Chapter 2
KARL MARX (1818–1883)

Key Concepts
Class
Bourgeoisie
Proletariat
Forces and relations of production
Capital
Surplus value
Alienation
Labor theory of value
Exploitation
Class consciousness

*The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.*

(Marx and Engels 1848/1978:473)
Reading Selections From Marx

- The German Ideology (1845-46)
- Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844
  - Alienated Labour
  - The Power of Money in Bourgeois Society
- The Communist Manifesto (1848)
  - Bourgeois and Proletarians
  - Proletarians and Communists
- Capital (1867)
  - Commodities
  - The General Formula for Capital
- The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State (Engels) (1884)
  - The Family
  - Barbarism, Civilization, and the State
Biographical Sketch: Karl Marx

- University career (1835-1841): focusing on history, philosophy, and law
- While attending the University of Berlin, Marx joined the Young Hegelians. This group of radical thinkers developed a powerful critique of George W.F. Hegel’s philosophy
- Marx’s academic career ambitions ended when the Berlin Ministry of Education blacklisted him due to his radical views
Biographical Sketch: Karl Marx continued

- Henri de Saint-Simon, Adam Smith, & David Ricardo each influenced Marx’s life work and theories
- In the early 1840s, Marx began his longtime friendship and collaboration with Friedrich Engels
- Marx and his family ultimately died due to failing income and health in the early 1880s.
Intellectual Influences & Core Ideas

- Marx’s work was a reaction to the dire economic and social conditions brought on by the industrial revolution.
- Marx sought to forge a theoretical model intended not only to *interpret* the world, but also to *change* it.
- Marx focused on economic classes and forces of production.
Private ownership of the means of production leads to class relations based on domination and subordination. (bourgeois vs. proletariat)

For Marx, this class struggle is the catalyst for social change and the prime mover of history.

“The history of all hitherto existing society, is the history of class struggles” (1848/1978:473)
Intellectual Influences & Core Ideas continued

- Marx developed his theory in reaction to laissez-faire capitalism, an economic system based on individual competition for markets. (Adam Smith)

- Marx shared much of Smith’s analysis of economics, but important differences separate the two theories.

- Most notable is Marx’s insistence that, far from establishing a system of perfect liberty, private ownership of the means of production necessarily leads to the alienation of workers.
Intellectual Influences & Core Ideas continued

Photo 2.1  Sordid Factory Conditions: A Young Girl Working as a Spinner in a U.S. Textile Mill, Circa 1910

© 2010 Sage/Pine Forge All rights reserved
Photo 2.2  Sadly, for some factory workers, little has changed over the past century. Here, 16-year-old girls are assembling Keds sneakers at the Kunshan Sun Hwa Footwear Company, in China. The girls apply the toxic glue with their bare hands. At the end of the day, they must line up and leave single file. The factory is surrounded by a 15-foot wall topped with barbed wire.
Although capitalism produces self-betterment for owners of capital, it necessarily prevents workers from realizing their essential human capacity to engage in creative labor.

According to Marx, capitalism is inherently exploitative.
Photo 2.3  Many of Charlie Chaplin’s silent films during the 1920s and 1930s offered a comedic—and quite critical—look at the industrial order. Here, in a scene from *Modern Times* (1936), Chaplin is literally a “cog in a machine.”
Intellectual Influences & Core Ideas continued

- Capitalism tends to give way to monopoly.
- The business owners who are unable to compete successfully for a share of the market find themselves joining the swelling ranks of propertyless wage earners or the “proletariat.”
Marx’s Model of Social Change

- This was precisely the purpose of Marx’s political activities: He sought to generate **class consciousness**—an awareness on the part of the working class of their common relationship to the means of production.
Marx’s Model of Social Change continued

- the development of class consciousness was a vital key in the evolution of society toward an ultimate, utopian end: communism.

