

SC 356/ BK 251

Theory and Practice of the US Left

Instructor Ambre Ivol

This class will be productive if it is interactive. In addition to our **weekly readings (1)**, here are **two additional requirements (2) & (3)** that will make our work more interesting, and your participation more meaningful.

1) Weekly readings

You are required to come to class having read the material and being prepared to discuss it with others. Every two weeks, you will be required to write a short essay based on the material read so far in each section. This exercise is intended to help you clarify your ideas, assimilate the text and its arguments, and develop your critical skills. This will also be a useful preparation for the essays you will have to write during the semester.

2) Oral history project

Conduct a survey about the significance, relevance or irrelevance of the American Left in the United States today. You can choose among your friends, your family, your professors, or complete strangers. You can do this alone or in a group, and, why not, conduct the survey on the BC campus.

Think about the type of questions you would like to ask on the subject. This is a collective project, and all students are required to participate in the elaboration of the survey questions. You should think about the questions you would like to ask and come to class with a draft for our class on January 25.

3) Oral presentations (*)

Each student will be responsible for the study of one theme related to the history of the American left. You will present your findings to the class in a well-structured form. We will discuss the methodology of the presentation and specific bibliographies in class.

Presentations in January and February:

Anarchism and Emma Goldman
Eugene Debs and the American Socialist Party
Helen Keller, socialism and feminism
The American communist party and WEB DuBois
Trotskyism in the United States
Marxism
The US labor movement and the creation of the CIO
CLR James
Ella Baker

Presentations in March and April:

Women's liberation movements
Gay liberation Movement and Stonewall
Students for a Democratic Society and the Weathermen Underground
The Student Non violent coordinating committee
Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers
The American Indian Movement
Irving Howe and the review Dissent
A. J. Muste and US pacifism
David Dellinger
Staughton Lynd
Herbert Aptheker
Tom Hayden
Stokely Carmichael

Presentations in May:

Noam Chomsky
Seattle and the antiglobalization movement
Michael Moore
Noami Klein
Ralph Nader and the Green Party
Nine Eleven and the international antiwar movement
The US immigrant movement of 2006
The Neo-conservatives- where do they come from? (See for ex. Irving Kristol or Norman Podhoretz-)

(*) The list is not a comprehensive one. If you would like to add a theme related to the history of the US left, please say so.

(**) Bibliographical references will be provided by the professor-

Examinations

In addition to the above-mentioned requirements, you will write two formal essays in the course of the semester. Also, mid-way through the semester, you will be asked to identify some of the key ideas/events/people we have studied and discussed in class (Mid-term).

Grading

Oral presentation 20%
Oral History project 20%
Essays 20% each-
Mid-term 10%
In class participation 10%

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I What is so old about the ‘Old’ Left ? 1930s-1950s

Week 1-

1/16. Introduction- Questionnaire

1/18. Screening of *You Can’t Be Neutral on a Moving Train*- documentary on Howard Zinn’s life. After you have seen the movie, answer the two questions about his life and politics.

Week 2-

1/23. Howard Zinn, *You Can’t Be Neutral on a Moving Train*- Read entirely-

1/25. Discussion about the survey on the US left today. Come to class with your own draft/ideas about the project.

Week 3-

1/30 & 2/1. Vivian Gornick, *The Romance of American Communism*- short essay based on reading due 2/1. Hand-outs.

Weeks 4 & 5 The Black Liberation Movement

2/6 & 2/8 *Autobiography of Malcom X* Intro + chapters 1-5; 6-10

2/13 & 2/15. *Autobiography of Malcom X* chapters 11-15; 16-19 + conclusion and afterword-

Short essay based on reading due both weeks.

II What was so new of the ‘New’ Left? 1960s-1970s

Week 6-

2/20 & 2/22. Isserman and Kazin, *America Divided*

Read Intro + chapters 1-2-3

Week 7 The Vietnam War

*2/27 Mid-term – Discussion about the survey project- methodology, issues you have as you conduct the survey, advice for the completion of the project.

3/1. Isserman & Kazin, read ch. 4

Zinn, *A People’s History of the United States*, read ch. 7-

Week 8

3/6 & 3/8 Spring break- read Kovic over break.

Week 9 A Soldier against the war

Ron Kovic, *Born on a Fourth of July*-

3/13 ch 1-4

3/15 ch 5-7

Take home essay

Week 10

3/20 & 3/22

Isserman & Kazin, ch. 5 to 14. Essay based on reading.

III The decline and revival of the US left: 1980s-today

Week 11 The “*end of history*” and after

3/27: Discussion about the Oral history project + Hand-outs on concept of the “*end of history*” by Francis Fukuyama to read

3/29 – discussion on hand-outs/student presentations.

Week 12

4/3- Zinn, *Marx in Soho: a play on history*

4/5- Easter break

Week 13 Seattle and Nine Eleven

4/10 Zinn, *A People’s History of the United States*

4/12 Hand outs about the impact of Nine Eleven on new social movements- Issues involving the Left and electoral politics: the 2000 and the 2004 presidential elections-

Week 14 The Iraq war and the current political crisis

4/17 Survey on the US left due.

4/19 Hand outs.

Week 15 Comparative study of the French and US Left today

4/24 Discussion about the French presidential elections by way of comparing and contrasting different traditions on the Left between Europe and the US- The first round of the French elections will take place on April 22- The second round will take place on May 6.

4/26 In-class screening- TBA.

Week 16

5/1 & 5/3 **Semester review** of key themes/moments defined and discussed together.

Preparation for final exam.

*5/8 to 5/15- Term examinations

** Syllabus is subject to change as the students' oral presentations are incorporated.