**Karl Marx’s *Capital***

Franke Seminar in the Humanities

Fall 2020

Instructor: Paul North

TF: Vanessa Gubbins

**The book, *Capital*, has arguably accomplished in the last couple centuries more than any other book has. It has taught workers to understand their place in the economy, started (and ended) revolutions, fundamentally changed social forms and discourse about social forms, and illuminated the political thinking of philosophers, politicians, artists, students, and oppressed groups of all kinds in Latin America, Africa, the East, the West, and wherever else you place the global meridians. A more influential book written in the last 200 years would be hard to find.**

**In the seminar we will study Marx’s powerful analysis, *Capital: Toward a critique of political economy, Volume 1*, which gives a compelling picture of an international economic and social system, the system, you might argue, within which we live. The book identifies five basic mysteries that shape us and our social world. The mysteries are: why social classes struggle against one another, why people are enthralled by things, how a certain quantity of money turns into more money without adding anything, why some people have to work and the more they work the less they make, and finally, what prevents the world from changing for the better.**

**Understanding this book means finding answers to these questions, among many others. If you want to know why there is so much scarcity and suffering amid extreme abundance, if you want to know why technology determines your daily life ever more profoundly, if you want to know how our clock got divided into hours, our years into weeks and weekends, and our lives into productive and unproductive sides, if you wonder when the climate disaster got as bad as it did, or why Europeans stole human beings in africa and sold them in the new world, if you are asking how the division of labor in a bourgeois household got established such that women, for centuries and in many places in the world still, and also still in many cases in the US, do the unpaid labor required to reproduce life — all these questions too are raised and answered, in particular ways.**

**Our work in the class will consist mainly in slow, attentive reading of the text. We will read for basic concepts and think through the controversies around the way Marx formulated those concepts. We will read for the rhetorical and literary gestures and devices that make these thoughts, not least of which is Marx’s ripping irony. Finally, we will not choose among a philosophical, economic, sociological, or historical way of reading, framework, or discipline. For a phenomenon that is too big to understand, the world-system in its interconnections, this book is too big to fit into a single discipline or method. The project will require openness to discourses foreign in style and epoch, and imagination enough to fill in where our understanding, and Marx’s, meet their limits.**

**The course will consist in a weekly seminar meeting, a weekly asynchronous discussion forum, and an almost weekly colloquium lead by different visiting experts aspects of *Capital* or Marxian thought.**

**Readings**

Particip

Articles

Additional articles and chapters will be provided in pdf format

**Reading Schedule (subject to change)**

Week 1

Marx, Theses on Feuerbach

*Capital* Ch. 1

Heinrich, “Preface"

Week 2

Ch. 1 continued

Heinrich, Ch. 1 “The Object of Critique in the Critique of Political Economy"

Week 3

Ch. 2-4

Heinrich, Ch. 2 “Value, Labor, Money"

Week 4

Ch. 2-4 continued

Mandel, *The Formation of Marx's Economic Thought*, selections

Week 5

Capital Ch. 5-9

Heinrich, Ch. 4 “Capital, Surplus Value, and Exploitation"

Week 6

Capital Ch. 10-13

Eric Schatzberg, *Technology: Critical History of a Concept*, Ch. 7 “Discourse of Technik: Engineers and Humanists”

Week 7

Capital Ch. 14-16

Week 8

Capital 17-20

Week 9

Capital 21-24

Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital*, Ch. 1 “The problem of our investigation"

Cedric Robinson, “Racial Capitalism: The Nonobjective Character of Capitalist

Development” in Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition

Week 10

Capital 21-24 continued

Michelle Murphy, “Reproduction"

Figga Haug, "The Marx within Feminism"

Week 11

Capital vol 2 selections

Heinrich, Ch. 6 “The Ciruclation of Capital”

Week 12

Capital vol 3 selections

Heinrich, Ch. 9 “Crisis”

Week 13

Heinrich, Ch. 11 “State and Capital” and Ch. 12 “Communism—Society beyond the Commodity, Money, and the State”

Melinda Cooper, Introduction to Sage Handbook of Neoliberalism

Étienne Balibar, "Re-reading Capital"

Final paper due

**Assignments**

Weekly problem sets. Not mathematical problems but thought problems. You will be given questions to which the answers are in Marx’s text. If you read carefully, you can answer them. About 1-2 pages.

Final paper. 12-15 pages.

**Grades**

Participation 20%

Weekly problem sets 30%

Final essay 50%

**Academic Honesty**

Any work you submit in this class is understood by you and by the instructor to be your own original work and no one else’s. You may want to include in your text some words or ideas written by others, but you may do so only with the proper attribution. This means that you openly and obviously mark the words or ideas of others as taken from their work, whether they be another’s exact words or a paraphrase of their text or a key idea taken from them. It also means that you fully identify the original source in the proper place in your paper, in parentheses or footnotes, and if necessary in a bibliography as well. Submitting another’s work as your own without proper attribution carries serious consequences. Yale’s policy on academic honesty can be found here: <http://catalog.yale.edu/first-year-student-handbook/academic-information/introduction-undergraduate-education/academic-honesty/>.

**Electronics policy [PLEASE READ]:** during Zoom sessions you will be using your device connected to the internet. There are some rules about what you should and should not access during the class session. From 9am to 11:15am on the days of the class, if you want to be marked present, you must close all windows and all webpages except those necessary to do the classwork and stay connected. Usually this will be only four apps or sites: 1. Zoom, 2. Canvas, 3. Pdf reader with that day’s texts, and 4. Google docs. Less frequently we will access other sites during the class or use other apps. Please only do this when instructed. A note on reference materials. Our references during classtime should be the text or texts we are discussing and our own understanding, memory, and imagination. We will practice abstinence with regard to Google and Wikipedia. In almost all situations, this course wants insights and interpretations from you, not answers to factual questions.