- He believed that the epoch of capitalism was a necessary stage in this evolution and the last historical period rooted in class conflict
Marx’s Model of Social Change continued

- Capitalism, with its unleashing of immense economic productivity, would create the capital and technology needed to sustain a communist society, the final stage of history. In this utopian society, the production of goods would be controlled collectively and not by private business elites.
Marx’s Theoretical Orientation

- Marx pursued themes that, taken as a whole, underscored his vision of a social order shaped by broad historical transitions and classes of actors (collectivist) pitted against one another in a struggle to realize their economic interests (rationalist).
Marx’s Theoretical Orientation: Grouped by Major Concepts

Remember, these charts are based upon ideal types; thus while Marx’s work overall is characterized as rational, collective (previous slide), this does not necessarily mean every piece of his work will fall into that area. See chart below.
Introduction to *The German Ideology* (1845-46)

- the most detailed account of Marx’s theory of history.
- Marx set out to reformulate the work of the eminent German philosopher Georg W. F. Hegel.
- Hegel saw change as the motor of history.
Hegel’s Dialectical Process

Hegel’s dialectical process: a given state of being or idea contains within it the seeds of an opposing state of being or idea. The resolution of the conflict produces yet a new state of being or idea. This synthesis, in turn, forms the basis of a new contradiction, thus continuing the process of change.
Hegel’s Dialectical Process continued

- *The German Ideology* reflects both Marx’s indebtedness to and break from Hegel’s philosophy.

- like Hegel, Marx argues that each successive period in societal evolution is a necessary consequence of the preceding stage;
Hegel’s Dialectical Process continued

However, Marx breaks decisively from Hegel by insisting that it is *material* existence—not consciousness—that fuels historical change.

Theoretically, this inversion is of utmost significance because it reflects a shift from a non-rationalist to a rationalist theoretical orientation.
Marx’s materialist conception of history

- Marx’s conviction that ideas or interests have no existence independent of physical reality.

- “Consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life-process” (Marx and Engels 1846/1978:154).
Marx’s materialist conception of history continued

- In short, Marx argues that the essence of individuals, what they truly are, is determined by the material, economic conditions—“what they produce and *how* they produce”—in which they live out their very existence.

- This perspective, moreover, yields a radical conclusion: “The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas” (ibid.:172).
Key Quotations from *The German Ideology* (1845-46)

- “the production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and material intercourse of men, the language of real life” (35)
- “life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life” (32)
- “Division of labour only becomes truly such from the moment when a division of material and mental labour appears” (37)
Key Quotations from *The German Ideology* (1845-46)

- “For as soon as the distribution of labour comes into being, each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape.” (37)

- “The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the ruling *material* force of society, is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force.” (40)
Introduction to Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844

- Alienation - the process of production and the results of our labor confront us as a dominating power.

- For Marx, just working for money—and not for the creativity of labor—is akin to selling your soul.

- The production process thus controls the worker; it confronts her as an alienating power.
Alienated Labour / “Alienation”

- Because the worker is alienated in her role as producer, she is alienated from the product that is produced. Now the *product* opposes the worker as an object over which she has no control—where and how it is sold and its price.

- Moreover, because the worker is alienated from the process of production as well as the product of his labors, he becomes alienated from *himself*.
Alienated Labour / “Alienation” continued

- The wage earner spends two-thirds of his wakeful hours engaged in a meaningless activity, save its providing him with the means of subsistence.

- Torn away from the object of his labor, unable to realize the essence of his creative nature or “species being,” the worker becomes alienated from the rest of humanity.
Marx describes how the possessor of money is transformed into anything money can buy.

One’s individuality is determined not by his or her own characteristics or capacities, but by the power afforded by money to transform what one wants into what one *is*. 
Money is thus a universal medium capable of being exchanged not only for a specific good or object, but also for human qualities such as beauty, talent, or honesty.

It bonds us to life itself and to our relationship with others, not through what we are, but through what we have the power to buy.
Key Quotations from the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844: Alienated Labour*

- "The worker becomes an ever cheaper commodity the more commodities he creates." (43)

- "Labour produces not only commodities; it produces itself and the worker as a *commodity*—and does so in the proportion in which it produces commodities generally." (43)

- "the object which labour produces—labour’s product—confronts it as *something alien*, as a *power independent* of the producer." (43)
Key Quotations from the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*: Alienated Labour

- “The worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. He is at home when he is not working, and when he is working he is not at home. His labour is therefore not voluntary, but coerced; it is *forced labour.*” (44)

