

IDH2930 Reading Karl Marx Today

Sections: #25647 (in person); #31428 (online)

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Office Hours: by appointment

Meeting Time: Wednesday 12.50

Location: Little Hall 0117

Summary

More than a hundred years after his death, Karl Marx is still a controversial figure. His contributions to the fields of philosophy, economics, history, sociology, and political science, are widely recognized. At the same time, his work served as an inspiration for the creators of the communist regimes around the world and is thus associated with state repression and political violence committed and justified with the higher goals. Often, people form opinions about Karl Marx without reading and understanding his work. This course aims to remedy this. This semester, we will read the most emblematic works of Karl Marx and discuss them (using *The Marx-Engels Reader*), aiming to investigate his intellectual contributions and potential danger of his ideas. The texts will cover an array of Marx's thoughts, from his early works inspired by Hegel, to his foundational texts discussing economic relations in the capitalist society, to his writings about the promises of a new communist society.

Throughout the semester, the students will read different Marx's texts, which will be critically examined during the class discussions. The students should be willing to be challenged to think about different interpretations of Marx's ideas. We will examine why some people were inspired by his ideas to such a degree that they tried to implement them by creating new political, social, and economic order. We will also investigate why some people are threatened by Marx's ideas even today. Each week, we will discuss the assigned text first by thinking about the ideas in the context of the time of Marx's writing. Following that, we will discuss whether Marx's ideas are applicable to today's society. How to think about the exploitation in the gig economy? How to think about value creation through labor applying these ideas to the Instagram influencers? Can we imagine alternative ways to organize the collective interests of the workers without strong labor unions? What should be the role of the state according to Marx? What do we expect from the state today?

Students will get to know Marx's famous texts by reading them first hand rather than relying on someone else's interpretations of his works. By looking at Marx, we will address a wider issue of the connection between politics and economics, and how they shape human lives.

Objectives

There are two primary goals of this course. More directly, you will familiarize yourself with the intellectual figure of Karl Marx and his main works. In broader terms, this course will help you to develop critical thinking, challenging you to engage with abstract yet often contentious ideas, to critically think about their merits, and problems related to them. You will also be trained to respond to the opposing positions using nuanced arguments. Discussions in the class and response papers will train you to apply ideas developed in different historical circumstances to today's world and to think about their implications and appropriateness.

Requirements

This class focuses on the texts of Karl Marx. You will be reading the primary texts, written by Marx himself, rather than interpretations of his work. Before each weekly meeting, you are expected to read the assigned text, think about it, and be prepared to analyze it together with other students. My role will be primarily one of the discussion moderator, and I will not deliver lectures, but rather expect to talk about the assigned readings with you. Occasionally, I might explain a specific point, but overall I expect critical engagement with the assigned materials. You should be aware that over the years many people struggled with these texts, trying to interpret the meaning of some of their aspects, or thinking about their practical application. We will be using that road: thinking about Marx's texts, and thinking about their importance and implications for the world today.

The course will also have an online discussion board, where I will pose the weekly question(s) inspired by the weekly reading. I expect people to comment on these questions, which will be open-ended and will serve as an invitation for the discussion rather than as a question that should/can be easily and clearly answered. The discussion on the online board can be continued in the class if we decide that some questions require our further engagement.

During the course of the semester, you will write two short response papers during the weeks of your choice. In each paper you will (1) explain the main points raised in the assigned Marx's text for the week, and (2) comment on how these ideas are seen today, touching on the positions sympathetic to Marx and opposed to him. You will also summarize why this specific text/idea is still considered relevant today.

Finally, in the last meeting, the whole class will be randomly divided into two groups. Each group will prepare the case, one of them focusing on the importance and value of Marx's work, and the other one pointing out his shortcomings and problems with his reasoning. The students will be randomly assigned to the groups the week before so they can prepare their group case. The work will be divided among all the group members, and the participation will be graded.

