BASEBALL
A Marxist Analysis

Marxian theory holds that the test of its own validity is its capacity to explain the world and, on that basis, to foster change. Politics 218 is a course for students with a grasp of Marxist theory to take the intermediate step between theory and practice — to examine the ways in which it can elucidate social reality. (Any third step is your own choice and responsibility.) We will take up major works on a range of topics by social scientists who have attempted to use various Marxian approaches as analytical tools.
Politics 218 relies significantly on discussion; I will not be going over the material in detailed lectures. It is imperative, then, that before each class you complete the readings for the day. Otherwise, you will not be able to get much out of that class session, and you will, unavoidably, feel lost.

We will make intensive use of Blackboard.

§ Once each week you should respond in writing on our course blog to questions that I will pose for each session. Specifically, those of you with surnames beginning A–H will do so by the end of Sunday night (for Monday’s class), those with surnames I–P by the end of Tuesday night (for Wednesday’s class), and those of with surnames Q–Z by Thursday evening (for Friday’s class). If you miss your appointed day, simply post a reply for another day that week. You may, of course, respond more than once each week if you like; the more often you do so, the more you will learn.

§ Second, you can post questions of fact or interpretation that arise as you do each session’s reading. I and other members of the class may respond to your questions right on the blog, and I will try to do so in the subsequent class. Start a debate!

§ Third, before each class, take a few moments to log in to the blog to read what everyone has written.

You will also write two open-book, take-home essays of approximately 1,500 words (= 6 pages) each. The schedule appears in the course outline below. These papers do require you to demonstrate command of the material, but they are oriented mainly toward developing your engagement with and analysis and interpretation of it. To give you an idea of what to expect and to help you orient your reading and thinking, starting on page 6 below you will find the essay questions used in the most recent offering of the course. You can expect many of the same issues to be treated this time around, probably with some of the same or similar questions.

I will evaluate your work according to the following weightings:

- Weekly blog comments: 50%
- Papers: 25% each
- Contribution to class sessions: A “fudge factor”

Please take careful note of these proportions. They reflect my conviction that the daily process of participating in the course by reading, thinking and contributing to everyone else’s learning in face-to-face and online discussion is as important to your learning as the two papers you will write. In the past students who assumed that the papers were their only responsibilities for the course were surprised at the end of the semester. 😊
Americans spend five times as much on dog food as on college books. Politics 218 is doing its part to right our priorities. Please purchase the following books, which are available at the Oberlin Bookstore; try your best to find Burawoy, which is out of print but may be available at used booksellers.

Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*
Michael Burawoy, *The Politics of Production*
Jefferson Cowie, *Capital Moves: RCA's 70-Year Quest for Cheap Labor*
John Bellamy Foster, *The Ecological Revolution*
David Harvey, *The New Imperialism*
David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neo-Liberalism*
Ira Katznelson, *City Trenches: Urban Politics and the Patterning of Class in the United States*
Christian Parenti, *Lockdown America: Police and Prisons in the Age of Crisis*
William Strunk and E.B. White, *Elements of Style*
Howard Waitzkin, *The Second Sickness*
Erik Olin Wright, *Class Counts: Comparative Studies in Class Analysis (student edition)*

Some of our readings are on print reserve and E-res. The Eres password is Polt218 (and it is case-specific).

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February 24: Political Economy VI

February 26: Class I *(N.b. This class may have to be rescheduled for March 1 @ 3:30.)*
    Wright, *Class Counts*, chapters 1-3.

March 1: Class II *(N.b. This class may have to be rescheduled for 4:30-5:20.)*
    Wright, *Class Counts*, chapters 6-9.

March 3: Class III
    Wright, *Class Counts*, chapters 10 & 11.

March 5: Politics and the State I: Crime and Imprisonment I

March 8: Politics and the State II: Crime and Imprisonment II
    **FIRST ESSAY QUESTIONS DISTRIBUTED.**

March 10: Politics and the State III: Crime and Imprisonment III

March 12: Politics and the State IV: Urban Politics I
    Ira Katznelson, *City Trenches*, chapters 1-3.

March 15: Politics and the State V: Urban Politics II
    Ira Katznelson, *City Trenches*, chapters 4-6.

March 17: Politics and the State VI: Urban Politics III
    Ira Katznelson, *City Trenches*, chapters 7 & 8.

March 19: Class cancelled due to my professional travel

**MARCH 20: FIRST ESSAY DUE.**

March 22: Health Care I

March 24: Health Care II
    Waitzkin, chapters 4-6.

March 26: Optional informal discussion (as very few of you would attend a regular class)

April 5: Class canceled due to my professional travel.
April 7: The Environment I

April 9: The Environment II

April 12: The Environment III

April 14: Labor Process I

April 16: Labor Process II

April 19: Labor Process III

April 21: Labor Process IV

April 23: Labor Process V
  Michael Burawoy, *The Politics of Production*, pages 5-84 (on reserve and Eres).