- “Estranged labour turns thus: (3) Man’s *species being*, both nature and his spiritual species property, into a being *alien* to him, into a *means* to his *individual existence*. It estranges man’s own body from him, as it does external nature and his spiritual essence, his *human* being.” (46)

- “The *alien* being, to whom labour and the produce of labour belongs, in whose service labour is done and for whose benefit the produce of labour is provided, can only be *man* himself.” (47)
Key Quotations from the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*: The Power of Money in Bourgeois Society

- “By possessing the *property* of buying everything, by possessing the property of appropriating all objects, *money* is thus the *object* of eminent possession. The universality of its *property* is the omnipotence of its being.” (48)

- “Money’s properties are my properties and essential powers—the properties and powers of its possessor. Thus, what I *am* and *am capable* of is by no means determined by my individuality.” (49)

- “Money is the alienated *ability of mankind.*” (50)
Introduction to The Communist Manifesto

- In 1847, the Communist League, an association formed by radical workers in 1836, commissioned Marx and Engels to write a political tract outlining the organization’s program.
- The *Manifesto* is a deliberately adversarial work intended to inspire allegiance to the movement’s cause.
Introduction to The Communist Manifesto

- much of the *Manifesto* is a “scientific prophecy” detailing the downfall of the capitalist class and the rise of the proletariat.
Introduction to The Communist Manifesto

- Marx’s commitment to the Enlightenment belief in the perfectibility of humanity, which, according to Marx, would be realized through an inevitable communist revolution.

- describes the economic processes that made for the dominance of the capitalist class and that eventually will produce its own “grave-diggers”—a class-conscious proletariat.
Introduction to The Communist Manifesto

- the *social relations of production* (how productive activity is organized and the laws governing property ownership) will become a “fetter” or obstacle to the continued development of the means of production (i.e., machinery, technology).
The result is an “epidemic of over-production” (Marx and Engels 1848/1978:478) in which the bourgeoisie “chokes” on the overabundance of goods produced by ever increasing industrial efficiency.
Key Quotations from *The Communist Manifesto*

- “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.” (54)

- “Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, possesses, however, this distinct feature: it has simplified class antagonisms: Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: bourgeoisie and proletariat.” (55)
Introduction to *Capital*

- In “Commodities,” Marx explores the sources of “value” by asking what determines the worth or price of goods bought and sold on the market.

- Marx draws a distinction between “use-value” and “exchange-value.”
Use-Value & Exchange Value

- **Use-Value**: the utility of a commodity or its ability to satisfy wants.

- **Exchange Value**: expresses equivalencies—how much of a given commodity (e.g., corn) it takes to equal the value of another commodity (e.g., iron).
Commodities continued

- Labor Theory of Value: the value of an object is determined ultimately by the amount of labor time (hours, weeks, months, etc.) that it took to produce it.

- By equating the value of goods with labor time, Marx not only outlined the economic principles that purportedly guide exchange, he also unmasked the root source of exploitation inherent in capitalist production.

- In a capitalist economy, those who do not own the means of production have no choice but to sell their labor power in order to survive.
Commodities continued: Surplus Value

- Surplus Value: is the difference between what workers earn for their labor and the price or value of the goods that they produce.

- The capitalist has two principal means at his disposal for increasing profit and market share: increasing “absolute” or “relative” surplus value.
Surplus Value

- Absolute Surplus Value: extending the working day.
- Relative Surplus Value: increasing the productivity of labor by instituting timesaving procedures.
Fetishism of commodities is a reworked version of Marx’s concept of alienation. Fetishism refers to the distorted relationship existing between individuals and the production and consumption of goods.
Commodities continued: Fetishism of commodities

- we treat the goods we buy as if they have "magical" powers. We lose sight of the fact that we create commodities and, in doing so, grant them a power over us that in reality they do not hold.
Commodities continued: The General Formula For Capital

- Marx describes the cycle or circulation of commodities peculiar to capitalism. Unlike other economic arrangements, production under capitalism is driven by profit.
- the owners of the means of production are concerned primarily with generating more wealth and capital, not with satisfying the standards of living established through tradition.
Commodities continued: The General Formula For Capital

- Capital: (raw materials, machinery for production) or, more generally, money
- Guiding the profit motive is a cycle of exchange Marx labeled as “M—C—M.”
  (M): money; (C): commodity
Commodities continued: The General Formula For Capital

