

**Core Topics in US History: Social and Cultural Histories of Capitalism**  
**21:512:360:01 [21255]**  
**Tuesday/Thursday: 4-5:20 p.m.**  
**Hill Hall 104**

**Instructor: Christopher Adam Mitchell**  
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### **Course Description**

What is capital and, for that matter, what is “capitalism”? Does capitalism just mean free markets, high finance, and trade, or does it reveal more complex cultural patterns and social processes? Is capitalism determined simply by supply and demand, hard work, and strategy, or are the institutions of state and society central to the creation of capitalist hierarchies, which range from extraordinary wealth and privilege to abject poverty? Perhaps more importantly, how do the vast majority of people experience capitalism, especially people typically excluded from the boardrooms and executive suites of the capitalists, like factory and agricultural workers, middle managers, renters and mortgage payers, small business owners, consumers, under- and unemployed workers, retirees, and public beneficiaries? Is capitalism simply an economic system that divides people into classes, or does capitalism also shape the more complex dynamics of white supremacy, sexism, compulsory heterosexuality, and transphobia?

This course explores these questions in the history of the United States from its founding in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century to the present by exploring the history of the concept of capital, the role of slavery in American capitalism, the activities of entrepreneurship and development markets, the formation of workers’ organizations and identities, the effect of markets on the family and the segregation of domestic space, the rise of consumer society, and the roots of some of the inequalities that characterize our society in the twentieth century. Throughout these readings, we will place race, sexuality, and gender at the center of our analysis of economics and social class.

### **Course learning outcomes**

Social and Cultural Histories of Capitalism will introduce students to some of the ideas central to the historical analysis of capitalism through a combination of theoretical readings, primary sources, and the work of historians of capitalism. Students will then engage in critical analyses of theoretical concepts to interpret primary sources and evaluate their application by historians in order to understand capitalism as a social and cultural as well as economic process. Most importantly, Social and Cultural Histories of Capitalism will explore the concrete experiences and human agencies of economic histories, moving the history of capitalism from the pages of the ledger to the real world of lived experience.

Through a combination of short written assignments, in-class discussion, the development of a group research and media project, and a comprehensive final exam, students in this course will learn

- how to engage fundamental concepts in the history of capitalism: the commodity, ideology, entrepreneurship, consumption, the problem of slavery, wages, the gendered division of labor and domestic versus public economies, class consciousness and identity, as well as macro- and microeconomic processes like neoliberalism, migration (including immigration), globalization, geographic segregation, and gentrification
- how to connect theoretical concepts in the study of capitalism to the history of ideas and cultural representation as well as the concrete experiences of specific social organized by race, class, gender, sexuality, dis/ability, and other differences
- how to define and discuss debates and critical issues among social and cultural historians of capitalism
- how to identify and interpret archives and primary sources for the empirical study of capitalism
- how to make collective, group-based decisions about how to investigate and frame an archive or set of primary sources that illuminates a narrow aspect or topic in the social and cultural history of capitalism

### **Disability Statement**

Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines>. If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus's disability services office will provide you with a Letter of Accommodations. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. To begin this process, please complete the Registration form on the ODS web site at: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/registration-form>. For more information please contact Kate Torres at [\(973\)353-5375](tel:9733535375) or in the Office of Disability Services in the Paul Robeson Campus Center, in suite 219 or by contacting [odsnewark@rutgers.edu](mailto:odsnewark@rutgers.edu).

### **The Writing Center**

The Writing Center (<http://www.ncas.rutgers.edu/writingcenter>), located in Room 126 of Conklin Hall, offers writing tutoring and writing workshops to all undergraduate students currently enrolled in classes on the Rutgers-Newark campus. Their tutors work to help students become more independent readers and writers capable of responding well to the demands of writing within the university. Please inform your students that The Writing Center is available to them free of charge and encourage them to take advantage of their services to strengthen their reading, writing, and research skills.