April 26: Labor Process VI

April 28: Labor Process VII

April 30: Labor Process VIII

May 3: Globalization and Imperialism I
  SECOND ESSAY QUESTIONS DISTRIBUTED.

May 5: Globalization and Imperialism II

May 7: Globalization and Imperialism III
  Second essay questions distributed.
May 10: What Is To Be Done? I
Waitzkin, The Second Sickness, chapters 7 & 8.

May 12: What Is To Be Done? II
Harvey, A Brief History of Neoliberalism, chapter 7.

May 14: Conclusion

MAY 18: SECOND ESSAY DUE. (This deadline is firm, due to strict College rules.)

ESSAY QUESTIONS FROM THE MOST RECENT OFFERING OF THE COURSE

FIRST ESSAY TOPICS

1. What is driving change in contemporary political economy? To what extent can developments in the past thirty or forty years be explained by reference to the impersonal economic tendencies and laws of motion of capitalism? In contrast, what role should be assigned to political action (on the part of workers and the state) and class struggle in the transition from Fordist to post-Fordist forms of accumulation? Be sure to refer to the arguments and examples contained in Harvey and Cowie, while also considering their relation to classical Marxian political economy.

2. What does Wright’s elaboration of Marxian class structure gain? What does it lose? Think not just in terms of the structural analysis itself, but also about its ability to analyze gender, class consciousness, and/or class formation. Ground your analysis in Marxian theory itself.

3. Parenti offers a highly textured account of policing and imprisonment in the late 20th century. Analyze the Marxian “value-added” in his account. Has a Marxian approach enabled him to illuminate something that a non-Marxian would have missed? What specific use does he make of Marxian theory? What other possible Marxian arguments (if any) does he avoid, and is this a good decision? Has the Marxian approach blindered him to other equally valid explanations? Pay particular attention to issues of class, the state and political economy.

4. Marx had two theories of the state: an instrumental approach which treated the state as the tool of the bourgeoisie, and a structural approach in which the state and politics reflected the overall structure of capitalist society. In what ways do Marxian theories of the state figure in the accounts of Harvey, Cowie, Wright, and/or Parenti (choose two or more), and how persuasive are they? Pay attention to the state’s motivations for its actions, and consider whether Marxian theory helps illuminate them. Where applicable, be
sure also to analyze how changes in the structure of capitalism have affected the state's objectives, strategies and tactics over time. Can these changes and their political consequences be explained in Marxian terms?
5. Write out your own question, discuss it with me (a necessary step), and then respond to it.

SECOND ESSAY TOPICS

1. Do capitalists always have an interest in making work as de-skilled and alienating as possible? Consider issues of profit, power, and consent.
2. Is capitalism, as a specific mode of production (compared, say, to pre-capitalist societies and Soviet-style state socialism), uniquely destructive of nature, as a simple Marxian theory might suggest? If not, is this a refutation of Marxian theory?
3. What kind of politics do O'Connor's and Kovel's theories of capitalism and nature imply? Consider the role of the state, class conflict, and coalition politics in your answer, and evaluate the implications for Marxian theory. [N.b.: O'Connor and Kovel were readings on the environment, which have now been replaced with Foster.]
4. Katzenelson offers a textured account of the type of politics that developed in northern Manhattan in the middle of the twentieth century. Analyze the Marxian "value-added" in his account. In other words, has a Marxian approach enabled him to illuminate something that a non-Marxian would have missed? Pay particular attention to issues of class, the state and political economy.
5. Waitzkin offers a highly textured account of health care, in the late 20th century. Analyze the Marxian "value-added" in his account. Has a Marxian approach enabled him to illuminate something that a non-Marxian would have missed? What specific use is made of Marxian theory? What other possible Marxian arguments (if any) are avoided, and is this a good decision? Has the Marxian approach blinded the author(s) to other equally valid explanations? Pay particular attention to issues of class, the state and political economy.
6. Is the US's turn to imperialism, like the globalization that preceded it (and still continues), just the latest "spatial fix" for capitalism's crisis tendencies? What relationship, if any, does it have with flexible accumulation, neoliberalism, or neocorporatism? Be sure to refer to the arguments and examples contained in both Harvey and Retort, while also considering their relation to classical Marxian political economy.
7. What, if anything, does Marx's theory of technology help explain about our present world? What are its limitations or self-contradictions? Consider the arguments of some of these authors: a) Kovel, b) Waitzkin, c) Braverman and Burawoy.
8. Lenin once famously asked "What Is To Be Done?" Does Marxian theory provide a guide to approaching this question in our day and age? Refer specifically to the ideas put forward by at least several of our authors who address the issue (Harvey, Kovel, Waitzkin). Feel free to develop your own analysis as well, grounding it in Marxian theory (in a way that argues either for its usefulness or uselessness). [N.b.: Kovel is replaced with Foster.]
9. Write out your own question, discuss it with me (a necessary step), and then respond to it in writing.