Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels

*The Communist Manifesto* (1847)
Karl Marx (1818-1883)

- Born in Trier, Germany, the 3rd of nine children of a lawyer
- Educated first at the University of Bonn; became co-president of a drinking club and got involved in a duel; his father insisted that he transfer to a more serious university, which he did after the first year, switching to the university of Berlin, where he studied law and philosophy
- First job after graduation was as a journalist for The Rheinische Zeitung in Cologne; he soon became its editor, criticized Prussian authorities; paper was shut down by govt. in 1843
- Shortly after the newspaper was closed, he married Jenny von Westphalen, the daughter of a wealthy industrialist and baron, and had seven children with her; four children died young but one, Eleanor, became a committed socialist and helped edit her father’s works
More biographical information on Marx

• In 1843 he moved with his wife to Paris, met Friedrich Engels there

• Traveled in 1845 to Brussels with Engels to join the Communist League there; eventually they were given the task of writing a manifesto

• Wrote The German Ideology and The Communist Manifesto during this period

• Went back to Germany in 1848 but his stay was short-lived; the next year he was deported

• Now stateless, he and his family went to England, where he was to spend the rest of his days, mostly researching, writing and organizing

• He also continued to work as a journalist, writing articles for several newspapers, including The New York Tribune (founded earlier by Horace Greeley)

• Died in London in 1883
Influences on Marx?

- The German idealist G.W.F. Hegel and his theory of the dialectic
  a) thesis
  b) anti-thesis
  c) synthesis (result of clash between thesis and antithesis)
- Ludwig Feuerbach and his criticism of religion and advocacy of materialism
Key terms for Marx and Engels

• What is the bourgeoisie?
  The bourgeoisie are the capitalist class, esp. the owners of the means of production (factories, e.g.)

• What is the proletariat?
  The proletariat are the urban workers; they are a subordinate class that lacks the means of production and the ability to sustain itself without selling its labor to the ruling class

- What is commodification?
  Everything becomes an object, even workers who must sell their labor; they become just another commodity and are alienated from the fruits of their labor
The Capitalist era is the key stage

- Capitalism promotes secularization and materialism
- All previous social bonds – to family, religion, nation – are replaced by the “cold cash nexus”
- Capitalism promotes globalization, the search for expanding markets
- Capitalism promotes urbanization, the subjugation of the country to the rule of towns
- Capitalism also promotes over-production, which leads to gluts of commodities and crises
Marx and Engels’ theory of history

- What pushes history forward?
  - Marx: Economics-historical materialism
- Class struggle between haves and have-nots lay at its root (Cf. Christianity – God’s plan for salvation)
- Over time, simplified class divisions will sharpen class consciousness
- **Stages/ Phases:**
  - 1) Prehistory
  - 2) Classical Antiquity: Masters vs. Slaves
  - 3) Middle Ages/ Feudal Era: Nobles vs. Serfs
  - 4) Capitalist Era: Bourgeoisie vs. Proletariat
  - 5) Dictatorship of the proletariat (classless society eventually)
Superstructure (Culture, politics, religion)

• Structure/Base (Control of the means of production)
Marx believes that capitalism’s end is inevitable

- Capitalists were a progressive force during the feudal era but by the capitalist era, they have exploited workers and caused massive social injustice.
- This will lead to a revolution.
- Marx discusses many of these ideas at greater length in his multi-volume *Das Kapital*.