### **Gender Pronouns and Names**

This class affirms all forms of gender expression and identity. If you prefer to be called a different name than what is on the class roster, please let me know. Feel free to correct the instructor or any member of the class on your gender pronoun, or if you do not wish to use a gender pronoun. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

### **Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance**

Rutgers faculty are committed to helping create a safe learning environment for all students and for the university as a whole. If you have experienced any form of gender or sex-based discrimination or harassment, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, relationship violence, or stalking, know that help and support are available. Rutgers has staff members trained to support survivors in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, and more. The University strongly encourages all students to report any such incidents to the University. Please be aware that all Rutgers employees (other than those designated as confidential resources such as advocates, counselors, clergy and healthcare providers as listed in Appendix A to Policy 10.3.12) are required to report information about such discrimination and harassment to the University. This means that if you tell a faculty member about a situation of sexual harassment or sexual violence, or other related misconduct, the faculty member must share that information with the University's Title IX Coordinator. If you wish to speak with a staff member who is confidential and does not have this reporting responsibility, you may contact the Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance at (973)-353-1918, or at [run.vpva@rutgers.edu](mailto:run.vpva@rutgers.edu). Learn more about the office here: <http://counseling.newark.rutgers.edu/vpva>

### **Classroom policies**

*\*Please note that the classroom procedures on attendance (including missed classes), late coursework, and student conduct in the classroom are outlined below. Please read this policy carefully before the first day of classes.*

*Attendance and absences.*

**Attendance in every class is expected.** Occasional illness (including illness of a child, parent, or other dependent), serious injury, transportation delays, and bereavement are inevitable. However, it is not the instructor's responsibility to "catch you up." If you must miss a class meeting, please assume personal responsibility for work missed. Exchange contact information with a classmate to help you keep up with your lectures. **Given the time constraints and other classmates' needs, students should not expect the instructor to repeat or summarize a lecture via e-mail or during office hours.**

**Be on time.** Students who are repeatedly late may be documented, which may result in the penalization of the attendance/participation grade. Students who are more than half an hour late to class will not be marked present. Tardiness will only be excused with proper documentation.

**Stay the entire time.** The instructor will mark as absent students who leave the class and do not return before its conclusion. Students who do so may only be excused in case of a medical emergency or with proper documentation.

**Document excuses.** The instructor will only excuse absences with proper documentation, and all

students who miss classes must meet with the instructor briefly before class in order to receive an excuse. Proper documentation should be dated and include a signature. Proper documentation includes physician or medical care provider notes (including for sick children and dependents), court documents, obituaries, and formal requests from administration or faculty. Students who miss more than a day of classes are strongly encouraged to self report their absences at the following website: <https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/>. In addition, students with extended absences (longer than two weeks) should notify the Dean of Students at Rutgers-Newark. University policy stipulates that work scheduling conflicts and family vacations will not be excused. Students who simply e-mail the instructor without documentation, or who fail to follow up with documentation will not be excused. Furthermore, University and history department policy stipulates that students will lose half a letter grade (5 percentage points) of their FINAL COURSE GRADE after the fifth unexcused absence. Students who miss eight or more classes through any combination of excused or unexcused absences will not earn credit for the course. Such students should withdraw from the course.

*E-management, organization, and podcasts.* Students must participate in all aspects of the course, including Blackboard assignments. Students must have a working Rutgers username and password, as well as the coordination of e-mail and Blackboard usage. The instructor will frequently send e-mail reminders and assign material on Blackboard. In the event that the instructor cannot hold a physical class meeting—typically due to inclement weather or conflict with an academic conference—the instructor will post a podcast and lecture slides. Students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with podcasts and lecture slides just as they are responsible for attending in-class lecture. Podcasts and lecture slide material may be used for written assignments, quizzes, and exams.

In addition to using Blackboard, students will also use the University libraries website ([libraries.rutgers.edu](http://libraries.rutgers.edu)) in order to download required readings and, when necessary, conduct research.

**Students are responsible for keeping up with and contributing to any on-line components of the class. Please do not contact the instructor if you have a problem with Blackboard access. If students have e-management issues, students should immediately contact the Newark Computing Services Help Desk, located in Hill Hall 109, or call at 973-353-5083.**

*Student conduct.* Please be respectful of your peers, your instructor, and the university setting. Students may be asked to leave the class for the following reasons: cell phone use and texting during class (except for students with children and/or other dependents), using laptops to surf social media and other irrelevant websites, sleeping in class, persistently talking or whispering while the instructor or other students are speaking, blatant disruptions, and ad hominem attacks on other students or the instructor, including attacks couched in racism, sexism, transphobia, homophobia, discrimination based on ability, and religious intolerance. Students who become distracted by or who distract others with technology *for any reason* may be asked to sit in the front rows if they wish to continue to use a laptop or tablet. Students who consistently misuse technology will not be allowed to bring laptops or tablets into the classroom.

