CAPITALISM, SOCIALISM, AND DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA SINCE 1890

History is vital or dead … according as it is or is not presented from the sociological standpoint. When treated simply as a record of what has passed and gone, … there is no motive for attending to it. The ethical value of history teaching will be measured by the extent to which it is treated as a matter of analysis of existing social relations—that is to say as affording insight into what makes up the structure and working of society…. Only a mind trained to grasp social situations … can get sufficient hold on the realities of this life to see what sort of action, critical and constructive, it really demands.

John Dewey

Overview

This course was previously taught by the great labor historian Selig Perlman and then the famous emigré sociologist Hans Gerth. Gerth’s old syllabus is on file in the sociology department office, and Perlman’s lectures have been published as Selig Perlman's Lectures on Capitalism and Socialism (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976).

The primary goal of the course is to examine the historical development of capitalism, socialism, and democracy in the United States, paying close attention to how the past shapes subsequent politics and policy outcomes. (“Men make their own history,” as Marx wrote, “but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.”) Throughout the semester, we will try to see what social and political theory have to say to American history and vice versa. The course is organized chronologically in several parts, including the Progressive era; the New Deal; postwar challenges to and criticisms of the New Deal, from the left and the right; the Great Society, the civil rights movement, and the New Left; and the rise of the New Right since the 1970s. As the course moves forward in time, we revisit some general questions that help to give the course thematic unity and coherence. These include questions about the changing and contested meanings of democracy, the relationship between capitalism and democracy, why there has been no significant socialist movement or labor party in the United States, and how the meaning and boundaries of American citizenship have changed over time.

Prerequisites

Junior standing, and any one of these: an introductory sociology course (SOC 140, 181, 210, or 211); American Society (SOC 125); American History, Civil War Era to the Present (HIS 102); or Introduction to U.S. History (HIS 109). An introductory course in sociological theory (SOC 475) is recommended.

Course Requirements and Grades

The course will be taught at an advanced, unrestricted honors undergraduate level. It will also be appropriate for graduate students who plan to work on the subject. Undergraduates are required to read about 110 pages per week on average. Graduate student reading averages more like 165
pages per week. If you are unable or unwilling to do this much reading, you should drop the course now. Please complete the reading(s) before the class in which we discuss them. If you are pressed for time, at least skim through them to identify key concepts and main points.

Each student may earn up to 100 points based on:

1. **Attendance and quality of participation in class discussion (20 points):** Class time will be devoted to a combination of lecturing and discussion. Students are expected to attend class regularly, arrive on time, and participate thoughtfully in class discussions based on the readings. You will lose these points if you do not fulfill these requirements. You do not need to explain or justify occasional absences, but frequent tardiness, absences, or lack of participation will affect your grade. You are encouraged to raise questions, which counts as participation.

2. **Three short papers (15 points each/45 points total):** You are required to write three short analytical papers, 3-5 pages each. Each paper should focus on one required reading in the syllabus and (a) summarize, in your own words, the author’s argument; (b) explain how the author’s argument expands, challenges, or refines other readings or theories covered in the course; and (c) evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the argument, in terms of its theoretical contributions and the evidence presented. Each short paper is due at the beginning of the class in which we will discuss the reading. Papers submitted at the end of class or after the class will not be accepted. You must submit at least one paper within the first eight weeks of the semester, and you may not submit more than one paper within one week. For all papers, I require that you turn in both a hard copy (typed) and a computer file of the paper (preferably in Word format). The latter can be submitted through Learn@UW. You will receive neither credit nor a grade for these assignments unless you turn in both copies: hard copy and computer file.

3. **Take-home final exam (35 points):** A short-answer and essay examination will be distributed on December 10 and due on Dec. 17 at 12:05 PM. Your completed exam may be submitted through Learn@UW. The exam is open-book, but you are expected to complete it on your own without help and without discussing it with others.

Graduate students may choose between taking the final examination or writing a 20-page term paper, submitted through Learn@UW and due no later than Dec. 17 at 12:05 PM. Graduate students who decide to write a research paper must submit a one-page prospectus by the end of the sixth week. The prospectus should indicate the topic and central theme of the paper with an accompanying bibliography. The prospectus will count for 5 points and the paper for 30.

