Theorists and Theorizing

OS 308 (17029), Fall 2010
T-Th, 10:15-11:35, CH 151

Office Hours:
Thursday, Humanities 16.
Noon- 2:30 pm & by appt

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Theorists and Theorizing

This course will focus on the works of two of the great theorists of democracy, Alexis De Tocqueville and Karl Marx. We will take up their critiques of democracy and capitalism, their visions of what a fully developed democratic society should look like, and whether their critiques and visions are valid today. The reasons for selecting these two political theorists to focus on are straightforward. Both Tocqueville and Marx are concerned centrally with equality – Tocqueville with the actual achievement of equality in America and its consequences, most of which he believed to be negative; Marx with the positive consequences of the absence of equality in capitalist society, namely the inevitability of a socialist revolution stemming from class conflict.

Course Requirements
Every student is expected to participate in class on a regular basis, posing questions, answering questions, contesting or arguing on behalf of the views of other students in the course and, certainly, challenging the views of the instructor. Class participation is valued at 25% of the final grade. Obviously, in order to participate students must attend class. Attendance will be taken each class. As class meets but twice each week during the course of the semester, which means two class absences amount to missing a full week of class, students are discouraged from missing more than one class during the term. Additional, unexcused class absences are grounds for deregistration and failure.

Students are permitted to bring beverages to class, although no food of any sort is permitted. Cell phones are to be turned off upon entering class. Students who use computers for note taking are not permitted to use their computers for any other application during class time. Students must arrive to class on time. If anything competes with this obligation a student should take a different course with more flexible requirements.

Required Reading (available at Mary Jane Books)
Alexis De Tocqueville, Democracy in America, volume II.
Karl Marx, Marx-Engels Reader
Weekly Assignments

August 30. Course introduction.

September 2. No class. APSA meeting.


September 14. Democracy in America, Book I, chs. 6-10, pp. 29-47.

September 16. Democracy in America, Book I, chs. 11-17, pp. 48-76.


October 5. Democracy in America, Book III, chs. 4-9, pp. 175-200.


October 14. No class.


October 28. Mid-term examination.


November 25. No class.


December 7. Last class. Course summary.