*Course readings.* Students must complete the readings before each class meeting, prepared to bring questions and comments for class. Students must purchase or otherwise obtain copies of the required texts. All other texts will be available on the course blackboard page. **Students are required to bring the readings to class in order to reference page numbers and other references to the readings in**

**lectures.** Students will read an average of 30-40 pages per class meeting, which is typical for an undergraduate course in history. Although on a handful of days we will exceed that limit, many days will consist of only 10-20 pages of readings. Some students may find the amount of reading difficult, and such students should make plans to dedicate extra hours in order to successfully complete the course readings. **The University suggests that students schedule or otherwise dedicate 3-6 class hours per week reading and studying for this course. In addition to the readings listed on the course calendar, students are responsible for reading all supplemental materials, including the syllabus, the writing guide, and all prompts.**

*Late policy.* Late work submitted without documentation will be accepted only at the discretion of the instructor. Late work is generally assessed at a 10% penalty for each 24-hour period an assignment is late.

*Statement on Academic Honesty and Plagiarism*

**If you plagiarize, you will at a minimum fail the assignment, and you may possibly fail the course.** Students will submit all written work to Turnitin, and students must sign the University honor pledge when submitting any in-class assignments. Any student who commits plagiarism or other acts of academic dishonesty will be asked to withdraw from the course. Violations will be reported to the appropriate university authorities and may result in further disciplinary action. Academic dishonesty includes unauthorized collaboration on homework assignments and, of course, cheating on in-class assignments.

**All work electronic work must be submitted to the Turnitin module on the course Blackboard page. All in-class and electronic work must include the following pledge: “On my honor, I have neither received nor given any unauthorized assistance on this examination / assignment.”**

\*\*From the University’s Policy on Academic Integrity for Undergraduate and Graduate Students:

“Plagiarism is the representation of the words or ideas of another as one's own in any academic exercise. To avoid plagiarism, every direct quotation must be identified by quotation marks or by appropriate indentation and must be properly cited in the text or in a footnote. Acknowledgment is required when material from another source stored in print, electronic or other medium is paraphrased or summarized in whole or in part in one's own words. To acknowledge a paraphrase properly, one might state: "to paraphrase Plato's comment..." and conclude with a footnote identifying the exact reference. A footnote acknowledging only a directly quoted statement does not suffice to notify the reader of any preceding or succeeding paraphrased material. Information which is common knowledge such as names of leaders of prominent nations, basic scientific laws, etc., need not be footnoted; however, all facts or information obtained in reading or research that are not common knowledge among students in the course must be acknowledged.

In addition to materials specifically cited in the text, only materials that contribute to one's general understanding of the subject may be acknowledged in the bibliography. Plagiarism can, in some cases, be a subtle issue. Any questions about what constitutes plagiarism should be discussed with the faculty member.”

## **Coursework and requirements**

*Participation (10%).* One of the most critical aspects of this course is in-class participation. **Students should come to class each day with the assigned readings, prepared to discuss specific questions and issues raised by the readings.** Students who refuse to discuss the reading materials, repeatedly take the class discussion off-topic or engage in other disruptions, or who fail to bring the readings into class risk harming their participation grade.

*Short writing assignments (25%).* Students will complete short writing assignments throughout the semester over the readings. All take-home writing assignments will be submitted to Blackboard, and all in-class assignments will take place at the beginning of class time.

*Media project and presentation (40%).* In the second week of class, students will organize into small groups (3-5 students) and begin work on a media project to explore some historical aspect of American capitalism through the identification and interpretation of an archive or set of primary sources. Students will work with the instructor to develop media projects, which must be posted on-line and framed for an in-class presentation during the last two weeks of class. Media projects can be completed in the following ways: 1) the creation of a standalone blog using the course Blackboard page or another blog-posting platform; 2) the creation of a social media presence on an approved format; or 3) the creation of an interactive multimedia project such as a film or slideshow for a video-sharing format.

*Final exam (25%).* Students will complete a final exam consisting of an in-class portion administered at the time scheduled by the University, as well as a take-home question (or set of questions) to be completed by 11:59 p.m. and uploaded to Turnitin on the date of the final examination, December 17.

## **Required Readings**

Students must obtain the following books, which are available at the University bookstore and on-line. Electronic versions are permitted.

Edward Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (Basic Books: 2016)

LaShawn Harris, *Sex Workers, Psychics, and Numbers Runners: Black Women in New York City's Underground Economy* (University of Illinois Press: 2016)

Robin D.G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists in the Great Depression*, 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition (University of North Carolina Press: 2015)

## **Calendar of Topics and Readings**

- I. Introduction: What is capital, and what is capitalism?

