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Richard D. Wolff Papers

1912-2020
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Hired to the UMass Amherst Economics Department as part of the “radical package” in 1973, Richard D. Wolff is an influential Marxian economist and professor emeritus of economics. Wolff was born in 1942 to Max and Lieselotte Wolff, who emigrated to the United States during World War II. He earned a BA in History from Harvard, MA in Economics from Stanford, and MA and PhD in Economics from Yale University, during which time he was an instructor at Yale. Before coming to UMass, Wolff also taught at the City College of the City University of New York. Wolff and his colleague and frequent collaborator, Stephen Resnick, wrote prolifically during their career at UMass, developing a new framework for considering political economy. While teaching at UMass, Wolff and his colleagues founded the Association for Economic and Social Analysis (AESAs), which sponsors publication of the journal Rethinking Marxism. In 2012, Wolff co-founded Democracy at Work, a non-profit producing media that provides education and analysis of capitalism, Marxism, and democratic workplaces. The Richard Wolff Papers document the professional and professional career of Wolff through course material, writings and publications, book contracts, floppy disks, and a plethora of correspondence in the form of handwritten letters and printed out emails. There is also a small but significant amount of personal material, including family scrapbooks from Germany and his mother’s manuscript on surviving the Holocaust.

Background on Richard D. Wolff

Richard D. Wolff was born on April 1, 1942 to Max and Lieselotte Wolff. His parents emigrated to the United States during World War II and made their new home in Youngstown, Ohio, later moving near New York City. Max Wolff had been a lawyer in Germany and France. In the United States, Max would become a Professor of Modern History and International Affairs at Youngstown College, and later held a similar position at the University of Missouri; he would also work as a professor at Teachers College, Columbia University. Max held a position as the Director of Research for the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and Research Resident of the Center for Urban Education in 1965, a senior researcher in the Center for Urban Education in New York, and in 1966 he conducted an influential study on the Head Start program. Lieselotte Wolff would go on to write a manuscript about her experience fleeing from Germany entitled "How I Escaped the Holocaust." Later in life, Richard Wolff, through inquiries with the Red Cross, would attempt to help his mother reconnect with family and friends from whom she was separated during World War II. Wolff would also go through the process of applying for German citizenship in 2007.

Growing up in this environment would influence Richard in his education and career. He graduated from Harvard in 1963 with a B.A., magna cum laude, in history, and would go on to earn three Masters degrees: one in Economics from Stanford in 1964, one in Economics from Yale in 1966, and one in History from Yale in 1967. Wolff would also attend Yale to earn his Ph.D. in Economics in 1969 and his dissertation, "Economic Aspects of British Colonialism in Kenya, 1895-1930" would be published a few years later in 1974. Wolff taught at Yale while he was a graduate student, and he would go on to teach at the City College of New York until 1973.

In 1972, Wolff was courted by the University of Massachusetts Amherst, invited by Dean Alfange, Jr., who was Dean of the Faculty of Social and Behavioral Sciences and acting chairman of the Economics Department at the time. Wolff was hired to UMass Amherst as an associate professor in 1973 as part of the "radical package" of professors coming to the Economics Department, which included Samuel Bowles, Herbert Gintis, Richard Edwards, and Stephen A. Resnick. During this time, Wolff and Resnick, who also worked at the City College and then UMass Amherst, enjoyed a long-term collaborative relationship which lasted until Resnick's death in 2013; they wrote and published numerous books and articles together and taught classes together. Wolff's courses were most often related to Marxian theory and Marxian economics, but he also taught on the history of economic thought and the United States economy. During his 1979-80 sabbatical leave, with the help of a grant from The American Council of Learned Societies, Wolff went to Paris for several months where he studied with noted Marxist philosopher, Louis Althusser. Wolff taught at UMass Amherst until 2008, and during that time he would see a shift in the politics and focus of the department. As correspondence, positive results from course questionnaires, and Wolff being a recipient of the UMass Distinguished Teaching Award in 1981 indicate, his classes were enjoyed by students. He was named Professor Emeritus in Economics at UMass Amherst in 2008, and he is currently a visiting professor in the Graduate Program in International Affairs at the New School.

While working at UMass, Wolff was a founding member of the Association for Economic and Social Analysis (AESA), established in 1988, and the association's journal, Rethinking Marxism, which explores economics, culture and society; Wolff served as a member of the editorial board for Rethinking Marxism. Wolff also co-founded Democracy at Work, a non-profit creating shows such as Economic Update, a weekly program in which Wolff analyzes economic issues. Throughout the years, Wolff has given numerous lectures, interviews, and contributed pieces to various publications, including Monthly Review.

