

SOC 3999W

University

Meeting time/location: TBA

Marx and Marxism

Fall 2026

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Course Description: Marx’s critique of capitalism, his theories on class conflict, and his materialist understanding of history remain central to interpreting the social, economic, and political structures of modern society. This course provides an in-depth exploration of Marx’s key writings, the evolution of Marxist thought, and the continued relevance of these ideas in contemporary social analysis. By examining both foundational texts and critical adaptations, we will consider how Marxism informs our understanding of power, inequality, and the possibilities for social change.

Success in this course requires the ability to think critically about complex theoretical concepts, as well as to evaluate their application in both historical and modern contexts. You will be challenged to synthesize competing interpretations of Marxist theory and develop well-supported arguments. As a writing-intensive course, assignments will focus on developing your capacity to articulate nuanced positions clearly and persuasively, grounding your analysis in rigorous evidence.

Learning Objectives:

The two primary learning objectives in this course are 1) to develop critical thinking skills and 2) to hone critical writing skills. In a world increasingly shaped by misinformation, distorted data, and ideological manipulation, it’s crucial to cultivate a skeptical and analytical mindset. Through the lens of Marxist theory, we will learn to critically assess claims, scrutinize the use of evidence, and identify the broader social and political implications of the arguments we encounter. These skills will not only be useful in understanding Marx’s work but will also empower you to engage more thoughtfully and rigorously with the information you encounter in your academic pursuits, professional life, and everyday experiences.

The Principle of Charity:

“In philosophy and rhetoric, the **principle of charity** requires interpreting a speaker’s statements to be rational and, in the case of any argument, considering its best, strongest possible interpretation. In its narrowest sense, the goal of this methodological principle is to avoid attributing irrationality, logical fallacies or falsehoods to the others’ statements, when a coherent, rational interpretation of the statements is available.”

Text(s):

Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. 1978. *The Marx-Engels Reader*. 2nd Revised & enlarged edition. Edited by R. C. Tucker. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company.

Hegel, G. W. F., and J. N. Findlay. 1977. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Revised ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lenin, Vladimir Ilyich. 1987. *Essential Works of Lenin: "What Is to Be Done?" And Other Writings*. 1st edition. Dover Publications.

Additional readings will be distributed via Canvas.

Grade Distribution:

Participation and Attendance	15%
Three Reading Reflection Memos	36%
Course Paper (Proposal, Draft, Final)	49%

Major Assignments (details):

Participation and Attendance (15%): Talking in class and having conversations about topics is important to make class time worth it and to show you're paying attention. So try your best to be engaged in classroom discussions when we have them, and in small-group discussions as well. To do this, you will need to have read the material for the given day. The readings on this course have been specifically chosen for their clarity and quality.

Three Reading Reflection Memos (36%): Students will be expected to turn in 3 reading reflection memos on the weeks of their choosing. The memos should reflect upon at least three of the assigned readings for the day selected. Memos are due at the start of the class meeting where the readings will be discussed. Students must attend that session to earn full credit for the memo. Students must turn in two memos by end of Week 9, so that writing workloads don't become too heavy at the end of the course. You may turn in an extra Reading Reflection Memo and we'll drop the lowest score.

Here are the elements of a good reading reflection memo:

Reading reflection memo expectations: Summarize each author's main argument (~1 paragraph for each reading). What are the important points that the author is trying to communicate? What kinds of evidence does the author use (e.g. interviews, personal experience, historical data, survey data, experiment, etc.)?

Analysis and Reflection: Discuss what parts of the arguments you find convincing, provocative, or weak (~1 paragraph per reading). In this section, reflect on whether the author's argument provoked you to agree or disagree, reflect on a similar experience, or introduced you to a new or surprising reality of inequalities or identities related to race, class, and gender. Explain clearly and include specific references to the text with direct quotations or paraphrasing.

Connections: Explain how the articles relate to one another and to the broader themes of the class discussed up to that point.

