The discipline of sociology was founded to understand humanity’s experience of modernity. The fall of the aristocratic order in Europe and the broad leveling of Western societies prompted some of the greatest minds of the 19th and 20th centuries to come to grips with a new civilization – democratic, meritocratic and economic – that was emerging all around them.

Historical and comparative sociology thus asks some of the biggest questions we can pose of our times – questions at the heart of any effort to improve the lives of fellow human beings.

- What is the origin of democratic movements?
- What causes economic growth and prosperity?
- Does economic development lay the foundation for political reform?
- Are political and economic liberalism “natural” or inevitable?

These and other related questions obsessed brilliant thinkers such as Tocqueville, Marx and Weber. As they sought to answer such questions, these thinkers not only wrote with startling insight; they also created whole methodologies for the new science of sociology.

In this class we will read some of works of these remarkable minds, among the greatest works of social analysis ever written. In analyzing and emulating their works, we will learn how to conduct sociology as they did: by rigorously comparing different societies and different times; recreating the world views of their subjects from interviews, legal documents, diaries, religious texts and literature; and, critically, tracing the origins of new orientations and new identities back to the social circumstances that prompted their adoption.

By the end of the class students will be able to use the tools of comparative and historical sociology to analyze large-scale social phenomena with rigor and insight.

Course books:

The following books are on sale at the Brandeis Bookstore or available form other booksellers (such as Amazon.com)


All other readings will be posted on Latte.

**Course Requirements:**

The course has three main assignments: an analysis of historical documents retrieved from an archive; a take home midterm on theories our authors have provided; and a final paper.

The analysis of the historical documents will give students the chance to demonstrate how they might deduce clues about a past society from such evidence. The document might be a passage from a diary, a contract, a political manifesto – anything that gives students the chance to interpret the state of mind of its author. Each student will make a short (15 minutes) presentation to the rest of the class on an historical document of his or her choice and will explain what other sources have helped the student interpret the document’s meaning.

The class will prepare for this assignment by visiting the Robert D. Farber University Archives & Special Collections Department; the archives contain some extraordinary collections, including, for example:

- The Hall-Hoag Collection of Extremist Literature in the United States
- Theresienstadt Concentration Camp Documents
- Alfred Dreyfus Trial Collection

…and many more. Students may also select documents from other historical archives in the Boston area.

The take home midterm will be a series of short essay questions on the theorists we have studied; it will be distributed on Oct. 24 and collected on Oct. 31.

The final paper will be a 12-15 page comparative study of the emergence of a new social identity or a dramatic shift in a society’s orientation. Students will compare the society’s initial state to its later condition. How, for example, did South Korea adopt a commitment to dramatic economic growth? How did Serbs move from identifying with
the state of Yugoslavia to despising it? All students should meet with me to discuss their paper topics and methodologies well before beginning research and writing.

The breakdown in grading will be:

- The analysis of the historical documents (20 percent)
- Take home midterm (30 percent)
- Final paper (30 percent)
- Class Participation (20 percent)

Course of Readings

**Sept. 7**  
*Introduction*

**PART ONE: Equality of Conditions**

**Sept. 12 & 14**  
*The Rise of the Global Bourgeoisie?*

Sept. 12:
- “Hillary Clinton: Chinese System Is Doomed, Leaders on a 'Fool's Errand','’ *The Atlantic*.

Sept. 14:
- “Pakistan’s Middle Class Extremists,” *Foreign Affairs*, July 11, 2011.

**Sept. 19 & 21**  
*Alexis de Tocqueville and Equality of Conditions*

Sept. 19:
- Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*: (hereafter DA); Introduction: (pp. 1-15)

Sept. 21:
- Tocqueville, DA, Vol. I, Part 1, ch. 2-5 (pp. 27-93)
Sept. 26 & 28  Tocqueville: Tyranny of the Majority, Individualism

Sept. 26:  
Tocqueville, DA, Vol. I, Part 2, ch. 7, 9 (pp. 235-302, skim ch. 8)

Sept. 28:  

Oct. 3 & 5  Tocqueville: Honor and its Absence, Soft Despotism

Oct. 3:  

Oct. 5:  
DA, Vol. II, Part 4, ch. 1-8; (pp. 639-676)

PART TWO: Historical Materialism

Oct. 10 & 12  Historical Materialism & The Consequences of Capitalism

Oct 10:  
Marx: “Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right,” (pp. 16-25); “On the Jewish Question,” (pp. 26-52)

Oct. 12:  
Marx: “The German Ideology,” (pp. 146-200); “The Communist Manifesto,” (pp. 469-500)

Oct. 19 (no class on Oct. 17) Visit to the Farber Special Collections

Oct. 24 & 26  Interpreting History on the Fly

Oct. 24:  

Oct. 24:  
Marx. “The Class Struggles in France, 1848-1850,” “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,” (pp. 586-617); “On Imperialism in India,” (pp. 653-664)
Oct. 31 & Nov. 2:   Contemporary structuralists

Oct. 31:


Nov. 2:


PART THREE: Weber and Weberians

Nov. 7 & 9   Methodological Individualism and Culture

Nov. 7:

  Greenfeld, Liah. “The Political Significance of Culture.”

Nov. 9:

Nov. 14 & 16 & 21   The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism

Nov. 14:
  Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, ch. 1-3 (pp. 35-92)

Nov. 16:
  Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, ch. 4 (pp. 95-154)

Nov. 21:
  Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, ch. 5 (pp. 155-183)

HAPPY THANKSGIVING!
Nov. 28 & 30 Weber’s Heirs – and Successors?

Nov. 28

Nov. 30

Dec. 5 & 7 Nationalism as “The Spirit of Capitalism?”

Dec. 5

Dec. 7

Dec. 12 Concluding discussion