For years, Wolff lived in New Haven, Connecticut with his wife, Dr. Harriet Fraad, a psychotherapist and hypnotherapist, and his two children, Max and Theresa. He was a founding member of the New Haven Green Party and ran as its mayoral candidate in 1985, although he did not win the election. While living in New Haven, Wolff served as a member of the New Haven Revenue Commission and the Overall Economic Plan Committee. Today, Wolff lives with his wife Harriet in Manhattan.

Scope of collection

The Richard Wolff Papers document the impressive professional career of a Marxian economist devoted to educating the people in matters of economic theory, history, and current economic crises. Organized into five series, the collection includes course material from Wolff's time at UMass Amherst, writings undertaken by himself and with collaborators, as well as publications, conferences, and speaking engagements in which Wolff participated. His correspondence veers towards the professional, with much of it discussing theory with colleagues, but there is also personal material that sheds a light on the environment that Wolff grew up in. Audiovisual material contains VHS, DVD, and CD recordings of lectures and interviews that Wolff gave, while the digital material retains a focus on Wolff's writings with Stephen A. Resnick and material for the classes that he taught at UMass.

Series descriptions

[Series 1. Professional Activities](#)

1972-2020
2.5 boxes

This series consists of material related to Wolff's professorship at UMass Amherst and his professional work not directly related to his role at the university. Includes documentation of Wolff being hired to UMass Amherst in 1973, his promotion to full professor in 1980, and the many economics courses that he taught while at UMass. These courses include History of Economic Thought, Marxian Theory, Advanced Topics in Marxist Economics, and History of the Marxian Tradition, among others, with the majority of the course material dating to the 1990s and 2000s. Course material includes syllabi, exam details, and Wolff's lecture notes. Student papers have been removed from these folders. Also included in this series are memorandums from the Field Group in Marxian Economics and information about comprehensive exams, annual faculty reports, course evaluations, and retirement information.

A major component of this series consists of Wolff's writing, both as an individual and in collaboration with other authors such as Stephen Resnick, often in the form of papers and reviews. Of particular note are discussion papers that Wolff and Resnick wrote for the AESA discussion series, and working papers written while Wolff and Resnick were employed at UMass Amherst. Some of Wolff's writing appears as articles within various journals, which are also listed in this series. Writings by Wolff's colleagues, publications which feature interviews with Wolff, and book agreements are included, as are Wolff's papers and reviews in Rethinking Marxism.

Wolff also frequently attended conferences and other speaking engagements; programs, notes, and travel information from these events round out the series.

[Series 2. Correspondence](#)

1975-2018
.5 box

This series spans correspondence from the 70s to 2000s, but the majority of correspondence is from the 90s. Wolff had many correspondents throughout the years, and some of the more significant correspondents have been separated out into their own folders; the rest of the correspondence has been sorted chronologically. Correspondence includes handwritten and typed letters as well as printed out emails.

[Series 3. Personal](#)

1912-2007
1 box

Contains material significant to Wolff's personal life and family history. There are two copies of his mother, Lieselotte Wolff's, manuscript entitled "How I Escaped the Holocaust" as well as a family scrapbook containing handwritten letters in German between Wolff's father, Max, and the rest of his family from 1912-1936. Also found in this series is correspondence and documents related to Wolff's search with the Red Cross to locate his mother's family and friends after World War II, application for naturalization, and other scrapbooks and journals. There are also photographs, clippings, and Wolff's 1963 Harvard yearbook.

[Series 4. Audiovisual](#)

1997-2016
1 box

Composed of VHS tapes and DVDs of talks with Wolff, including interviews with him and his interviews with guests on the show Economic Update. There are multiple copies of Capitalism Hits the Fan, a 2008 documentary in which Wolff discusses the global economic crisis.

[Series 5. Digital](#)

1991-2003
1 box

This series includes 33 floppy disks and 1 zip disk of material. Many of the digital files are drafts from books, papers, and course material, some of which is duplicated in the physical documents of the first two series of the collections. Digital files have not been fully processed.

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1990 issue contains article by Richard D. Wolff: "Clouds Gather Over Connecticut: In My Opinion".

March, April 1994 issue contains article: "Yale Can Afford to Pay New Haven".

