

SOCIOLOGY 439: COMPARATIVE-HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

Winter Quarter, 2012

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Class: Friday 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 understand, appreciate, and criticize 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 books that we will read, for certain weeks, students will meet the authors – who 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. 13), 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. 6.

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 6 Introduction to the Course

January 13: 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 (note, Skocpol will be visiting CHSS on Feb 10).

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

January 20: no class this week.

January 27: This week we read an award-winning sociological work that combines social, economic and political history, and which uses both quantitative and documentary evidence to support its analysis. It will be useful to pair this book with the Dobbin reading the following week. *Professor Chen will be joining us in person.*

Anthony Chen, The Fifth Freedom: Jobs, Politics, and Civil Rights in the United States, 1941-1972. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2009.

February 3: Frank Dobbin has worked at the intersections of organizational sociology, sociology of law and inequality, and economic sociology. This prize-winning book analyzes the articulation and spread of “non-discriminatory” employment practices through populations of public and private U.S. organizations over the last several decades. *Professor Dobbin will be joining us in person.*

Frank Dobbin, Inventing Equal Opportunity. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2009.

February 10: 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 recent 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 17: The timeliness of comparative-historical work is evident in Krippner’s analysis of the financialization of the U.S. economy. Although this project was started well before the crisis of 2008, its relevance became abundantly evident as the global financial system spiraled out of control. *Professor Krippner will be joining us in person.*

Greta Krippner, Capitalizing on Crisis: The Political Origins of the Rise of Finance, Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 2010.

February 24: 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 2 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.

March 9: 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.