Format: Papers should be 3–4 pages long, double-spaced with 12-point Times New Roman font and 1-inch margins. No cover pages are needed but you need a Works Cited page listing your sources (not counted in the page count). Include the course topic and response paper number (e.g. "Social Construction of Race, Response Paper 1 of 3") at top of the first page, along with your name, the course number, and the date.

Course Paper (49%): The course paper will be an 8–10 page research paper due on December 17th, focusing on the application of Marxist theory to a topic of your choice. This could include analyzing a contemporary issue, historical event, piece of literature, social movement, or cultural phenomenon through the lens of Marxist theory (e.g., class struggle, alienation, imperialism, or ideology). The instructor reserves the right to veto or suggest alterations to topics. This paper will be due in stages throughout the term. Students will receive feedback on each stage, with the expectation that they incorporate this feedback to strengthen their work. Each stage requires a paragraph explaining how revisions address concerns from previous drafts.

- *Paper Proposal (5%)*: Due on October 22nd. A one-page proposal of the research topic, research question(s), and goals of the paper. This proposal should also explain how the paper is related to the course.
- *Final Paper Draft (10%)*: Due on November 26th. A full rough draft for comment and revision.
- *Final Paper (34%)*: Due on December 17th. 8–10 pages in length, 1-inch margins, 12-point Times New Roman font, double spaced. Minimum 8 sources. Your choice of citation style, though you should use in-text citations.

Letter Grade Distribution:

≥ 93.00	A	73.00 - 76.99	C
90.00 - 92.99	A-	70.00 - 72.99	C-
87.00 - 89.99	B+	67.00 - 69.99	D+
83.00 - 86.99	B	63.00 - 66.99	D
80.00 - 82.99	B-	60.00 - 62.99	D-
77.00 - 79.99	C+	≤ 59.99	F

Course Policies:

- **Submissions:** All assignments must be uploaded to Canvas in PDF format. Use standard formatting: double-spaced, Times New Roman 12-point font.
- **File Naming:** Please name files using the convention: `lastname_assignmentname.pdf`.
- **Late Policy:** Late work will be accepted with a 10% grade dock for each day it is late, up to 3 days.
- **Grade Disputes:** If you wish to dispute a grade, please wait 24 hours after receiving it before reaching out to the TA for discussion.

Course Outline:

Week	Content
Week 01	Introduction to Sociology and Methodology
Week 02	Understanding Hegelian Dialectics Singer, “Hegel: A Very Short Introduction”; Hegel, “The Phenomenology of Spirit”
Week 03	Marx on Hegel Marx, “Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right”; Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach”
Week 04	Historical Materialism Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte”; Marx, “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts”
Week 05	Marx and Engels Hobsbawm, “Introduction to the Manifesto”; Marx and Engels, “The Communist Manifesto”
Week 06	Commodities, Value, Alienation Marx, “Capital”; Marx, “Wage Labour and Capital” (p. 203–217)
Week 07	The State and Revolution Lenin, “The State and Revolution”; Engels, “Socialism: Utopian and Scientific”
Week 08	Race and Racism Robinson, “Black Marxism”; Fields, “Slavery, Race, and Ideology”
Week 09	Gender, Capital, and Reproduction Federici, “Caliban and the Witch”; Engels, “The Origin of the Family”
Week 10	Imperialism I Lenin, “Imperialism”; Luxemburg, “The Accumulation of Capital”
Week 11	Imperialism II Parenti, “Against Empire”; Césaire, “Discourse on Colonialism”
Week 12	Culture, Ideology, and Hegemony Gramsci, “Selections from the Prison Notebooks”; Hall, “The Problem of Ideology”
Week 13	“Cultural Marxism” Cruz, “Unwoke: How to Defeat Cultural Marxism in America”; Chomsky, “Manufacturing Consent”
Week 14	Marxism in the 21st Century Harvey, “The Enigma of Capital”; Graeber, “Bullshit Jobs”