- Seeking to invest in and expand her business, the capitalist converts her money (M) into a commodity (C) by purchasing additional machinery, raw materials, or labor. The capitalist then sells her finished product as a commodity in exchange for money (M).
Commodities continued: The General Formula For Capital

- For others, the cycle of exchange takes an inverse path.
- The worker enters into exchange possessing only his labor power, which is sold as a commodity (C) on the market. The commodity, labor, is then exchanged for money (M) or a wage. The worker then takes the money and spends it on the commodities (C) necessary to his survival.
- This cycle (C-M-C) must be repeated daily as the commodities bought by the worker, tied as they are to survival, are more or less immediately consumed.
Key Quotations from *Capital: Commodities*

- “A commodity is, in the first place, an object outside us, a thing that by its properties satisfies human wants of some sort or another.” (69)

- “A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men’s labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour.” (72)

- “...the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relation both with one another and the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men’s hands. This I call the Fetishism...” (73)
Key Quotations from *Capital*: The General Formula for Capital

- “In the circulation C—M—C, the money is in the end converted into a commodity, that serves as a use-value; it is spent once for all. In the inverted form, M—C—M, on the contrary, the buyer lays out money in order that, as a seller, he may recover money.” (77)

- “The circuit C—M—C starts with one commodity, and finishes with another, which falls out of circulation and into consumption. Consumption, the satisfaction of wants, in one word, use-value, is its end and aim. The circuit M—C—M, on the contrary, commences with money and ends with money. Its leading motive, and the goal that attracts it, is therefore mere exchange-value.” (77)

- “Buying in order to sell, or, more accurately, buying in order to sell dearer, M—C—M', appears certainly to be a form peculiar to one kind of capital alone, namely merchants’ capital.” (80)
Engels rearticulates their (he and Marx) materialist conception of history whereby the organization of societies is determined by both the production of the means of existence and the reproduction of the species.
Introduction to Friedrich Engels, The Origin of Family, Private Property and the State

- Following Morgan’s (1877) analysis, Engels argued that prehistoric societies had passed through two stages of development—savagery and barbarism.
Introduction to Friedrich Engels, The Origin of Family, Private Property and the State

- Savagery - characterized by communally organized hunting and gathering societies.

- Barbarism - marked by the domestication and breeding of animals for food, the development of irrigation techniques for the cultivation of crops, and, later, iron plows for tilling large fields.
Group marriages were replaced by the “pairing family” consisting of one man, one woman, and their children.

The advent of the pairing family effected a new division of labor in which the man took responsibility for obtaining food and, with it, ownership of the means of production.
Introduction to Friedrich Engels, The Origin of Family, Private Property and the State

- The man’s power was further consolidated through overturning “mother-right” lines of descent.

- Laws of inheritance would henceforth be assigned through the male, not the female.
Continual population growth and advances in production techniques and labor ushered in the transition from barbarism to civilization—the period of industry.
Introduction to Friedrich Engels, The Origin of Family, Private Property and the State

- The transition from the pairing family to the monogamous family.
- Monogamous marriage stripped women of the freedom, honor, and respect naturally accorded during the “backward” period of barbarism.
- The “advances” of civilization in their stead have regulated the wife to “domestic slavery.”
Many anthropologists and historians contend that Engels’s portrayal of the premodern family is ethnographically and historically inaccurate.

Materialist perspective and causes
State is now center of power within the civilized society, the boundaries of which were marked by territory, not blood.

To secure its defense against foreign enemies and to maintain domestic order, the state compelled its citizens to pay taxes.
Introduction to Friedrich Engels, The Origin of Family, Private Property and the State

- The armies, police forces, and prisons—served the interests of the dominant economic class.

- Thus, the state provided the ruling class with the political means for oppressing and exploiting the subordinate class and ensuring its continued economic dominance.
Key Quotes from: The Origin of Family, Private Property and the State

―the world historical defeat of the female sex. The man took command in the home also; the woman was degraded and reduced to servitude, she became the slave of his lust and a mere instrument for the production of children‖ (83)
Key Quotes from: The Origin of Family, Private Property and the State

“the first form of the family to be based, not on natural, but on economic conditions—on the victory of private property over primitive, natural communal property” (84)