Your work will be evaluated based on:

Attendance (10%) - Attending class is mandatory, and absences should be excused based on University policies.

Participation in class (20%) – The course will function as a discussion-oriented seminar. Students should read the assigned materials before the class, and come to class willing to critically discuss the weekly topic.

Participation in the discussion board (20%) – The students will also participate in a discussion board. Every week I will post a question to be discussed using the discussion board. The board will serve to engage you with each other, since you are expected to comment on each other's contributions, rather than repeating the common points.

Response papers (20% each; 40% total) – The response papers will be structured around the reading assigned for the week in question. The students will explain Marx's text, address how these ideas are seen today (aiming to assess positive and negative sides), and comment on the relevance of the idea in question and its treatment by Marx today. The paper will have to be submitted before the weekly class meeting.

Group debate (10%) – During the last meeting, the students (randomly divided into two groups) will make a case for and against Marx. They will aim to make the most compelling case for the continuing importance of Marx (or against the importance/appropriateness of his ideas today).

Grading scale:

Grade	Score	Grade	Score	Grade	Score	Grade	Score
A	94-100	B	83-86	C	73-76	D	63-66
A-	90-93	B-	80-82	C-	70-72	D-	60-62
B+	87-89	C+	77-79	D+	67-69	E	0-59

Required Text

Tucker, Robert C., eds. 1978. The Marx-Engels Reader. Second Edition. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

University Policies

Academic honesty

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Honor Code specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. [Click here to read the Honor Code](#). Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor or TAs in this class.

Make-up exams and other work

Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies.

Students with disabilities

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center. [Click here to get started with the Disability Resource Center](#). It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.

Class evaluations

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via ufl.bluera.com/ufl/.

COVID-19

In response to COVID-19, the following policies and requirements are in place to maintain your learning environment and to enhance the safety of our in-classroom interactions.

- You are required to wear approved face coverings at all times during class and within buildings. Following and enforcing these policies and requirements are all of our responsibility. Failure to do so will lead to a report to the Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution.
- This course has been assigned a physical classroom with enough capacity to maintain physical distancing (6 feet between individuals) requirements. Please utilize designated seats and maintain appropriate spacing between students. Please do not move desks or stations.
- Sanitizing supplies are available in the classroom if you wish to wipe down your desks prior to sitting down and at the end of the class.

- Follow your instructor's guidance on how to enter and exit the classroom. Practice physical distancing to the extent possible when entering and exiting the classroom.
- If you are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms ([Click here for guidance from the CDC on symptoms of coronavirus](#)), please use the UF Health screening system and follow the instructions on whether you are able to attend class. [Click here for UF Health guidance on what to do if you have been exposed to or are experiencing Covid-19 symptoms](#).
- Course materials will be provided to you with an excused absence, and you will be given a reasonable amount of time to make up work. [Find more information on the university attendance policies](#).

Campus Resources

Health and Wellness

U Matter, We Care: If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu, 352-392-1575, or visit *U Matter, We Care* website to refer or report a concern and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.

Counseling and Wellness Center: Visit the Counseling and Wellness Center website or call 352-392-1575 for information on crisis services as well as non-crisis services.

Student Health Care Center: Call 352-392-1161 for 24/7 information to help you find the care you need, or visit the Student Health Care Center website.

University Police Department: Visit UF Police Department website or call 352-392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies).

UF Health Shands Emergency Room / Trauma Center: For immediate medical care call 352-733-0111 or go to the emergency room at 1515 SW Archer Road, Gainesville, FL 32608; [Visit the UF Health Emergency Room and Trauma Center website](#).

Academic Resources

E-learning technical support: Contact the UF Computing Help Desk at 352-392-4357 or via e-mail at helpdesk@ufl.edu.

[Career Connections Center:](#) Reitz Union Suite 1300, 352-392-1601. Career assistance and counseling services.

[Library Support:](#) Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.

