need to actively research the historical moment of your primary source's production and other relevant subjects. This essay must be 5-6 pages long. Please incorporate at least 2 secondary sources, at least one of which must be a scholarly source. A more detailed description of this assignment, including possible paths of analysis and research, will be provided in class. Once completed, students may revise this assignment based on instructor feedback and resubmit it for a higher grade within one week of assignment return.

Essay 2: For this final essay, you may pick one of three possible writing projects. I must approve all projects. To this end, students will submit proposals for their writing project in the final weeks of class. Until this Unit, we have studied different Marxist arguments about politics and history, with careful consideration to these arguments as products of history. Now, you must take these intellectual processes one step further, and apply Marxist concepts to the analysis of history and culture. I will provide a more detailed description of this assignment in class.

Option 1: Marxist Cultural Analysis – If you pick this option, you will be required to analyze a cultural object in terms of the concepts discussed throughout the semester. Whatever cultural object you analyze is up to you, but it must not appear on the syllabus as a primary text. *In this essay, you must think through some form of Marxism when you analyze your object, and do so in a historical sense. That is, your analysis should emerge out of your consideration of the historicity of cultural objects as practiced in Unit 2.* For example, you could analyze a story's depiction of alienation, you could analyze a story's representation of labor, or you could discuss the ideological dimensions of a film. This essay must be 6-7 pages long and incorporate at least 3 secondary sources in addition to your primary text.

Option 2: Writing a Pamphlet – If you pick this option, you will be required to generate an argument about some aspect of social, political, or cultural life from a Marxist perspective, producing a work of Marxist theory in the form of a political pamphlet. *In this option, you will need to consider historical, social, and cultural processes and use them as evidence to generate a theoretical argument that fits, in some manner, within the Marxist tradition.* There are several ways to accomplish this. You could pick a Marxist theory, critique it, and propose a counter-theory. You could identify and theorize a historical, social, or cultural problem/contradiction. You could revise and update a theory specific to a previous historical moment. You could explain how a specific theory is relevant to a contemporary problem. Since you will be submitting this assignment as a pamphlet of the sort we have analyzed elsewhere in this course, you are encouraged to incorporate visual and design elements throughout your work. Your work

will not be evaluated on your graphic design skills. You should, however, decide on an audience for your pamphlet – it need not be academic. It could be aimed at political organizers, theorists, or the otherwise politically unengaged. You must draw upon at least three relevant sources to complete this assignment. Your work must be at 6-7 pages long.

Option 3: Creating Political Art – If you pick this option, you will be required to produce a creative work indebted to any of the Marxist theories of culture and politics we have covered this semester. You could write a short story indebted to Michael Gold's theories of proletarian realism. You could write a play that draws upon Theodor Adorno's ideas about form and history. However you choose to do this, you must also produce a short analytical commentary on your work, situating it within the present historical moment, explaining its implicit argument, and describing its theoretical underpinnings. For instance, if you produce a work of proletarian realism, you would need to explain how it emerged out of contemporary historical conditions, explain the political point it tries to make, and explain why your work exemplifies Gold's ideas. Your commentary must draw upon at least 3 theoretical and historical sources in addition to your own creative work. The creative portion of this assignment must be at least 4 pages long, and your commentary must be at least 3 pages long. You are welcome to create a non-text based work as well. In the past, students have produced works of visual art, podcasts, and short films. If you choose to create a work that is not text-based, please meet with me to discuss length requirements.

Discussion: As stated above, we will grapple with complex issues and ideas this semester, and the best way to guarantee your understanding of course material is to discuss them. Simply stated, your active participation in class discussion and class activities is essential. In evaluating your Discussion grade at the end of the semester, I will consider class contributions, attentiveness, and overall engagement with material.

Reading Quizzes: Throughout the semester, there will be a minimum of 12 "semi-unannounced" quizzes on the day's assigned material. I reserve the right to add additional quizzes. By "semi-unannounced," I mean that quiz dates and material will be announced during the class meeting prior to the day of the quiz. This will usually take the form of me saying, "Expect a quiz next class on the primary readings" or something similar. Your two lowest quiz grades will be dropped at the end of the semester. These quizzes cannot be made-up under any circumstances. I reserve the right to hold unannounced quizzes.

COURSE POLICIES

Attendance Policy: Many of the concepts we will cover this semester are very complex, requiring substantive thought and discussion. That means attendance is crucial to understanding course material. Consequently, missing class will severely inhibit your ability to understand it. I expect you to attend class and arrive on time. You will be granted five unexcused absences. Your final grade will be penalized 5 percentage points for every absence beyond the allotted five.

You will not be penalized for missing class on religious holy days. A student who misses classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day should inform me, in writing, well in advance of the absence, so that alternative arrangements can be made to complete work. If you know you will have to miss class(es) for this reason, provide me with the date(s) as early as possible.