November, December 1994 issue contains article: "What the U.S. Elections Show: In My Opinion".

Albritton, Robert: The De(con)struction of Marx's Capital
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Amariglio, Jack and Antonio Callari: Marxian Value Theory and the Problem of the Subject: The Role of Commodity Fetishism
1989

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Amariglio, Jack and Bruce Norton: Marxist Historians and the Question of Class in the French Revolution
1991

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Contains article by Richard D. Wolff: "Die US-Wirtschaft im Jahr 2000--eine marxistische Analyse".

Balibar, Etienne: Europe: Final Crisis?

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The Boston Globe Magazine

1995 Feb 12

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Contains article by B. J. Roche: "The Last Marxists" for which Wolff was interviewed.

The Boston Occupier

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Callari, Antonio: Rethinking Marxism articles

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Chinese translation of article by Stephen A. Resnick and Richard D. Wolff: "Economic Crisis: A Marxist Interpretation" first published in Foreign Theoretical Trends and reprinted here.

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Contains article by Richard D. Wolff: "Economia e fondamentalismo nelle elezioni statunitensi".

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Contains article by Richard D. Wolff: "PC Administrators at Vassar: Power and Ideology".

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Contains article by Guangjie Ning introducing Stephen A Resnick and Richard D. Wolff's "Class Theory & History"; includes photocopy of Guangjie Ning's Chinese translation of Wolff's article: "The American Economy in 2000, a Marxist Analysis".

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Contains interview with Richard D. Wolff by Srécko Horvat discussing Occupy Wall Street.

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Contains article by Richard D. Wolff: "Green and Marxist!"

Helmick, Kristiana: May Day's Heyday is Over
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Contains interview with Richard D. Wolff by Ed Rampell.

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Contains article by Richard D. Wolff: "Socialism Returns, Again".

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Contains interview with Chris Williams by Richard D. Wolff, discussing the climate crisis.

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May-June issue contains article by Richard D. Wolff: "'Socially Responsible Capitalism'—An Oxymoron?"

September-October issue contains articles responding to Wolff's previous article, and Wolff offers his final thoughts.

Journal of humanities and social sciences
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Kämpfe für eine solidarische welt
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Contains article by Brigitte Kahl, Jan Rehmann, Richard D. Wolff, and Charlene Sinclair: "Capitalism, Economy, and Religion: A Christian-Marxist Dialogue Roundtable at the Left Forum, March 20, 2001".

Katzner, Donald W.: To the Edge of Camelot, preliminary draft
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Contains comment by Richard D. Wolff: "Capitalism and its Discontents."

London Socialist Historians Group Newsletter
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Contains review of Stephen A. Resnick and Richard D. Wolff's "Class Theory and History. Capitalism and Communism in the USSR".

Madra, Yahya M.: Questions of Communism: Ethics, Ontology, Subjectivity
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Contains review of Rethinking Marxism.

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Contains article by Richard D. Wolff: "Occupy Production".

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Contains article by Richard D. Wolff: "Gli USA e lo sviluppo diseguale".

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Contains article by Max Fraad-Wolff and Richard D. Wolff: "Boom or bust in Washington".

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Contains an introduction to Stephen A. Resnick, Richard D. Wolff, and Herbert Gintis; article: "The Theory of Transitional Conjunctures and the Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism in Western Europe"; and "Reply to Herb Gintis".

The Review of Radical Political Economics
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Contains article by Richard D. Wolff and Stephen A. Resnick: "Classes in Marxian Theory".

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Contains article by Richard D. Wolff: "The Contradictions of Finance".

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Contains article by Richard D. Wolff: "Hundert Jahre globaler Reloizierung des Kapitals".

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Contains Chinese translation of Stephen A. Resnick and Richard D. Wolff's "Economic Crisis: A Marxist Interpretation"; first published in Foreign Theoretical Trends and reprinted by Theoretical Economics.

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Contains article by Richard D. Wolff: "Prospects for the U.S. Left: Not Bad At All".

Un Marxisme Made in USA: Marx Au-Dela D'Althusser?
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Interview by Jacques Bidet with Stephen A. Resnick and Richard D. Wolff.

URPE Newsletter
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Contains article by Stephen A. Resnick and Richard D. Wolff: "On Overdetermination: A Response to John Miller".

Wallis, Victor: Song and Vision in the U.S. Labor Movement
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Contains article by Richard D. Wolff: "Economic Problems and Marxian Analysis".

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