

**PHIL 397 On Your Marx:
Alienation, Exploitation, Liberation**
M-W-F 11:00 to 11:50AM, W01-0037
Professor: Dana Francisco Miranda
Email: Dana.Miranda@umb.edu
Student Hours: Zoom or by appointment.
T 1:00-2:30PM; TH 1:00-2:30PM

Overview

“You cannot have untold, obscene wealth unless you have untold, obscene poverty. That is the law of capitalism.” – Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor

This course introduces the methodological and practical commitments of Marxist theory. We will examine key ideas such as historical materialism, ideology, labor, alienation, capital, and commodity fetishism as both applicable to critiques of capitalism but also as necessary for human emancipation. The class will begin by exploring the earlier works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, as well as their proponents and detractors. Lastly, we will consider some contemporary, global applications of the Marxist tradition. Readings will include works by Rosa Luxemburg, José Carlos Mariátegui, Samir Amin, Mao Zedong, Thomas Sankara, Silvia Federici, Amílcar Cabral, Vladimir Lenin and Andaiye.

Course Objectives

Students will interrogate various aspects of Marxism. In doing so, students will interrogate major theoretical concepts while considering the practical implications of the ideology. This course will also provide students opportunities to develop knowledge of how economic systems are created, maintained, and challenged. Lastly, students will also develop their skills in reading, writing and dialoguing as required for undertaking philosophy.

Course Unit Instruction

This class is scheduled to meet for 3 hours per week. Additional instructional activities for the course include attendance at various College events and associated writing activities/workshops distributed across the semester. Participation in these events and completion of associated activities/workshops will add an additional 14 hours of instruction. Lastly, I reserve the right to make changes to this syllabus, as necessary. Therefore, students are advised to refer to the syllabus posted on Blackboard for the most updated version.

Policies

All UMass Boston policies are in effect. These include:

- Policy on Academic Dishonesty: As an academic community devoted to the discovery and dissemination of truth, the University of Massachusetts Boston insists that its students will conduct themselves honestly in all academic activities. Students are expected to refuse to engage in any activity unauthorized by university policy. Please be sure to review the Student

Code of Conduct for Academic Honesty Policy and Procedures.

- Students with disabilities requesting classroom or course accommodations must complete a multi-faceted determination process through the Office of Disability Services prior to the development and implementation of accommodations, auxiliary aids, and services. Each Accommodation Plan is individually and collaboratively developed between the student and the Lillian Semper Ross Center for Disability Services. If you have not already done so, please contact the Center to have a dialogue regarding your academic needs and the recommended accommodations, auxiliary aides, and services.
- If you are experiencing financial hardship, have difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day or do not have a safe and stable place to live, and believe this may affect your performance in this course, I would urge you to contact the Office of the Dean of Students (ODOS) or Student Support Services (SSS) for support. You may also discuss your concerns with me if you are comfortable doing so.

Some additional policies include:

- Gender Pronouns: All people deserve to be addressed in accordance with their identity, ranging from preferring a nickname to your gender pronouns. Students are encouraged to notify me of their gender pronouns so I can address you correctly (she, he, they, ze, etc.), especially if they have reason to believe I may use the incorrect pronouns. I use he/him.
- Electronic Device: Engaged listening without electronic mediation is an important skill, and this classroom will be an opportunity for those otherwise challenged in this domain to practice it. If you have important reasons (e.g., medical, disability accommodation, etc.) to use any such devices, please talk to me as soon as possible so that I can approve appropriate exceptions to this policy. Otherwise, this classroom will be free of electronic devices.
- Email Communication: At times I will communicate with the entire class using campus email systems, so it is essential that you regularly check your UMB email address or forward your UMB account email to your preferred email address. I encourage you to contact me via email with questions about the course, the material we cover in class, and assignments.
- Policy on Children: If you are a parent, you are welcome to bring your child to class. If they are interested and old enough to take part in the conversation, all the better. If they are babies, fine. If they need to breastfeed, fine. You probably have alternate arrangements, and your other professors might not have the same policy (and I respect that), but I just wanted to make my attitude about children explicit in case of preference or emergency. You are welcome here, and if you have dependents that need constant care or whose care has been interrupted, they are also welcomed.
- Everyone needs help at some point (and typically at multiple points) in their academic journey. If you or someone you know experiences academic stress, difficult life events, or feelings of anxiety or depression, we encourage you to seek support. Effective campus resources (such as Academic Support Services and Undergraduate Studies, Resources4U, the UHS Counseling Center, and the U-ACCESS Food Pantry) are here to help.
- No one will be asked to speak for a group (whether class, race, sexual orientation, age, religion, creed, disability, gender, or geography).

