Core Topics in US History: Social and Cultural Histories of Capitalism
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Tuesday/Thursday: 4-5:20 p.m.
Hill Hall 104

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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 18th 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 or in the Office of Disability Services in the Paul Robeson Campus Center, in suite 219 or by contacting 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. Learn more about the office here: [http://counseling.newark.rutgers.edu/vpva](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/](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) 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 online. Electronic versions are permitted.


Calendar of Topics and Readings

I. Introduction: What is capital, and what is capitalism?
**Week 1**

September 3  
*Course introduction*

September 5  


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

**Week 2**

September 10  

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


III. The Early United States and Emerging Markets

**Week 3**

September 17  

September 19  
Baptist, 49-110

**Week 4**

September 24  
Baptist, 111-170

September 26  


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 *A’rn’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


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

**Week 8**

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


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

Week 13


VIII. Class Presentations

**Week 14**
December 3  Class presentations
December 5  Class presentations

IX. 21st Century Inequalities

**Week 15**
December 12  Reading day (no classes scheduled)

December 17  Final Examination