HISTORY OF CAPITALISM

Overview:

Over the past fifteen years scholars have built upon the work of prior generations of business historians, labor historians, and economic historians to develop a field that has become known as the “history of capitalism.” This seminar will consider the methods and contributions of recent scholarship in the field, in conjunction with classic works on the history of political economy, with a primary focus on the period from 1865 to the present.

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 be expected to introduce class discussion for two meetings – which entails distributing six concise questions no later than the preceding Thursday evening, and sharing five–ten minutes of remarks situating the readings in their historiographic contexts and assessing their intended contributions. Finally, each student will be asked to write a review (750–1,250 words) of one book chosen from the supplementary readings. Unless students request otherwise in the first two weeks of the semester, this course will be graded on a pass/fail basis.

Texts:

Most of the required course readings will be available on electronic reserve (and are denoted with an asterisk in the syllabus). The other readings, listed below, should be acquired separately:


Monday, August 29th: Historicizing Capitalism

• "Seth Rockman, “What Makes the History of Capitalism Newsworthy?”, *Journal of the Early Republic* 34, no. 3 (2014), pp. 439–452. (Skip the sections from 453 onward.)

**Monday, September 12th: Market Society in Context**


**Supplementary Readings:**
• Jerry Muller, *The Mind and the Market: Capitalism in Modern European Thought* (Knopf, 2002).
• Douglass North, *Structure and Change in Economic History* (Norton, 1982).
Monday, September 19th: Slavery and the Market


Supplementary Readings:
- Robin Einhorn, American Taxation, American Slavery (University of Chicago Press, 2006).
- Stephanie E. Jones-Rogers, They Were Her Property: White Women as Slave Owners in the American South (Yale University Press, 2019).
- Stephanie McCurry, Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country (Oxford University Press, 1995).
- Craig Steven Wilder, Ebony & Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America’s Universities (Bloomsbury, 2013).
• Gavin Wright, *Old South, New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy Since the Civil War* (Basic, 1986).

Monday, September 26th: Urbanization and Industrialization


*Supplementary Readings:*

**Monday, October 3rd: Finance and Financialization**


**Supplementary Readings:**
• David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* (Melville, 2010).
• Adam Tooze, *Crashed: How a Decade of Financial Crises Changed the World* (Viking 2018).

Monday, October 10th: The Rise of Global Economic Governance


Supplementary Readings:

Monday, October 17th: The Developmental State


**Supplementary Readings:**


**Monday, October 24th: Race, Capitalism, and the Carceral State**


**Supplementary Readings:**


**Monday, October 31st: The Politics of Consumption**


**Supplementary Readings:**


Monday, November 7th: New Technologies of Capitalism


**Supplementary Readings:**


• Richard Sennett, *The Culture of the New Capitalism* (Yale University Press, 2006).
• Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism*.

Monday, November 14th: The Neoliberal Turn, Part I: Origins

• *Quinn Slobodian, Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (Harvard University Press, forthcoming), Introduction, ch. 3, and ch. 5 (pp. 1–26, 91–120, 146–181).

Supplementary Readings:


• David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford University Press, 2005).


**Monday, November 28th:** The Neoliberal Turn, Part II: Implications and Afterlives


• *Lily Geismar, Left Behind: The Democrats’ Failed Attempt to Solve Inequality* (PublicAffairs, 2022), Introduction, ch. 1.


**Supplementary Readings:**


Monday, December 5th: Commercial and Territorial Empires (author visit from Daniel Immerwahr)


*Supplementary Readings:*