Assignments

Participation (20%): Attendance is mandatory. I understand that emergencies arise, so each student is allowed two absences. Each absence beyond the allotted two will result in a point deduction. Please note that to receive a grade in this category one must not only show up, but also participate. This will primarily reflect a) Preparation for posing questions in the discussion period of class and b) Engaged listening and discussion contributions during this period; will be boosted by c) Participation and question-posing during the (ideally interactive) lecture segment. If you are at any point unsure how you are doing in participation and want to know, email me and we can begin a conversation. Students who are extremely weary of speaking in class can receive alternative assignments in lieu of in-class participation but must meet with me in the first two weeks of the semester (or within one week of enrolling if not enrolled during this period) to make arrangements.

Students will be expected to come prepared with critical questions to raise during classroom discussion. I advise students to jot down at minimum one question, observation, or provocation while studying.

Presentations (20%): Students will select one week where they will choose a reading and give an in-class presentation. Students must turn in an outline of their presentation. This outline will include at minimum two dialogic questions as well as detailed instructions on the structure of their presentation. These questions will serve as the basis for in-class discussion. Outlines must be emailed the day before one's presentation by noon. *An example outline will be provided*

Short Paper (20%): One essay submission of 1000-1500 words responding to prompts provided in advance. The papers will be due on the Friday of Week 7 (Oct. 22). The short essay paper must be handed in electronically by midnight. Rubric:

- 5 points: Essay addresses all aspects of the question and does so in a thoughtful way, incorporating key insights from texts and class discussions, and suggests a reasonable, though possibly somewhat open-ended, answer.
- 4 points: Essay addresses the question adequately but struggles to reconcile different positions, either through internal inconsistencies (e.g., the essay defends a contradictory position) or through failing to grapple with central dimensions of the material.
- 3 points: Essay addresses the question but doesn't demonstrate any commitment to rigor or critical thought or fails to relate the question to material from the reading(s) and/or class discussions.
- 2 points: Essay is substantial but does not address the prompt.
- 1 point: Essay fails to address the prompt and lacks substance or coherence.

Essays that are late but no more than 48 hours late will be docked 1 point. Essays that are more than 48 hours late will be docked 2 points. Essays that are not turned in by the end of the semester will receive no credit. Essays receiving a grade of 3 or lower can be rewritten and submitted for re-grading if you meet with me to discuss them.

Term Paper (30%): For the final paper, students must meet with me in person or must have digital approval; for group papers, all members of the group must be present at this meeting together unless extraordinary circumstances dictate otherwise. Term papers must be emailed by midnight December 20, 2021. My policy is to deduct ten points for each day late. You may choose from any of these options:

- *Position paper*: Write a paper defending a philosophical position related to topics discussed in class or in the assigned readings. Solo: 2000 words. Group of 2: 2500 words.
- *Research paper*: Either a) Read 1-2 outside works and critically examine the reading or its relation to one or more of the required readings for the course, or b) Read and criticize a full book from which one of the required readings is drawn, or c) Propose a research project of your own, subject to instructor approval. Solo: 2000 words. Group of 2: 2500 words.

Assessments (10%): Students will complete mid-semester and end-of-class self-assessments so that we may better focus on qualitative and not quantitative evaluations. You will be reflecting carefully on your own work and the work of your peers. If this process causes more anxiety than it alleviates, see me at any point to confer about tips for self-evaluations. Please know that if an assignment does not feel productive, we can find ways to modify, remix, or repurpose the instructions.

Mid-semester assessments must be completed by midnight on October 22, 2021. Final assessments must be completed by midnight on December 22, 2021, after your final paper is turned in.

Guidance on Late Work

Missing a deadline is a stressful experience. Sometimes it's just the result of an acute situation, but sometimes it's the result of something more persistent—struggling with the material, life circumstances, or one's mental state—and the source of trouble is not always obvious from the inside. Students in these situations often blame themselves and as a result incur late penalties. Students sometimes even fail classes because they get paralyzed and ultimately never submit the assignment. If you are in this situation, I can help. If you are going to miss a deadline:

1. Email me *whatever you have* before the deadline. If I get something from you, no matter how incomplete, the first day's late penalty will be halved.
2. Stay in contact with me until you finish. We will make a plan to get you back on track.

Readings

There are no required texts for this course; all readings will be provided online. However, there are two resources that can help with a critical analysis of Marxism. See:

Robert Tucker (ed.). *The Marx-Engels Reader* (W. W. Norton & Company).
Olúfẹ́mì Táíwò. [Why Everything Cost Money](#).

Schedule

Week 1:

Sep. 6: Labor Day (*No class*)

Sep. 8: Introductions. What is this course and who's in it? *No reading*.