The grading scale for the course is as follows: A = 93-100, AB = 88-92, B = 83-87, BC = 78-82, C = 70-77, D = 60-69, F = 59 or below.

**Accommodations**

Please send me an email by the end of the second week of the course if you are eligible for special arrangements or accommodations for testing, assignments, or other aspects of the course. This may be the case if English is your second language or you experience a physical or psychological condition that makes it difficult for you to complete assignments and/or exams without some modification of those tasks. Accommodations are provided for students who qualify for disability services through the McBurney Center. Their website has detailed instructions about how to qualify. Provide a copy of your accommodations request (VISA) to the instructor by the end of the second week of class. We try to reserve rooms and proctors by the third week in class, so we must know of all accommodations by then.
If you wish to request a scheduling accommodation for religious observances, please send an email by the end of the second week of the course stating the specific date(s) for which you request accommodation. Campus policy requires that religious observances be accommodated if you make a timely request early in the term. See the university’s web page for details.

**Academic honesty**

You are expected to follow the university’s rules and regulations pertaining to academic honesty and integrity. The standards are outlined by the Office of the Dean of Students. According to UWS 14, academic misconduct is defined as:

- seeks to claim credit for the work or efforts of another without authorization or citation;
- uses unauthorized materials or fabricated data in any academic exercise;
- forges or falsifies academic documents or records;
- intentionally impedes or damages the academic work of others;
- engages in conduct aimed at making false representation of a student's academic performance;
- assists other students in any of these acts.

For a complete description of behaviors that violate the university’s standards as well the disciplinary penalties and procedures, please see the Dean of Students website. Please also consult the UW Writing Center’s handout on “Acknowledging, Paraphrasing, and Quoting Sources” before proceeding in this course. If you have questions about the rules for any of the assignments or exams, please ask me.

You are expected to be familiar with the university’s rules and regulations pertaining to academic honesty and integrity before you submit any written work. Lack of familiarity with these rules does not constitute an excuse for acts of misconduct.

**Departmental notice of grievance and appeal rights**

The Department of Sociology regularly conducts student evaluations of all professors and teaching assistants. Students who have more immediate concerns about this course should report them to the department chair, 8128 Social Science (Pamela.oliver@wisc.edu).

**Department learning objectives**

Beyond the specific content I will cover in this course, I have designed this course to achieve the following instructional objectives designated as priorities by the Department of Sociology:

- **Critically Evaluate Published Research.** Sociology graduates will be able to read and evaluate published research as it appears in academic journals and popular or policy publications.
- **Communicate Skillfully:** Sociology majors write papers and make oral presentations that build arguments and assess evidence in a clear and effective manner.
- **Critical Thinking about Society and Social Processes:** Sociology graduates can look beyond the surface of issues to discover the "why" and "how" of social order and structure and consider the underlying social mechanisms that may be creating a situation, identify evidence that may adjudicate between alternate explanations for phenomena, and develop proposed policies or action plans in light of theory and data.
Reading Assignments

Two books are required: Steve Babson, The Unfinished Struggle: Turning Points in American Labor, 1877-Present (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), and Clayton Sinyai, Schools of Democracy: A Political History of the American Labor Movement (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006). These books may be purchased at the University Book Store and are on reserve at College Library. All other required reading assignments will be posted on Learn@UW. If there is a problem with any of the reserve readings, please e-mail me as soon as possible to let me know.

On dates indicated by an asterisk (*), class may be rescheduled due to a major Jewish holiday.

All students are expected to complete all reading assignments listed below except as follows: Students are not expected to read recommended assignments. Reading assignments indicated by a dagger (†) or “for grads” are required for graduate students but only recommended for undergraduates.

I. HISTORICAL LEGACIES AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Sep. 3 - Introduction to the course (no reading)

Sep. 8 – Liberalism and its alternatives in America
Held, Models of Democracy, third edition, 56-60, 62-65 (Citizenship and the constitutional state), 70 (The idea of protective democracy), 70-75 (The problem of factions), 79-81 (Liberty and the development of democracy), 93-95 (Summary remarks). The rest of the chapter is recommended.

