

# CENS 201: *Capital* and Commentary

## Part I – Contexts

Thomas Kemple

Contrasts and Conflicts: The Cultures of Central, Eastern, Northern Europe

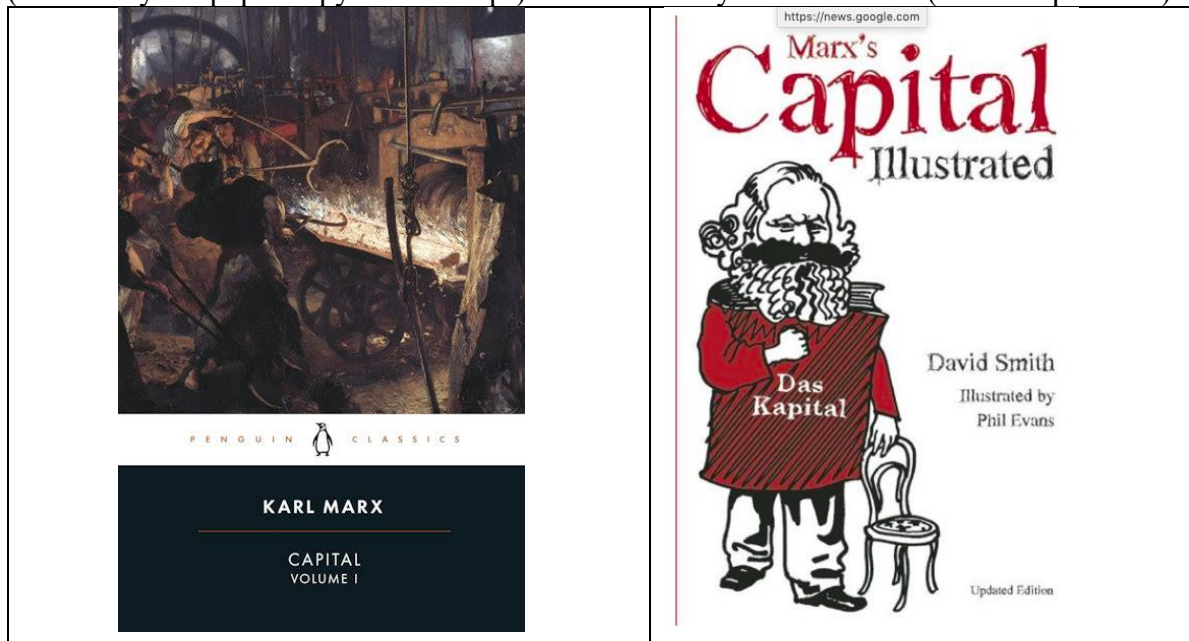
(draft summer 2024; subject to change)

2024 Winter Term 1, Mondays & Wednesdays, 9:30-11:00am

Marx's *Capital* (*Das Kapital*) is arguably the best known book in the canon of European Studies, and yet also the least read! The challenge (or wager) of this course is to read *Capital* as a literary, philosophical, sociological, historical, political and economic *experiment in thinking otherwise* about our past, present, and future. Together we'll explore how Marx's passion for both interpreting and changing the modern world speaks to his own context as well as to ours. We'll focus on his ideas about class exploitation, settler colonialism, the gendered division of labour, chattel slavery, economic crises, and ecological breakdown. Knowledge of languages other than English, including but not limited to German, is an asset but *not* a prerequisite!

Required: Karl Marx (1867/1976), *Capital Vol. 1*  
Trans. by Ben Fowkes. Penguin Books.  
(Please buy the paper copy—it's cheap!)

Recommended: *Marx's Capital Illustrated*  
David Smith (2012); illus. by Paul Evans  
Haymarket Books. (also inexpensive!)



In addition to *Marx's Capital Illustrated*, a selection of supplementary readings to provide context for our readings from and writing about *Capital* will be made available on Canvas.

**Evaluation:** In-class test (15%)  
3-4 page commentary (20%) (plus bonus participation marks!)  
4-5 page short essay (30%)  
Final exam (35%)

**Course Outline – T1, M/W, 9:00-11:00am, September-December 2024**

Introductory Class (Sept. 4):

***Capital in Context – There and Then ... Here and Now (More than Ever!)***

Week 1 (Sept. 9/11): ***Capital*, ‘Preface to First Edition’**

**‘Preface to Second Edition’, ‘Postface to French Edition’**

Marx and Engels, Part I, *The Communist Manifesto*

Supplementary: Berman, ‘All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: Marx and Modernism’

Weeks 2 & 3 (Sept. 16/18, 23/25): ***Capital*, Parts I, II: Commodities, Money, Capital [Value]**

Supplementary: Wolin, ‘Moneybags Must be So Lucky’

Smith, ‘Sharing, Not Selling: Marx Against Value’

\*\*\* In-class test: Sept. 25 \*\*\*

Weeks 4 & 5 (Sept. 30/Oct. 2 & Oct. 7/9): ***Capital*, Part III: Absolute Surplus-Value [Factory]**

Supplementary: Stallybrass, ‘Marx’s Coat’

Neocleous, ‘The Political Economy of the Dead: Marx’s Vampires’

Weeks 6 & 7 (Oct. 14/16 & 21/23): ***Capital*, Part IV: Relative Surplus-Value [Machinery]**

Supplementary: Thompson, ‘Time, Work, Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism’

Week 8 (Oct. 28/30): ***Capital*, Part V: Formulas for the Rate of Surplus-Value [Exploitation]**

Supplementary: Saito, ‘Marx’s Theory of Metabolism in an Age of Ecological Crisis’

\*\*\* Commentary due: October 30, 9:30am \*\*\*

Week 9 (Nov. 4/6): ***Capital*, Part VI: Wages [Alienation]**

Supplementary: Fraser, ‘Behind Marx’s Hidden Abode’

Weeks 10 & 11 (Nov. 11/13 & 18/20): ***Capital*, Part VII: Capitalist Accumulation [Expansion]**

Supplementary: Harvey, ‘The “New” Imperialism: Accumulation by Dispossession’

\*\*\* Short Essay due: November 20, 9:30am \*\*\*

Weeks 12&13 (Nov 25/27&Dec 2/4): ***Capital*, Pt. VIII: Primitive Accumulation [Colonisation]**

Supplementary: Federici, ‘On Primitive Accumulation, Globalization, and Reproduction’

Foster, Clark, and Holleman, ‘Marx and the Indigenous’

\*\*\* Final Exam: date, place, and time TBA \*\*\*

*In addition to the online interviews and articles by Sylvia Federici, also highly recommended are online pieces by William Davies, Jodi Dean, Scott Galloway, Naomi Klein, Thomas Piketty, Adolph Reed, Wolfgang Streek, Yanis Varoufakis, and others.*