When you must miss a class, you are responsible for getting notes from a classmate.

Late Work: If an assignment is submitted after the posted deadline on the day it is due (e.g. after 5pm, but before midnight), its grade will be docked 2.5 percentage points. For every calendar day thereafter

that an assignment is late, its grade will be docked 5 percentage points. The Late Work Penalty will apply to revised works. For instance, if an essay is turned in two days late, and is thereby penalized ten percentage points, a revised version of that essay will also be docked ten percentage points. Except under rare and extenuating circumstances, I will not accept work that is more than 7 days late. Work that is submitted more than 7 days late will not be graded, and a 0 will be entered into the gradebook.

Tardiness: If you arrive to class more than 10 minutes late, you will be considered tardy. Two instances of tardiness will be considered one absence.

Technology in the Classroom: Cell phone use is prohibited. You cannot record class lectures/discussion unless you have a documented disability and a letter from the university granting you said academic accommodation. I-Pods or similar music listening devices are prohibited. Laptop use is permissible and encouraged, as you should use every resource available to you, but only for taking notes and/or reading digital files relevant to class discussion. Please be attentive and respectful to your instructor and your classmates (i.e. laptop activity MUST pertain to class activities). If I find your use of technology to be disruptive and irrelevant to class activities, you will lose technology privileges for the duration of the semester.

Classroom Decorum: In this course, we will discuss and write about complex ideas that are often very challenging. They are difficult to read and often probe divisive subjects. Please be mindful of this throughout the semester and be respectful. We want to cultivate an atmosphere hospitable to critical debate, one conducive to learning for everybody. We all enter the classroom with preexisting political, ethical, and intellectual commitments. Understanding an argument is not the same as accepting it. In this class, we are seeking to understand different arguments and ideas. You are not required to agree either with any of the writers we discuss, your classmates, or with me, in whole or in part.

DAILY SCHEDULE (SUBJECT TO CHANGE AT INSTRUCTOR'S DISCRETION)

UNIT 1: INTRODUCING MARX(ISM)

WEEK 1

Introductions

Beginning an Adventure in Marxism

Reading: Marshall Berman, "Caught Up in the Mix: Some Adventures in Marxism;" Karl Marx, "For a Ruthless Criticism of Everything Existing"

WEEK 2

Consciousness and Social Practice

Reading: Karl Marx, excerpts from *The German Ideology*; Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach"

History and Dialectics

Reading: Karl Marx, "From *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*: Preface"; Raymond Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory"

Class Struggle

Reading: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (Part 1); Marshall Berman, "Tearing Away the Veils: *The Communist Manifesto*"

WEEK 3

Class Struggle Continued

Reading: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (Parts 2-4)

Alienation

Reading: Karl Marx, "Alienated Labor"

The Commodity

Reading: Karl Marx, excerpts from Chapter 1 in *Capital*

WEEK 4

Labor and the Mode of Production

Reading: Karl Marx, excerpts from *Value, Price, and Profit*

Labor and the Mode of Production Continued

Reading: Karl Marx, excerpts from Chapters 26, 27, 31, 32, and 33 in *Capital*

Last Day to Submit Unit 1 Short Writing Assignment

UNIT 2: MARXISM IN AMERICAN CULTURE

WEEK 5

Marxists in America?

Reading: Paul Buhle, "Introduction" in *Marxism in the United States* (9-17); Karl Marx, "La Liberté Speech" (<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1872/09/08.htm>); Friedrich Engels, "Letter to Friedrich A. Sorge (Why There is No Large Socialist Party in America)" (https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1886/letters/86_11_29.htm)

Auto-Critique Due

Immigrant Radicalisms

Reading: Alexandra Kollontai, "The Statue of Liberty" (<https://www.marxists.org/archive/kollonta/1916/statue-liberty.htm>); Read any two profiles of Language Federations on the Early American Marxism Website (<http://www.marxisthistory.org/subject/usa/eam/>)

The Romance of Revolution

Reading: John Reed, Excerpts from *Ten Days That Shook the World*; Mike Gold, "Why I Became a Communist"; John Patrick Diggins, excerpts from *The Rise and Fall of the American Left* (93-113)

WEEK 6

The Old Left

Reading: William Z. Foster, "Organization and Program" and "Toward Soviet America," John Patrick Diggins, excerpts from *The Rise and Fall of the American Left* (145-164)

Complicating Old Left Ideologies: Tillie Olsen's *Yonnondio: From the Thirties* (1974)

Reading: Tillie Olsen, *Yonnondio: From the Thirties* (Chapters 1-4)

Tillie Olsen's *Yonnondio* and Marxist-Feminism

Reading: Tillie Olsen, *Yonnondio: From the Thirties* (Chapters 5-6); Meridel Le Sueur, "Women on the Bread Lines"