Recommended:
Rogers M. Smith, Civic Ideals (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

Sep. 10 - The Knights of Labor and American exceptionalism

Recommended:


*Sep. 15 - Why no socialism in America?*  

Recommended:  
William P. Jones, “‘Nothing Special to Offer the Negro’: Revisiting the ‘Debsian View’ of the Negro Question,” International Labor and Working-Class History 74, no 1 (Fall 2008): 212-224.  


Sep. 17 - A “precocious social spending regime” in America?  

Recommended:  

II. THE PROGRESSIVE ERA, 1890-1920

*Sep. 22 - Labor in the Progressive era*  
†Sinyai, “A Wooden Man?” in Schools of Democracy, 50-109

Sep. 24 - Political influence without political participation?  

†Theda Skocpol et al., “Women’s Associations and the Enactment of Mothers’ Pensions in the United States,” American Political Science Review 87, no. 3 (Sep. 1993): 686-701.  
Sep. 29 - New modes of participation: interest-group politics
Recommended:

Oct. 1 - New modes of participation: deliberative and direct democracy
Recommended:

Oct. 6 - Toward elite democracy?
Prospectus (for graduate students) due by the end of this week.
Mattson, Creating a Democratic Public, 105-127, 129-135.
Held, Models of Democracy, 125-126, 129-138 (Bureaucracy, parliaments and nation-states), 141-144 (The last vestige of democracy?), 146-152 (Classical v. modern democracy). For grads: read the entire chapter (125-157).

Oct. 8 - Restricting political participation

III. THE NEW DEAL, 1932-1941

Oct. 13 - Labor, Great Depression, and New Deal
Oct. 15 - Explaining the New Deal: Capitalists

Oct. 20 - Explaining the New Deal: The state

Recommended:

Oct. 22 - Explaining the New Deal: Capitalists revisited
Last day to submit first of three short papers.

Oct. 27- Explaining the New Deal: Courts and intellectuals

Recommended:
Jefferson Cowie and Nick Salvatore, “The Long Exception: Rethinking the Place of the New Deal in American History,” *International Labor and Working-Class History* 74, no. 1 (Fall 2008): 3-32. See also responses by Kevin Boyle, Michael Kazin, Jennifer Klein, Nancy MacLean, David Montgomery, and reply by Cowie/Salvatore, in the same issue.
Oct. 29 - The New Deal, citizenship, and gender

Nov. 3 - The New Deal, citizenship, and race
Recommended:
Chad Alan Goldberg, Citizens and Paupers: Relief, Rights, and Race, from the Freedmen’s Bureau to Workfare (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 105-186.

IV. CONSOLIDATING, TRANSFORMING, AND CHALLENGING THE NEW DEAL, 1941-1968

Nov. 5 - Labor’s growth and accommodation
Recommended:
Nov. 10 - Reactions against the New Deal
†Kim Phillips-Fein, Invisible Hands: The Businessmen’s Crusade Against the New Deal (W.W. Norton, 2010), selections to be announced.

Nov. 12 - Postwar stability and Cold War liberalism
Held, Models of Democracy, 185-190 (on postwar stability), 160-169 (on pluralism).

Recommended:

Nov. 17 - The civil rights movement and the War on Poverty

Nov. 19 - From fair employment practices to affirmative action
The rest of the book is recommended.

Recommended:
Nov. 24 – Postwar democratic capitalism in crisis?
†Sinyai, “Not a Slogan or a Fad: Labor and the Great Society,” *Schools of Democracy*, 199-223.

Recommended:

THANKSGIVING RECESS NOV. 26-29

V. THE RISE OF THE RIGHT

Dec. 1 – Overview of the New Right
Himmelstein, *To the Right*, 1-10.

Recommended:

Dec. 3 - Tax revolt

Dec. 8 – Capitalist mobilization
Recommended:

Dec. 10 – Political and electoral change
Take-home final exam distributed.

Recommended:

Dec. 15 – Option A or B

Option A: Oligarchy and its discontents

Recommended:

**Option B: Obamacare**

**Recommended:**

**Take-home final exam or (for graduate students) term paper due Dec. 17 at 12:05 PM.**