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 from other booksellers (such as Amazon.com)


I also strongly recommend that you buy Alexis de Tocqueville’s *The Old Regime and the French Revolution* (Anchor, 1955) and Hannah Arendt’s *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1973), for two reasons. First, we will be reading large sections of them; second, they are two of the best books published in the last 200 years.

All other readings will be posted on Latte.

**Course Requirements:**

The course has three main assignments: analyses of primary documents; an analysis of historical documents retrieved from an archive; and a final paper.

The analyses of historical documents will take up the second half of many of Wednesday's classes. Students will be expected to come to class with a one-page interpretation of how the document could be used to make a sociological argument. Students will then compare interpretations.

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 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 a judicious combination of:

- Weekly analyses of the historical documents (20 percent)
- Presentation of document (30 percent)
- Final paper (40 percent)
- Other Class Participation (10 percent)

Course of Readings

**Jan 13**  
**Introduction**

**Jan. 15**  
**Comparison: Two Dissident Intellectuals**


Mihailo Markovic. *From Affluence to Praxis; Philosophy and Social Criticism.* (University of Michigan Press [1974]) Ch. 5. (L)

**Jan. 22**  
**Case Study: Wars of Yugoslavia**

Laura Silber, *Death of a Nation.* Selections. (L)

Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Sciences, 1986. (L)


**Part One: Popular Sovereignty/Revolution/Nationalism**

**Jan. 27 & 29: Tocqueville**

Jan. 27:  
Tocqueville, *Democracy in America:* Introduction: (pp. 1-15) (L)

Jan. 29:  
Tocqueville, *The Old Regime,* Part II, Ch. 8 & 9, Part III, ch. 1 (L)

**Feb. 3 & 5: Marx and Greenfeld**

Feb. 3:  
Marx: "On the Jewish Question," and “Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right,*” (pp. 16-25). and “The German Ideology,” (pp. 146-200).

**Feb. 10 & 12: Case Study: Europe in 1848**


Marx, "The Communist Manifesto"


Tocqueville, *Memoirs.* Selections. (L)

Feb. 17-22: **February Vacation**

Feb. 24 & 26: **Structuralists Look at Revolutions**


Feb. 26: Skocpol, Theda. “France, Russia, China: A Structural Analysis of Social Revolutions,” in *Social Revolutions in the Modern World.* (Cambridge UP, 1994) (L)

**March 3 & 5: Comparative Totalitarianisms**

March 3: Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands.* Selections. (L)

Hannah Arendt; *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* Chapter 10 & 11 (L)

March 5: Arendt, Origins, Ch. 12-13 (L)

Part Two: The Origins of Economic Growth

**March 10 & 12: Structuralists on the Origins of Economic Growth**

March 10: Reread Marx, The Communist Manifesto


**March 17 & 19: Weberian Method**


March 19: Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, ch. 1-3 (pp. 35-92)

**March 24 & 26: The Protestant Ethic Cont.**

March 24: Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, ch. 4 (pp. 95-154)

March 26: Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, ch. 5 (pp. 155-183)

**March 31 & April 2 Weber’s Heirs – and Successors?**


**April 7, 9 & 14: Nationalism as “The Spirit of Capitalism?”**

April 7 Greenfeld, Liah. *The Spirit of Capitalism*: Ch. 3 & 4

April 9 Greenfeld, *The Spirit of Capitalism*, Ch. 5 & 6

April 14 Greenfeld, *The Spirit of Capitalism*, Ch. 7 & 8.

**April 23 & 28 Final Presentations and Thoughts**