

SOCIOLOGY 439: COMPARATIVE-HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

Winter Quarter, 2010

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Fridays 9 am – 12 noon, 1812 Chicago Avenue, Seminar Room.

This course provides an introduction to the field of comparative-historical analysis. It does so by examining a variety of different books that illustrate alternative approaches for developing theory, pursuing comparisons, evaluating arguments, and using historical evidence. These books present different visions of what successful comparative-historical analysis can look like in practice.

From the readings and assignments, students should develop new skills to better understand, appreciate, and critique excellent works of comparative-historical analysis. These skills in turn will help students who want to pursue research in this field to create their own excellent works of comparative-historical analysis.

Beyond the diverse books that we will read, two distinctive features of the course help introduce different visions of comparative-historical analysis. First, since this is a co-taught course, students will be exposed to the different (though hopefully complimentary) perspectives of Professors Carruthers and Mahoney. Second, for certain weeks, students will meet the authors of the books they read -- the authors will visit during class time to discuss their work with students.

Discussion is vital to the success of the course. Students are expected to come to class prepared, having read the assigned book and ready to raise issues for general discussion. All of the assigned books are available at Norris Bookstore.

The course assignments fall into two categories: weekly assignments and two critical essays. For the weekly assignments (starting Jan. 15), students will be asked to turn in a short reflection in which they briefly summarize the main components of the argument of the book being discussed for that week. Further details on the format of these weekly summaries will be provided during the first class on Jan. 8.

For each critical essay, students will write a paper of about 6-9 pages in length (1,500-2,000 words) in which they critically appraise selected aspects of the argument of an assigned book. These essays must not simply summarize and review the book. Instead, they should consider larger issues raised by the book, and its relation to the relevant literature. To complete each critical essay, students must read the existing reviews of the book and draw on 5 to 10 outside articles and/or books. Further details will be provided during the first class.

January 8 Introduction to the Course

January 15: We begin with one of the most famous comparative-historical studies ever produced: Skocpol's *States and Social Revolutions*. The book touches on many of the analytical issues and debates that will run throughout the course. No serious student of comparative-historical analysis can afford to skip this book.

Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1979.

January 22: This week we read an historical work that combines social, economic and legal history, and which makes comparisons, but in a much less structured fashion than Skocpol. It also reveals some of the signature qualities of the best history: deep engagement with historical sources, close attention to context, and good writing.

Dylan Penningroth, *The Claims of Kinfolk: African American Property and Community in the Nineteenth-Century South*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. 2003.

January 29: Next we move up to the level of the world system and consider how global processes shape (and are shaped by) social movements. Silver assembles an impressive quantitative data set and puts it to good use in presenting a fascinating vision of how capitalist development spreads over time and brings predictable patterns of social unrest with it.

Beverly Silver, *Forces of Labor: Workers' Movements and Globalization Since 1870*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2003.

February 5: Trained in political science, but with a strong sociological bent, Paul McLean studies in detail the enactment of social networks. His evidence is rooted in the particulars of 15th-century Florence, but the book engages much more general social scientific arguments about the use, construction, and cultural framing, of social networks.

Paul D. McLean, *The Art of the Network: Strategic Interaction and Patronage in Renaissance Florence*. Durham: Duke University Press. 2007.

February 12: Bruce Mann is a legal historian at Harvard Law School, but this book reveals the social, political and cultural aspects of a so-called "hard" economic event: bankruptcy. Given the current financial crisis, it is especially interesting to contrast the world Mann describes with the contemporary political and economic significance of debt.

Bruce Mann, Republic of Debtors: Bankruptcy in the Age of American Independence. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 2002.

February 19: The magnificent temporal and spatial scope of comparative-historical analysis is fully on display in Barkey's richly textured book. She uncovers the social structures connecting center with periphery that enabled the Ottoman Empire to emerge, adapt, and thrive over a prolonged period of time. Intriguingly, she also shows how these same structures help explain the eventual demise of the empire.

Karen Barkey, Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2008

February 26: In this book, Verdery examines one of the most dramatic (maybe even "revolutionary") social changes of the late 20th-century: the transition from socialism to post-socialism in Eastern and Central Europe. In a study that combines ethnography with document-based research, she explores how a sweeping transformation of property rights actually worked "on the ground."

Katherine Verdery, The Vanishing Hectare: Property and Value in Postsocialist Transylvania. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. 2003.

March 5 No class

March 12: We end with a book that illustrates a mode of comparative-historical analysis common in political science. Haggard and Kaufman use brief case analyses and systematic comparisons (often with quantitative data) to work out an explanation of variations social provision across both countries and whole regions. This explanation emphasizes variables common in political science -- political coalitions, critical realignments, and political institutions.

Stephan Haggard and Robert R. Kaufman, Development, Democracy, and Welfare States: Latin America, East Asia, and Eastern Europe. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2008.