Philosophy 120B explores a variety of works in the field of radical social and political philosophy and concentrates in particular on the early writings of Marx, Foucault’s theory of power, and contemporary philosophical arguments about racism and gender oppression. The first part of the course focuses on Marx’s 1844 Manuscripts and the German Ideology, as well as on Michel Foucault’s theory of rationality and social discipline. The second part of the course begins with bell hooks’ Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center and moves on to a cluster of contemporary radical feminist works on the nature of gender, the structure of domination and subordination, and the possible grounds for liberation and empowerment. Part Three is devoted to contemporary works in the philosophy of race and racism. Among the topics that we shall discuss in this part of the course are: the status of “race” as a category (natural or socially constructed), the structure of racism, white privilege, epistemic injustice, and the nature and consequences of microagressions.

Learning Goals/ The course has two general learning goals. The first is to provide students with a deep understanding of various radical theories of social and political life, as well as a framework within which to critically analyze these theories with respect to their normative starting points, their methodological assumptions, their particular arguments, and their realizability in practice. The second learning goal is to provide a basis for students to develop the ability to both read texts critically and to develop clear and persuasive arguments of their own.

Course Requirements/ Two 7-8 page papers and a final exam. Class attendance is mandatory. Class participation is highly valued.

Work Load/ Success in this 4-credit course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study time per week in course preparation.

Grading/ The two papers and the final exam will be weighted equally for purposes of grading. The instructor reserves the right to raise a student’s final grade on the basis of significant improvement in writing over the term and/or the high quality of the student’s oral contribution to group discussion.

Required Books: the following required books can be purchased at the University Bookstore:

Karl Marx, The Marx-Engels Reader.
Foucault, The Foucault Reader.
bell hooks, Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center.
Linda Alcoff and E. Potter, eds, Feminist Epistemologies.

The remaining course materials will be included in the Course Pack (CP).
Academic Integrity/ Students are expected to be honest in all of their academic work. Please consult Brandeis’s Rights and Responsibilities document for all policies and procedures related to academic integrity.

Disabilities/ If you are a student with a disability on record at Brandeis and would like to be accommodated, please speak with me after class or in my office.

Readings

The class will be structured around the readings. So please prepare them for the date cited.

Aug. 29: Introduction to Course

Sept. 5: Karl Marx, “1844 Manuscripts”, in Marx-Engels Reader, pp. 70-81.

Sept. 6: “1844 Manuscripts”, pp. 81-98; 101-105.

Sept. 12: Marx, “German Ideology”, Marx-Engels Reader, pp. 149 (last two paragraphs)-163.

Sept. 17: “German Ideology”, pp. 189 (last paragraph)- 200.


Oct. 12: First Papers Due in Philosophy Dept. office.
Oct. 15: bel hooks, Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center, Chapters 1-4

Oct. 17: hooks, Chapters 5-10.


Nov. 5: Judith Butler, selections, Doing Gender (CP).


Nov. 28: Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana, “Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance” (CP).
Nov. 30: Second Papers Due in Philosophy Dept. office.

Dec. 3: Charles Mills, “White Ignorance” (CP)


Dec. 10: Conclusions.