

FIRST ESSAY ASSIGNMENT

Please answer one of the following in a 5-8 page essay:

1) Marx writes that the formulation of a question is its solution. **Reformulate one of the following questions from a Marxian perspective, and then use Marx to suggest a different sort of solution.**

- “Why are the poor so often trapped in a culture of poverty?”
- “Should gays have the right to marry?”
- “Is government spending the way out of this recession?”
- “Why aren’t women equal to men?”
- “Is the U.S. approaching racial equality since Obama has been elected?”
- “Are pay cuts and layoffs in the universities necessary to balance the Arizona state budget?”
- Or suggest another relevant political or social question.

In your answer, explain what is wrong with the question as it is currently formulated. Then explain how a Marxian approach would reformulate the question and resolve it. (Or you can discuss how a Marxian approach fails to resolve it.) Use Marx’s reformulation of Bauer’s “Jewish question” as an example, if that helps. Be sure to root your argument in a careful analysis of at least two of the Marx texts we’ve read so far. Feel free to use any outside evidence you want to help answer your reformulated question, but it’s not required.

2) Marx argues that we are alienated in politics and production. **Analyze in what way you are (or are not) alienated.** In defending your argument, carefully discuss Marx’s notion of alienation. Then, apply it to your life situation (or the situation of someone you know, if you prefer.) If you like (though this is not required), in a final page or paragraph evaluate to what extent Marx’s solution to alienation (i.e. communism) would address this life situation. Use at least *two* of the following texts in your paper: “On the Jewish Question,” *1844 Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, and *The German Ideology*. Feel free to use any other text you want as well.

3) If you have another topic or question you would prefer to write on, you are welcome to do so. I must clear all student-generated topics before you start writing. I am happy to help you write up an appropriate topic.

Whatever question you answer, be sure that your paper makes a clear argument (i.e. has a strong thesis) and supports it through a careful analysis of the texts.

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- **DUE DATE:** Tuesday, February 24, in class
If you will have a problem meeting this deadline, contact me at least *one day before the deadline*. Otherwise, your essay will be penalized one grade.
 - **Points:** The paper is worth 50 points out of 250 total for the class.

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- **Grading** will be based on the following five criteria:
 - 1) That your paper has a **thesis**. A thesis consists of three elements: it introduces the topic, it answers the essay question clearly, and it tells the reader how the thesis is going to be defended, indicating what reasoning or evidence will be used in the body of the paper.
 - 2) That the paper is **well organized** and easy to understand. The recommended format is thesis-body-conclusion.
 - 3) That you make an **original, persuasive argument** based on your beliefs and what you've learned from the texts and lectures.
 - 4) That you **back up your claims with evidence** from the texts. This means you will have to explain the arguments *as well as* offer your analysis of them. I want to know what you think, but I also want to know how the things you've read support your argument.
 - 5) That your paper is typed and is the required length (double-spaced, regular margins). Please don't bother with fancy covers or folders. Please put page numbers on your paper.
- **How I grade**
 - A papers: Will meet all five criteria above.
 - B papers: Will generally meet four of the five criteria. For example, it will summarize the texts well but not make an argument (i.e. the paper will lack a thesis). Or it will be a paper that makes an argument but the evidence used to support it is weak.
 - C papers: Will fall short in two of the criteria, or it will show a surface engagement with the texts.
 - D papers: Will fall short in three of the criteria and/or reflect little engagement with the texts and/or a lack of effort.
- **Audience:** Write the paper for a generally educated audience. Do not assume the reader has any familiarity with the texts.
- **Citations:** If you get an idea from a text, or if you quote from it, be sure to cite it. *If you do not cite from the texts your paper will be penalized.* The best way to cite the texts is to follow this example: "To formulate a question is to resolve it" (Marx, 28). Note the placement of punctuation. If you use texts other than the Tucker edition, provide a full citation of your translation at the end of the paper. (Go to easybib.com if you need help in writing a correct citation.) Do not cite class lectures, although you are of course welcome to use them to write your paper. You do not need to use outside sources for this paper.
- **Electronic submission of papers:** If you prefer, you may email me your paper as a Microsoft Word, WordPerfect, or Rich Text File attachment. All the page number and margin requirements still apply. You must email me your submission before class on the due date.
- **Things I watch for:**
 - Papers whose evidence is entirely based on lecture notes or secondary sources. If it's clear to me that you haven't read the material carefully, don't expect anything higher than a C.
 - Papers that quote large chunks of a text. You should definitely quote from the texts to make your argument (and be sure to cite them when you do), but you should use the texts to *support* your argument, not to *make* your argument for you.
 - Papers that don't make an argument. *Be sure your paper has a thesis.*
 - Poor grammar. Poor grammar and spelling mistakes display a lack of concern for your work. If you don't care about your paper, why should I?
 - Plagiarism. Your paper should be the product of your own effort at reading, thinking, debating, and writing. If you copy your paper, or sections of your paper, from another source you will receive an F for this assignment and be subject to further penalties.
- **Questions about the paper:** I would much rather grade good papers than bad ones. Therefore, I would be happy to talk with you about any problems you may be having or to go over an outline or rough draft. Please see me for help during my office hours, email me (joel.olson@nau.edu), or call me at school (523-8514) or evenings before 11:00 p.m. on my cell phone at 928-600-5563.