WEEK 7

Concluding Tillie Olsen's *Yonnondio*

Reading: Tillie Olsen, *Yonnondio: From the Thirties* (Chapters 7-8)

The Popular Front

Reading: Kenneth Burke, "Revolutionary Symbolism in America"; League of Professional Groups for Foster and Ford, excerpts from *Culture and the Crisis*; Michael Denning, "Waiting for Lefty" in *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (3-50)

More Popular Fronts

Reading: C. L. R. James, "The Americanization of Bolshevism"; "The Revolutionary Answer to the Negro Problem in the United States"; Emma Tenayuca, "Communist Party of Texas: 1940 State Platform"

WEEK 8

Red Scared: Marxism and the Cold War

Reading: Tom Engelhardt, "The Enemy Disappears" in *The End of Victory Culture: Cold War America and the Disillusionment of a Generation* (113-132); Watch *Red Nightmare* (1962) (<https://archive.org/details/RedMenace>)

Marxism as a Critical Theory in the Postwar Era

Reading: Herbert Marcuse, excerpts from *One-Dimensional Man* (xxxix-xlviii, 3-20)

The New Left

Reading: Students for a Democratic Society, excerpts from "Port Huron Statement"; C. Wright Mills, "Letter to the New Left"; John Patrick Diggins, excerpt from *The Rise and Fall of the American Left* (218-248)

WEEK 9

Reconfiguring the New Left: Revolutionary (Inter)Nationalisms

Reading: Huey P. Newton; "Patrolling" and "The Correct Handling of a Revolution"; Young Lords Party, "13 Point Program and Platform of the Young Lords Organization (October 1969)" and "Young Lords Party 13-Point Program and Platform (revised November 1970)

Resisting Interlocking Structures of Power

Reading: Claudia Jones, "An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman!";
Combahee River Collective, "Combahee River Collective Statement"

Against Neoliberalism

Reading: Subcomandante Marcos, "The Fourth World War Had Begun"

Last Day to Submit Unit 2 Short Writing Assignment

UNIT 3: MARXISM ON AMERICAN CULTURE

WEEK 10

Art, Politics, and Political Art

Reading: Raymond Williams, "Literature" and "Ideology" in *Marxism and Literature* (45-74)

Essay 1 Due

The Political in Art and Literature

Reading: Fredric Jameson, excerpts from *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*

Analyzing the Political in Art: Case Study

Reading: Ursula Le Guin, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas"; Mark Fisher, "It's Easier to Imagine the End of the World than the End of Capitalism" in *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (1-11)

WEEK 11

Popular Culture as Commodities and Texts

Reading: Fredric Jameson, "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture"

Case Study: *Jaws*

Reading: Andreas Killen, "Power Shift" in *1973 Nervous Breakdown: Watergate, Warhol, and the Birth of Post-Sixties America* (195-226)

Screening: *Jaws* (Dir. Stephen Spielberg)

What is the "Popular" in Popular Culture?

Reading: Stuart Hall, "Notes on Deconstructing the 'Popular'"

WEEK 12

Movement Cultures

Reading: T.V. Reed, "Reflections on the Cultural Study of Social Movements" in *The Art of Protest: Culture of Activism from the Civil Rights Movement to the Streets of Seattle* (286-315)

What makes political art? Content? Writing for and by the Workers

Reading: Mike Gold, "Proletarian Realism"; György Lukács, "Realism in the Balance"

WEEK 13

Writing for and by the Workers: Case Study

Reading: Clifford Odets, *Waiting for Lefty*

What makes political art? Form? The Avant-Garde

Reading: Theodor Adorno, "Commitment"

Watch: First 30 minutes of *The Movement of People Working* (Dir. Phill Niblock)
(http://www.ubu.com/film/niblock_movement.html)

A Labor Theory of Art and Culture?

Reading: Michael Denning, "The Socioanalysis of Culture: Rethinking the Cultural Turn"
in *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds* (75-96)

WEEK 14

Structural Transformations

Reading: Walter Benjamin, "The Author as Producer"; Teju Cole, "Hafiz"
(<https://twitter.com/tejucole/timelines/437242785591078912>)

Art Occupied

Reading: Chris Hedges, "A Master Class in Occupation"; Molly Crabapple, "Shell Game"
(<http://mollycrabapple.com/2013/05/01/shell-game-hi-res/>)

Last Day to Submit Unit 3 Short Writing Assignment

Mandatory Paper Conferences

WEEK 15

Watching *Finally Got the News* (1970)

In-class screening: *Finally Got the News*

Discussing *Finally Got the News* (1970)

Reading: Dan Georgakis and Marvin Suvin, "Finally Got the News" in *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying: A Study in Urban Revolution* (107-130)

Some Tentative Conclusions

Auto-Critique Reflection Due

Essay 2 Due During Final Exams

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