### Week 1

September 3 *Course introduction*

September 5 1) Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations* (excerpts from Chapters 1-3); 2) Karl Marx, "The Commodity," from *Capital, Vol. 1*; 3) Alberto Martinelli, "Entrepreneurship and Management," from *The Handbook of Economic Sociology*: 476-503; 4) Nikhil Pal Singh, "Liberalism," in *Keywords of American Cultural Studies*: 139-145

Suggested readings: 1) Engels, "Private Property, The Family, and the State;" 2) Nancy Fraser, "How Feminism Became Capitalism's Handmaiden—And How to Reclaim It" (*The Guardian*); 3) Steven G. Marks, "The Word 'Capitalism': The Soviet Union's Gift to America," *Society* 49:2 (2012): 155-163

## II. Capitalism and the History of Slavery and Class in Colonial North America

### Week 2

September 10 1) Alden Vaughan, "The Origins Debate: Slavery and Racism in Seventeenth Century Virginia," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 97:3 (1989): 311-354; 2) Virginia Slavery Laws, *American Capitalism: A Reader* (2014): 52-55; 3) Kathleen Brown, "The Anxious World of the Slaveowning Patriarch," reprinted and abridged in *Major Problems in American History* (2012): 49-58

September 12 Baptist, Introduction (all) and pp. 1-5

Suggested readings: 1) Nicole Woolsey Biggart, "Labor and Leisure" in *The Handbook of Economic Sociology* (1994): 672-690; 2) Barbara J. Fields, "Slavery, Race, and Ideology in the United States of America," reprinted in *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life* (2012): 111-148

## III. The Early United States and Emerging Markets

### Week 3

September 17 1) Baptist, 5-49; 2) Robert Lee, "Accounting for Conquest: The Price of the Louisiana Purchase of Indian Country," *JAH* 103 (2017): 921-942

September 19 Baptist, 49-110

### Week 4

September 24 Baptist, 111-170

September 26 1) Baptist, 171-214; † 2) Cohen, Gilfoyle, and Horowitz, "Beginnings: Rivalry and Satire," *The Flash Press: Sporting Male Weeklies in New York*: 17-54

Suggested readings: 1) Gordon Wood, "Democracy" (Section III) of *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (1993): 229-369; 2); 3) Woody Holton, "The Capitalist Constitution," *American Capitalism: New Histories* (2018): 36-62; 4) Nancy Cott, "The Market Revolution and the Changes to Women's Work," reprinted and abridged in *Major Problems in American History* (2012): 246-254; 5) Daniel Walker Howe, "The Changes Wrought by Cotton, Transportation,

and Communication,” reprinted and abridged in *Major Problems in American History* (2012): 254-262; 6) Henry Clay, “In Defense of the American System,” *American Capitalism: A Reader*: 153-160; 7) Andrew Jackson, “Veto of the Bank Bill (1832),” *American Capitalism: A Reader*: 194-203

#### IV. The Market Revolution: Human and Finance Capital from the Antebellum Era to Reconstruction

##### Week 5

October 1 † Deborah Gray White, “Jezebel and Mammy” from *Aren’t I a Woman?*  
October 3 1) Baptist, 215-260; † 2) Truth, “Aren’t I a Woman?”

##### Week 6

October 8 Baptist, 261-308  
October 10 Baptist, 309-342

##### Week 7

October 15 Baptist, 343-396  
October 17 1) Baptist, 397-421; † 2) Herman Melville, “Bartleby the Scrivener;” 2) John N. Ingham, “Building Businesses, Creating Communities: Residential Segregation and the Growth of African American Business in Southern Cities, 1880-1915,” *Business History Review* (2003): 639-665

Suggested readings: 1) Charles Ball, “Slavery in the United States,” *American Capitalism: A Reader*: 161-170; 2) Juliet E.K. Walker, “Racism, Slavery, and Free Enterprise: Black Entrepreneurship in the United States before the Civil War,” *Business History Review* 60:3 (1986): 343-382; 3) Walter Johnson, “The Pedestal and the Veil: Rethinking the Capitalism/Slavery Question,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 24 (2004): 299-308; 4) Carl Ostrowski, “Slavery, Labor Reform, and Intertextuality in Antebellum Print Culture: The Slave Narrative and the City-Mysteries Novel,” *African American Review* 40:3 (2006): 493-506