SECOND ESSAY ASSIGNMENT

Please answer one of the following in a 5-8 page essay:

1) Marx analyzed the birth of capitalism and how capital was initially acquired; Lenin examined its later “monopoly” stage. Many argue that today we are in a new stage of capitalism. Use Marx and Lenin to evaluate the “globalization” stage of capitalism. **Are Marx’s theory of primitive accumulation and Lenin’s theory of imperialism useful in explaining globalization?** What do their theories capture or miss about how global capitalism functions in the twenty-first century? In your answer, explain Marx’s theory of how profits or surplus value are accumulated under capitalism. Then, carefully analyze both primitive accumulation in *Capital* and imperialism in *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* and make an argument for whether and/or how these theories are relevant today.

2) In his earlier work, Marx explains how capitalism alienates workers. In his later work, his focus shifts to explaining how they are exploited. **Are you exploited?** In answering this question, explain Marx’s theory of how the working class is exploited under capitalism. Be sure to discuss his theory of class conflict and how class struggle is built into every commodity. Then, argue whether this analysis usefully applies to your life. Discuss the ways in which you are (or are not) exploited and the ways in which you do (or do not) struggle against this exploitation. In a final paragraph, consider what the political implications of this struggle are—does it have the potential to create broad political reform? Use *Capital* extensively in making your argument. Feel free to bring in any other Marx text that you find useful.

3) One current alternative to existing consumption patterns under capitalism is “going green,” or reducing and conserving one’s consumption of goods and reusing or recycling them when possible. Your task is to develop a Marxian critique of being green. **In what way, if at all, does even a “green lifestyle” reproduce commodity fetishism?** In your answer, explain in depth Marx’s analysis of commodities as well as how they become fetishized. Then use your analysis to critique contemporary “green” lifestyles. Use *Capital* extensively in making your argument. Feel free to bring in any other Marx text you’d like as well.

4) If you have another topic or question you would prefer to write on, you are welcome to do so. I must clear all student-generated topics before you start writing. I am happy to help you write up an appropriate topic.

Whatever question you answer, be sure that your paper makes a clear argument (i.e. has a strong thesis) and supports it through a careful analysis of the texts.

• **DUE DATE: Tuesday, March 31, in class**

If you will have a problem meeting this deadline, contact me at least *one day before the deadline*. Otherwise, your essay will be penalized one grade.

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- **Points:** The paper is worth 50 points out of 250 total for the class.
- **Grading** will be based on the following five criteria:
 - 1) That your paper has a **thesis**. A thesis consists of three elements: it introduces the topic, it answers the essay question clearly, and it tells the reader how the thesis is going to be defended, indicating what reasoning or evidence will be used in the body of the paper.
 - 2) That the paper is **well organized** and easy to understand. The recommended format is thesis-body-conclusion.
 - 3) That you make an **original, persuasive argument** based on your beliefs and what you've learned from the texts and lectures.
 - 4) That you **back up your claims with evidence** from the texts. This means you will have to explain the arguments *as well as* offer your analysis of them. I want to know what you think, but I also want to know how the things you've read support your argument.
 - 5) That your paper is typed and is the required length (double-spaced, regular margins). Please don't bother with fancy covers or folders. Please put page numbers on your paper.
- **How I grade**
 - A papers: Will meet all five criteria above.
 - B papers: Will generally meet four of the five criteria. For example, it will summarize the texts well but not make an argument (i.e. the paper will lack a thesis). Or it will be a paper that makes an argument but the evidence used to support it is weak.
 - C papers: Will fall short in two of the criteria, or it will show a surface engagement with the texts.
 - D papers: Will fall short in three of the criteria and/or reflect little engagement with the texts and/or a lack of effort.
- **Audience:** Write the paper for a generally educated audience. Do not assume the reader has any familiarity with the texts.
- **Citations:** If you get an idea from a text, or if you quote from it, be sure to cite it. *If you do not cite from the texts your paper will be penalized.* The best way to cite the texts is to follow this example: "To formulate a question is to resolve it" (Marx, 28). Note the placement of punctuation. If you use texts not listed in the syllabus, provide a full citation at the end of the paper. (Go to easybib.com if you need help in writing a correct citation.) Do not cite class lectures, although you are of course welcome to use them to write your paper. You do not need to use outside sources for this paper.
- **Electronic submission of papers:** If you prefer, you may email me your paper as a Microsoft Word, WordPerfect, or Rich Text File attachment. All the page number and margin requirements still apply. You must email me your submission before class on the due date.
- **Things I watch for:**
 - Papers whose evidence is entirely based on lecture notes or secondary sources. If it's clear to me that you haven't read the material carefully, don't expect anything higher than a C.
 - Papers that quote large chunks of a text. You should definitely quote from the texts to make your argument (and be sure to cite them when you do), but you should use the texts to *support* your argument, not to *make* your argument for you.
 - Papers that don't make an argument. *Be sure your paper has a thesis.*
 - Poor grammar. Poor grammar and spelling mistakes display a lack of concern for your work. If you don't care about your paper, why should I?
 - Plagiarism. Your paper should be the product of your own effort at reading, thinking, debating, and writing. If you copy your paper, or sections of your paper, from another source you will receive an F for this assignment and be subject to further penalties.
- **Questions about the paper:** I would much rather grade good papers than bad ones. Therefore, I would be happy to talk with you about any problems you may be having or to go over an outline or rough draft. Please see me for help during my office hours, email me (joel.olson@nau.edu), or call me at school (523-8514) or evenings before 11:00 p.m. on my cell phone at 928-600-5563.