Sep. 10: Manifesto of the Communist Party by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels
Recommended Reading: "What is Orthodox Marxism?" by Georg Lukács

Week 2:

Sep. 13: Principles of Communism by Frederick Engels

Sep. 15: Alienation and Social Class by Karl Marx + The Attitude of the Bourgeoisie Towards the Proletariat by Friedrich Engels

Sep. 17: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses by Louis Althusser

Recommended Reading: German Ideology: Part I by Karl Marx

Week 3:

Sep. 20: The General Formula for Capital + The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof + The Two Factors of a Commodity: Use-Value and Value (The Substance of Value and the Magnitude of Value) by Karl Marx

Sep. 22: The Abolition of Work by Bob Black + No Gods, No Masters Degrees by CrimethInc Ex-Workers' Collective

Sep. 24: Invisible Exploitation: How Capital Extracts Value Beyond Wage Labor by Eva Swidler

Recommended Reading: Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 by Karl Marx

Week 4:

Sep. 27: The So-Called Primitive Accumulation by Karl Marx

Sep. 29: The Reproduction of Capital and Its Social Setting + The Accumulation of Capital – An Anti-Critique by Rosa Luxemburg

Oct. 1: Accumulation and development: a theoretical model by Samir Amin

Recommended Reading: Disaggregating Primitive Accumulation: The Dialectic of Labour and Land by Robert Nichols + Militarism as a Province of Accumulation by Rosa Luxemburg

Week 5:

Oct. 4: Racial Capitalism by Michael Ralph and Maya Singhal

Oct. 6: Socialism and the American Negro by W.E.B. Du Bois + Blackburn: Letters between Karl Marx and Frederick Engels + Letters between Marx and Lincoln

Oct. 8: What Could It Mean to Say, “Capitalism Causes Sexism and Racism?” by Vanessa Wills

Week 6:

Oct. 11: Indigenous Peoples Day (*No class*)

Oct. 13: “Global Inequality of Wealth in the Twenty-First Century,” Capital in the Twenty-First Century by Thomas Piketty

Oct. 15: Colonial Debts by Rocío Zambrana + A United Front Against Debt by Thomas Sankara

Week 7:

Oct. 18: Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism: Sections V-IX by Vladimir Lenin

Oct. 20: The ‘New’ Imperialism: Accumulation by Dispossession by David Harvey

Oct. 22: Ecological Imperialism: The Curse of Capitalism by John Bellamy Foster and Brett Clark
Short Paper + Mid-Semester Assessment Due

Week 8:

Oct. 25: Women’s Suffrage and Class Struggle by Rosa Luxemburg + Feminist Demands by José Carlos Mariátegui

Oct. 27: Marxism and Feminism + Wages Against Housework by Silvia Federici

Oct. 29: “Gender, Race, and Class: A Perspective on the Contemporary Caribbean Struggle,” The Point is to Change the World by Andaiye

Recommended Reading: The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism by Heidi Hartmann + Feminism, Marxism, Method and the State: An Agenda for Theory by Catharine MacKinnon

Week 9:

Nov. 1: The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte + Theses on Feuerbach by Karl Marx
Nov. 3: “The Development of Utopian Socialism,” Socialism: Utopian and Scientific by Frederick Engels + Capital Volume Three (excerpt) by Karl Marx
Nov. 5: “The Economic Basis of the Withering Away of the State,” The State and Revolution by Vladimir Lenin
Recommended Reading: Critique of the Gotha Program by Karl Marx

Week 10:

Nov. 8: The Possibility of Non-Violent Revolution by Karl Marx + Marxist Theory on Revolution and Violence by Adam Schaff
Nov. 10: “New Forms of Control,” One-Dimensional Man by Herbert Marcuse
Nov. 12: On Practice + Manifesto of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army by Mao Zedong
Recommended Reading: Little Red Book by Mao Zedong + On the Jewish Question by Karl Marx + “The Left Under the Counterrevolution,” Counter-Revolution and Revolt by Herbert Marcuse

Week 11:

Nov. 15: “Freedom must be conquered in struggle,” We Are the Heirs of the World's Revolutions: Speeches from the Burkina Faso Revolution 1983-87 by Thomas Sankara
Nov. 17: The Weapon of Theory by Amílcar Cabral
Nov. 19: The World Crisis and the Peruvian Proletariat + The Destiny of North America by José Carlos Mariátegui
Recommended Reading: Defense of Marxism by José Carlos Mariátegui

Week 12:

Nov. 22 + 24: For this week we will watch one of these select films based on party vote: Born in Flames (1983) + Bamako (2006) + Sorry to Bother You (2018) + Parasite (2019) + Matewan (1987).

Thanksgiving Recess (Nov. 25 - Nov. 28)

Week 13:

Nov. 29: A Permanent Economic Emergency by Slavoj Žižek
Dec. 1: On Delegitimising Capitalism: The Scourge of Africa and the South by Samir Amin
Dec. 3: Colonial global economy: towards a theoretical reorientation of political economy by Gurminder K. Bhambra

Week 14:

Dec. 6: Freedom Now by Alex Gourevitch and Corey Robin
Dec. 8: The Gospel of Wealth by Andrew Carnegie + “The Threat to Capitalism” + “New Rules,” Saving Capitalism: For the Many, Not the Few by Robert Reich
Dec. 10: “I Am Not a Leader”: Russell Means’ 1980 Mother Jones Cover Story
Recommended Reading: Thoughts and Details on Scarcity by Edmund Burke

Week 15:

Dec. 13: Class Review + Term Paper Workshop
Remember: Term Paper and Final Self-Assessment due next week.