#### V. Entrepreneurship, Financial Power, and Labor Resistance in the Era of the Corporation

##### Week 8

October 22 1) Alfred Chandler, “Mass Distribution,” from *The Visible Hand*: 207-235; 2) Hugh Rockoff, “The ‘Wizard of Oz’ as Monetary Allegory,” from *Historical Perspectives on the American Economy* (1995): 524-546; 3) Frederick Taylor, “Principles of Scientific Management” from *American Capitalism: A Reader*: 335-342  
October 24 1) William Z. Foster, “Syndicalism (1913),” 2) Preamble to the IWW Constitution from *American Capitalism: A Reader*: 320-329; 3) Documents from the International Ladies Garment Workers Union and the Triangle Factory Fire (online); 4) Peter Kvidera, “Rewriting the Ghetto: Cultural Production in the Labor Narratives of Rose Schneiderman and Theresa Malkiel,” *American Quarterly* 57:4 (2005): 1131-1154

Suggested readings (available on Blackboard): 1) Arthur Rolston, Capital, "Corporations, and Their Discontents in the Making of the California Constitutions, 1849-1911," *Pacific Historical Review* 80:4 (2011): 521-556; 2) William F. Holmes, "Rise of the Colored Farmers' Alliance," *Journal of Southern History* 41:2 (1975): 187-200; 3) Mark Noon, "'It aint' your color, it's your scabbing': Literary Depictions of African American Strikebreakers," *African American Review* 38:3 (2004): 429-439

## VI. Confronting the Crises of Capitalism

### *Week 9*

October 29 Kelley, 1-56  
October 31 Kelley, 57-118

### *Week 10*

November 5 Kelley, 119-175  
November 7 Kelley, 176-222

Suggested readings: 1) Franklin Delano Roosevelt, "Fireside Chat (1933)," and "Executive Order to Desegregate Wartime Production (1942)" from *American Capitalism: A Reader*: 354-359; 2) Chad Alan Goldberg, "Contesting the Status of Relief Workers during the New Deal: The Workers Alliance of America and the Works Progress Administration," *Social Science History* 29:3 (2005): 337-371; 3) Studs Terkel, *Hard Times* (excerpts) and *The Good War* (excerpts)

## VII. Consumers' Republics from Community Empowerment to Gentrification

### *Week 11*

November 12 1) Harris, 1-53; 2) F. Scott Fitzgerald, "Bernice Bobs Her Hair"  
November 14 Harris, 54-93

### *Week 12*

November 19 1) Harris, 123-167; 2) Nancy Achilles, "The Development of the Homosexual Bar as an Institution (1967)," and 3) Martin Levine, "Gay Ghetto (1979)" from *Social Perspectives in Lesbian and Gay Studies*: 175-182, 194-206  
November 21 1) Harris, 167-208; 2) David K. Johnson, "Physique Pioneers: The Politics of 1960s Gay Consumer Culture," *Journal of Social History* (2010): 867-892

### *Week 13*

November 26 1) Jessi Gan, "'Still at the Back of the Bus: Sylvia Rivera's Struggle,'" 2) Charles Nero, "Why are the gay ghettos white?," 3) Cathy Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics," *GLQ* : 437-465

Suggested readings: 1) Kathy Peiss, "'Charity Girls' and City Pleasures: Historical Notes on Working-Class Sexuality, 1880-1920," 2) Robert E. Weems, Jr., "Consumerism and the Construction of Black Female Identity in Twentieth Century America," and 3) Lizabeth Cohen,

“From Town Center to Shopping Center: The Reconfiguration of Community Marketplaces,” from *The Gender and Consumer Culture Reader*: 330-341, 166-178, and 245-266; 4) Ivan Light and Stavros Karageorgis, “The Ethnic Economy,” from *The Handbook of Economic Sociology*: 620-646; 5) Christina Hanhardt, “Butterflies, Whistles, and Fists: Gay Safe Street Patrols and the New Gay Ghetto, 1976-1981,” *RHR* (2008): 61-85; 6) Suleiman Osman, “The Decade of the Neighborhood,” in *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s*: 106-127; 7) Whitney Strub, *Perversion for Profit: The Politics of Pornography and the Rise of the New Right* (2013)

#### VIII. Class Presentations

##### *Week 14*

December 3 *Class presentations*

December 5 *Class presentations*

#### IX. 21st Century Inequalities

##### *Week 15*

December 10 1) Nelson Lichtenstein, “The Return of Merchant Capitalism,” *International Labor and Working-Class History* 81 (2012): 8-27; 2) Christine Shearer, “The Social Construction of Alaska Native Vulnerability to Climate Change,” *Race, Gender & Class* 19:1-2: 61-79

December 12 *Reading day (no classes scheduled)*

December 17 *Final Examination*