THIRD ESSAY ASSIGNMENT

In your third and final assignment, I want you to **develop and answer your own question regarding Marxist theory in an 8-10 page paper**. You may use any course texts you want to answer this question, but be sure to use at least one of the following: Gramsci, James, Mies. I also encourage you to use Marx, but that will depend on your research question.

Some topics you might want to consider writing on include:

- Hegemony
- The relationship between democracy and Marxism
- Popular culture (music, movies, TV, video games, etc.)
- The United States and potentials for communism here
- Globalization
- Gender and capitalism
- Race and capitalism
- The relationship between feminism and Marxism
- Revolutionary strategy (building communism in the U.S.)
- A critique of explanations of the current recession
- Immigration (and/or the anti-immigration movement) and globalization
- And numerous other topics of your choice

Whatever question you formulate and answer, be sure that your paper poses a clear and focused question, makes a clear argument (i.e. has a strong thesis) and supports it through a careful analysis of the texts.

- * **Due April 16 (10 points):** A one-paragraph paper proposal that consists of 1) Your research question, 2) your tentative thesis, and 3) a list of the texts you are going to use.
- * **Due May 5, by 5:00 p.m. (70 points):** Your paper. Due to the fact that grades are due just a few days later, *this deadline is firm.*

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- **Points:** This project is worth 80 points out of 250 total for the class. *Please make it your absolute best effort.*
 - **Grading** will be based on the following five criteria:
 - 1) That your paper has a **thesis**. A thesis consists of three elements: it introduces the topic and clearly states its research question, it answers the research question clearly, and it tells the reader how the thesis is going to be defended, indicating what reasoning or evidence will be used in the body of the paper.
 - 2) That the paper is **well organized** and easy to understand. The recommended format is thesis-body-conclusion.
 - 3) That you make an **original, persuasive argument** based on your beliefs and what you've learned from the texts and lectures.
 - 4) That you **back up your claims with evidence** from the texts. This means you will have to explain the arguments *as well as* offer your analysis of them. I want to know what you think, but I also want to know how the things you've read support your argument.
 - 5) That your paper is typed and is the required length (double-spaced, regular margins). Please don't bother with fancy covers or folders. Please put page numbers on your paper.

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- C papers: Will fall short in two of the criteria, or it will show a surface engagement with the texts.

- D papers: Will fall short in three of the criteria and/or reflect little engagement with the texts and/or a lack of effort.

- **Audience:** Write the paper for a generally educated audience. Do not assume the reader has any familiarity with the texts.

- **Citations:** If you get an idea from a text, or if you quote from it, be sure to cite it. *If you do not cite from the texts your paper will be penalized.* The best way to cite the texts is to follow this example: "To formulate a question is to resolve it" (Marx, 28). Note the placement of punctuation. You do not need to use outside sources for this paper but if you do, provide a full citation at the end of the paper. (Go to easybib.com if you need help in writing a correct citation.) Do not cite class lectures, although you are of course welcome to use them to write your paper.

- **Electronic submission of papers:** If you prefer, you may email me your paper as a Microsoft Word, WordPerfect, or Rich Text File attachment. All the page number and margin requirements still apply. You must email me your submission before class on the due date.

- **Things I watch for:**

- Papers that lack a clear, focused research question that can be answered persuasively within the page limit constraints.

- Papers whose evidence is entirely based on lecture notes or secondary sources. If it's clear to me that you haven't read the material carefully, don't expect anything higher than a C.

- Papers that quote large chunks of a text. You should definitely quote from the texts to make your argument (and be sure to cite them when you do), but you should use the texts to *support* your argument, not to *make* your argument for you.

- Papers that don't make an argument. *Be sure your paper has a thesis.*

- Poor grammar. Poor grammar and spelling mistakes display a lack of concern for your work. If you don't care about your paper, why should I?

- Plagiarism. Your paper should be the product of your own effort at reading, thinking, debating, and writing. If you copy your paper, or sections of your paper, from another source you will receive an F for this assignment and be subject to further penalties.

- **Questions about the paper:** I would much rather grade good papers than bad ones. Therefore, I would be happy to talk with you about any problems you may be having or to go over an outline or rough draft. Please see me for help during my office hours, email me (joel.olson@nau.edu), or call me at school (523-8514) or evenings before 11:00 p.m. on my cell phone at 928-600-5563.