

**Reaction Paper 1**

The division of these readings divides into three parts, the first, tracking the history of capitalist-socialist economic dialectic over the course of its history, and providing the context for the American focus of the second part. The second part introduces upon the origins of the American Revolution, broadly overviews the most well-recognized and momentous political developments in American politics since the end of the Second World War, and presents a cyclical theory of religious movement and its influence on socio-political developments in America. This leads into the third part, which is composed of one article discussion social cycles in history and their role in the sustenance and ultimate demise of various social-political systems throughout history. In this article it is speculated that the capitalist economic system cannot be sustained for longer than 50 years, but there is no answer given of whether it will be replaced by something substantively different or similar. Finally, this postulation is backed up by data indicating dramatic alterations in American living standards expected over the next one hundred years.

These readings present a background on the subjects that may be covered in the course. They give us a meaningful context in which to base our discussion for the rest of the semester. They are a good introduction to recent historical trends in American political thought. *Paths in Utopia* is related to *The Communist Manifesto* as a critique of Marxist thought and analysis of its ultimate failure to create the new society out of political revolution; *One Hundred Years of Socialism* traces the political outcomes of the leftist thought analyzed by Buber. *The Communist*

*Manifesto* itself stands more as a history and critique of capitalism, whereas *A History of Capitalism* is a more comprehensive and objective view of its early development.

These readings place the subsequent readings on the American experience in the context of America's place as the bastion of the triumphant worldwide capitalist system. Conservative intellectual development is traced in *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945*, whose consequences are dramatized in *Before the Storm*. The influence of religion, conservatism, and egalitarian liberalism on the American Revolution is discussed in *The Contours of American History*, and the religious aspect is more explicitly explored in *The Fourth Great Awakening*. The other three readings in this section track the more lasting consequences of the political upheaval of the 1960s—civil rights, women's rights, and consciousness of the significance of environmentalism. These readings also interact with readings on the concurrent development of American conservatism and its reactions to these movements. Finally, *The End of the World* summarizes the logic of systemic change in its basic forms.

The ideas in these readings relate to the themes of democracy, freedom, equality and community we have discussed so far in the course as being more concrete, historical elaborations of these concepts. They illustrate various theoretical paradigms by which all or certain aspects of each of these themes was explored in the last century, both in their successes and failures, with a prudence about predicting the future. Societies and movements across time and space have all broadly sought some combination of the four themes that we have discussed, and the shape in which they are achieved lies to a great extent on the economic structures of the time.

The determination of political structures, the ways through which democracy, freedom, equality and community are defined and sought after, and even the normative balance between these values, by economic phenomena is a major underlying theme across these readings. J.R.

McNeill points out that despite the vast distance separating political movements such as capitalism and communism, and the vastly different governments and peoples and their varying goals in modern history, all societies have traditionally worshipped economic growth above all else. Whereas the tides of the values debate between the four themes of democracy, freedom, equality and community have ebbed and flowed, the primacy of economic performance as the consideration of both democratic voters and legitimate policy elites of the world's major countries has never ebbed, and it is in the context of changing economic currents that conservatism, liberalism and leftism have played out their struggles. In fact, Wallerstein postulates the economic re-structuring following the Black Death was responsible for the birth of the capitalist system in Europe. Though, given the sweeping nature of the readings, there is not enough to make the case fully, one is certainly tempted to discount the significance of politics as a whole in the context of technologically or demographically-driven economic change.