[Teaching Center](#): Broward Hall, 352-392-2010 or to make an appointment 352- 392-6420. General study skills and tutoring.

Writing Studio: 2215 Turlington Hall, 352-846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers.

Student Complaints On-Campus: [Visit the Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code webpage for more information](#).

On-Line Students Complaints: [View the Distance Learning Student Complaint Process](#).

Important Note

The instructor reserved the right to change any of the administrative information (syllabus, readings, exams, distribution of grades, and papers) throughout the course of the semester and will inform students of such changes with due time and consideration.

Course Schedule

Week	Date	Content
1	01/13	<u>Introduction</u> Introducing the class, discussing the syllabus, planning the semester. [no readings]
2	01/20	<u>Importance of Context</u> In order to get a better understanding of how Karl Marx came to his ideas, we will start by watching a documentary focused on his life. This will help us to put his ideas in the larger political/social/cultural/technological context of his time. It will also help us to be aware of how we translate Marx's ideas in widely different contexts, both in terms of place and time. [no readings]
3	01/27	<u>Religion</u> We will be reading Marx's early writing <i>On the Jewish question</i> (inspired by debate among young Hegelians) as well as his position on religion more directly. [pp. 26-52; 53-54]
4	02/03	<u>Alienation</u> We will read an excerpt from Marx's early <i>Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts</i> , focusing on the conception of the labor, and the capitalist notion of labor as a product that is bought and sold. [pp. 66-81]

5	02/10	<u>(Private) Property</u> Among the early Marx's writings, we will read an excerpt on private property and communism. [pp. 81-93]
6	02/17	<u>Theory and Practice</u> We will read a short piece titled <i>Theses on Feuerbach</i> , which succinctly presents ideas about the human agency, and make a distinction between theorizing about the world and acting for a change. [pp. 143-145]
7	02/24	<u>Imagining Communism</u> Marx left very few explanations of what communism would entail. This week's excerpt from <i>The German Ideology</i> presents a vision of the gradual progression of society, led by material forces, and gives a glimpse of what the communist phase would be like. [pp. 148-175]
8	03/03	<u>Capital - Labor Opposition</u> We will read Marx's description of the main societal building blocks: capital and labor, describing their inherent opposition. [pp. 203-217]
9	03/10	<u>Mechanization, Automatization</u> Marx discusses the rise of mechanical production, and what that means for the workers. The text was written in the time of industrialization. We will discuss if these insights are relevant today and how. [pp. 278-290]
10	03/17	<u>Value</u> The cornerstone of Marx's economic theory is his theory of value. We read how Marx reasons that all value ultimately comes from labor and discuss the implications of this statement. [p. 302-329]
11	03/24	<u>Labor Market</u> In Marx's critique of capitalism, we read about the relations tied to buying and selling of labor-power. [p. 336-361]
12	03/31	<u>Communist Revolution</u>

		<p>This week we read one of the most well-known programmatic works of Marx and Engels (<i>Manifesto of the Communist Party</i>) that summarizes Marx’s main ideas related to class struggle and gives a call for action.</p> <p>[pp. 469-500]</p>
13	04/07	<p><u>History and Class Struggle</u></p> <p><i>The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte</i> is considered Marx’s great work on the political history of France, emphasizing the class struggle and historical change.</p> <p>[pp. 594-617]</p>
14	04/14	<p><u>Globalization</u></p> <p>Marx’s ideas were mostly grounded in the European context. We will read his brief discussion on imperialism in India as an invitation to think about how Marx’s ideas can be translated onto the global stage characterized by large disparities among the countries.</p> <p>[pp. 653-664]</p>
15	04/21	<p><u>Marx’s Legacy: Group Debate</u></p> <p>We look back at the semester and compare the ideas and writings of Karl Marx with their implementation in practice. Can we distinguish between the two? What did we learn? Is Karl Marx still relevant? How?</p>