The Marxist Theory of History

“The ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of its ruling class.”
Jenny and Karl

Is Marx Relevant Today?
Quotes of the Day

• "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness." --Karl Marx, *Preface to A Contribution to the critique of Political Economy*

• “the philosophers have only interpreted the world, the point is to change it” --Karl Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach* (11)
Today’s Menu

I. Marx turns classical political economy on its head
   A. It’s view of order in the universe as “god given”
   B. It’s view of the “good life as given and unchanging

II. Marx turns Liberal Political Economy on its head
   A. Political Liberalism and its view of “natural rights”
   B. Economic Liberalism and its view of the "natural" tendency to "truck, barter, and exchange“
   C. Marx was a Materialist

III. Methodology: Dialectical Materialism and Historical Materialism
   (Critique of Political Economy and German Ideology)
      A. Individuals don’t make history
      B. Mode of Production= forces of production + relations of production ( Expropriation of the Surplus and Class Relations)
      C. Base and Superstructure: Class Ideas (Ideology) to defend Class Rule
      D. “Law of Change”: Class contradictions and transformation in Modes of Production

IV. Marx and Engels’ Interpretation of history (Communist Manifesto)
    A. Primitive Communism
    B. Private Property (agriculture, feudalism)
    C. Small Industry (commercial capitalism)
    D. Industrial Revolution (capitalism)
    E. Workers’ Revolution (Socialism, Communism)
I. Marx Turns **Classical** Political Economy on its Head

A. Views of human nature as “god given” – social and communal roles

B. Views of “the good life” as given and unchanging-
   1. The role of “virtue in the good life. (compassion, generosity, altruism, honor)
   2. Hegel followed the classical theorists

C. For Marx, neither explained the march of “history”
   1. The role of the Division of Labor in human history

D. History as “Progress”
II. Marx turns *Liberal* Political Economy on its head

A. Political Liberalism and its view of “natural rights”
   1. would be realized with the overthrow of tyrants
   2. and creation of governments of consent

B. Economic Liberalism and its view of the "natural" tendency to "truck, barter, and exchange"
   1. would be realized with overthrow of mercantilism
   2. A material “good life” for all
   3. Competition and the acceptance of inequality

C. Marx was a Materialist
   1. Dismissive of Religion
   2. Believed that morality was simply “the ends justifying the means”
   3. Criticized as opening the door to tyranny
III. Methodology: Historical Materialism

A. Individuals don’t make history
   1. Collective groups of people make history without knowing it
   2. Change comes on the “supply side” within production

B. Mode of Production = forces of production + relations of production
   1. Forces of Production
   2. Relations of Production: Class Structure
   3. Expropriation of the Surplus and Class Relations
      a. Exploitation of the “producing class” by the “owning class”
      b. All adds up to the Mode of production
      c. Examples of slavery and Feudalism
C. Base and Superstructure: Class Ideas (Ideology) to defend Class Rule

1. Base (Mode of Production) gives rise to superstructure (ideology and religion)

2. Superstructure supports the base

3. Examples.......
Example: Religion

Religion is the opium of the people.
Examples (cont.) “Bourgeois Economics:” an Ideology to Defend Capitalism
Marxist view of capitalism:

**REVISED CAPITALISM 101**

**Market forces:** When large companies band together and force governments to bail them out.
Example: Theories of the “state” and Theory of the “neutral” state
Marx believed that American politicians are “subordinated” to capitalism.
Ideology of Freedom: It’s just another word for nothin’ left to lose....
Example: Ideology of Education
III. Method of Historical Materialism (cont.)

D. “Law of Change”: Class contradictions and transformation in Modes of Production

1. the Division of Labor
2. The “Law” of Progress
3. Class contradictions
IV. Marx and Engels Interpretation of History

A. Primitive Communism
B. Private Property $\rightarrow$ agriculture (empire $\rightarrow$ feudalism)
C. small industry (commercial capitalism) $\rightarrow$ industrial revolution (capitalism)
D. Capitalism $\rightarrow$ workers revolution $\rightarrow$ Communism