Overview:

In recent years scholars have built upon the work of prior generations of business historians, labor historians, and economic historians to develop a new field that has become known as the “history of capitalism.” This seminar will consider the methodologies and substantive contributions of recent scholarship in the field, in conjunction with classic works on the history of political economy.

Assignments and Grading:

This is a readings seminar, and the primary expectation is that every student will arrive in class prepared to contribute to in-depth discussions of the assigned texts.

Each student will also open the discussion of the readings for one week by emailing the class with five succinct questions by 8:00pm on the Monday before the meeting, and providing five to ten minutes of introductory remarks that situate the major reading within a broader historiography at the beginning of class.

At the conclusion of the semester, students who are not completing a field exam with me this year will be asked to submit a paper of 12-15 pages which examines a historiographic problem in greater depth. This paper should include substantial readings beyond those assigned on the syllabus, though they need not be defined around the general topics for the weekly reading assignments. It will be due on Monday, May 11.

Unless students request otherwise in the first two weeks of the semester, this course will be graded on a pass/fail basis.

Texts:

A number of the course readings (denoted with an * in the syllabus) will be available on electronic reserve. The other readings, listed below, should be acquired separately:


**Wednesday, January 28: Introduction**


**Wednesday, February 4: Historicizing Capitalism**


**Supplementary Readings:**

• Jerry Muller, *The Mind and the Market: Capitalism in Modern European Thought* (Knopf, 2002).
Wednesday, February 11: Labor and Class


Supplementary Readings:

Wednesday, February 18: Economic History


Supplementary Readings:
• Douglass North, *Structure and Change in Economic History* (Norton, 1982).
• Gavin Wright, *Old South, New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy Since the Civil War* (Basic, 1986).

**Wednesday, February 25: Business History**


*Supplementary Readings:*

• Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (Hill and Wang, 1982).

**Wednesday, March 4: Comparative Histories of Capitalism**


**Supplementary Readings:**
• Mark Blyth, *Great Transformations: Economic Ideas and Institutional Change in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 2002).
• David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford University Press, 2005).

**Wednesday, March 11: Slavery and the Market**


**Supplementary Readings:**

**Wednesday, March 25: Commodities**

• *Sidney Mintz, Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (Viking, 1985), pp. 3–18, 151–186.

**Supplementary Readings:**

**Wednesday, April 1: Currency and Finance**


**Supplementary Readings:**
• Julia Ott, When Wall Street Met Main Street: The Quest for an Investors’ Democracy (Harvard University Press, 2011).

Wednesday, April 8: Energy and the Environment


Supplementary Readings:
• Patrick Allitt, A Climate of Crisis: America in the Age of Environmentalism (Penguin, 2014).
• Christopher Jones, Routes of Power: Energy and Modern America (Harvard University Press, 2014).
• Catherine McNeur, Taming Manhattan: Environmental Battles in the Antebellum City (Harvard University Press, 2014).
• Anthony Wallace, St. Clair: A Nineteenth-Century Coal Town’s Experience with a Disaster-Prone Industry (Knopf, 1987).

Wednesday, April 15: Law, Regulation, and Welfare


Supplementary Readings:


**Wednesday, April 22: Consumption and Debt**


**Supplementary Readings:**

- David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* (Melville House, 2010).
Wednesday, April 29: Individualism and Inequality


Supplementary Readings: