HISTORY OF AMERICAN CAPITALISM

BASIC INFO

Lectures/discussion
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:30-3:45 p.m., 1101 Mosse Humanities Bldg.
Prof. Dunlavy – contact info
Prof. Dunlavy – contact info
cdunlavy@wisc.edu – (608) 263-1854 – mailbox #5005
Office hours
Prof. Dunlavy – contact info
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 4:00-5:00 p.m., 5109 Mosse Humanities
Website:  http://historyofcapitalism.net

OVERVIEW

How did American capitalism reach its current state? This is one of today’s most pressing questions, and it’s arguably the most exciting time in a century to grapple with it.

This course offers useful ways of thinking about (i.e., analyzing, understanding) American capitalism through a survey of its historical development since the mid-eighteenth century. Although history cannot be used to predict the future, understanding the historical processes by which we arrived at our current state helps us to make sense of the transformations going on around us.

Our survey of that history is structured around two broad dimensions of American capitalism:

- the foundational, though ever-changing, role of government, broadly construed, which both shaped and was shaped by American capitalism; and
- changes in technology, which have transformed (and are transforming) both the American economy and social relations.

Class periods will combine lecture and discussion. In virtually every lecture, we will devote a portion of our time to discussion of the assigned readings or the lectures.

GOALS: KNOWLEDGE- AND SKILL-BUILDING

This course offers you an opportunity to enhance both your knowledge of the history of American capitalism and your skill at thinking critically and historically.

The lectures, assigned readings, and writing assignments will encourage you to develop your ability to think critically. Critical thinking is one of the two most important skills that you can learn, whatever your career aspirations. The components of critical thinking are illustrated in the image to the right. For more information, see The Critical Thinking Community’s webpage at http://www.criticalthinking.org/pages/our-concept-of-critical-thinking/411. If you would like to work on your critical-thinking skills, I encourage you to read M. Neil Browne and Stuart M. Keeley, Asking the Right Questions: A Guide to Critical Thinking (any recent edition).

The second important skill is historical thinking. This means paying careful attention to events, to change over time, and to the particular sequence of events (chronology). It also means learning to grapple creatively with complexity—e.g., with differing rates of change, with multi-causality, and with necessarily incomplete information. What could be more useful in today’s complex and rapidly changing world?

If you do well in this course, you may characterize these skills on your resumé in the following words:

- Adept at analyzing complex, dynamic, real-world events based on incomplete information and able to communicate the results of that analysis coherently and succinctly.
READINGS

The readings are a mixture of primary sources (i.e., documents produced in the years we are studying) and secondary sources (written in later years, usually based on primary sources). With the exception of Rampolla’s *A Pocket Guide to Writing in History*, the readings will be available on Learn@UW (https://learnuw.wisc.edu, log in with your UW NetID).

Little prior knowledge of U.S. history is presumed in this course. However, if you would like to refresh or enhance your knowledge during the semester, a good choice for this course would be Pauline Maier et al., *Inventing America: A History of the United States*, 2d ed. (W. W. Norton, 2006).

ASSIGNMENTS

These are designed to help you develop essential skills—reading and listening carefully, evaluating and synthesizing what you have heard/read, and expressing your understanding coherently and persuasively in writing. If you have not read the little, all-time classic, Strunk and White’s *The Elements of Style*, this would be an excellent time to do so. Also, be sure to make use of resources such as Rampolla’s *Pocket Guide* and the UW’s Writing Center.

BRIEF ANALYSIS

This, the first assignment of the semester, is due in lecture on January 29. Its focus is on sharpening your analytical skills—in this instance, your ability to discern and summarize the key points to be gleaned from a set of primary sources.

RESEARCH ASSIGNMENT

You will have one research assignment this semester, using online digital sources. This assignment is designed to cultivate your research skills as well as your skills in critical thinking and historical thinking. It will ask you to relate articles published in a newspaper (e.g., *Chicago Tribune*) or a magazine (e.g., *Harper’s Weekly*) to the assigned readings.

TAKE-HOME ESSAYS

Both the mid-term and the final exam will be take-home essays, based solely on the assigned readings and the sources used for your research assignments. I will devote some time in lectures to the writing process.

OCCASIONAL QUIZZES OR BRIEF, IN-CLASS WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

From time to time (unannounced), a brief quiz or writing exercise will check your understanding of assigned readings or recent lectures.

GRADING

These tables indicate the relative weight of the various components that will form the basis for your semester grade. Your assignments will be graded on the scale shown at the right. Bear in mind that, even if your grade is at the upper (or lower) edge of a grading interval, it will still be reported at the end of the semester as the basic interval grade (e.g., 83 and 87 will both be reported as a B). Penalty for late papers: one full step (e.g., from A to B) for each day (partial days to be pro-rated).

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components of Your Grade</th>
<th>Scale</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brief analysis</td>
<td>A 93-100%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research assignment</td>
<td>AB 88-92%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mid-term take-home</td>
<td>B 83-87%</td>
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<td>Pop quizzes or exercises</td>
<td>BC 78-82%</td>
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<td>Final take-home essay</td>
<td>C 70-77%</td>
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<td>D 60-69%</td>
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<td>F 0-59%</td>
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INTELLECTUAL ENGAGEMENT

Faithful attendance of lectures is critical to getting the full benefit of a lecture course (seems rather obvious, doesn’t it ;-) ). But in a lecture course, it is all too easy to adopt a posture of passivity—sitting back and waiting to “receive” information. Developing analytical skills and historical understanding requires engagement. So cultivate an active posture in lectures. Don’t be lulled by my use of PowerPoint: use the slides for what they offer—an outline of the lecture and related illustrations—and take your own

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notes to fill in the details. Engage actively and critically with your readings. Bring the questions that your active engagement stimulates to lectures or office hours. Engagement is your choice.

CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE

Please reserve the back row of the lecture hall for auditors. If you cannot avoid arriving late for lectures (or leaving early), please let me know and sit on the aisle near the rear. You are welcome to use laptops or tablets, but only to take notes. Doing anything else will distract your fellow students. Cell phones: please turn off the sound; no texting, please.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

My default assumption is that you are in my class to learn and to do so honestly.

As our world has become increasingly property-oriented, plagiarism has become an increasingly serious offense. What is exactly is “plagiarism”? Here’s a definition, based on Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary (10th ed.):

To plagiarize is “to steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one’s own; . . . [to] present as new and original an idea or product derived from an existing source.”

The very notion of "stealing" ideas or words implies private-property rights in them—a concept made explicit in the term “intellectual property rights,” a matter of great controversy in the internet/media world today and the subject of some of our readings this semester. The minimum penalty for plagiarism in this class is an "F" for the semester (you might be surprised how easy it is to detect). All cases will be reported to the Dean of Students for possible further action.

In taking this course, you are committing yourself to academic honesty—that is, to submitting assignments that reflect your own, original words and ideas and to acknowledging clearly when you are relying on the words or ideas of others.

If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, an excellent source of information is the webpage “What is Plagiarism” at http://www.plagiarism.org/. I have also posted on Learn@UW a copy of Turnitin’s manual on plagiarism. Be sure to read ch. 6 in Rampolla’s Pocket Guide as well.

BIAS-FREE LEARNING

I am committed to creating and maintaining a bias-free learning environment that allows each of you to do your best work. Please note carefully the following excerpt from UW policies:

The University of Wisconsin-Madison, in accordance with the laws of the State of Wisconsin, seeks to protect its students from discrimination. S. 36.12 of the Wisconsin Statutes reads in part: No student may be denied admission to, participation in or the benefits of, or [be] discriminated against in any service, program, course, or facility of the (UW) system or its institutions or centers because of a the student’s race, color, creed, religion, sex, national origin, disability, ancestry, age, sexual orientation, pregnancy, marital status, or parental status.

If religious obligations should conflict with sections or lectures or with the assignments, please be sure to give me or your teaching assistant advance notice. If you are a McBurney student, please talk with me early in the semester so that we can discuss necessary arrangements.

If you have any questions or concerns about these policies, please don’t hesitate to bring them to me or to the Dean of Students in the Division of Student Life. For more information on the university's policies, contact UW-Madison's Office for Equity and Diversity, 179A Bascom Hall, 500 Lincoln Drive, Madison, WI 53706; (608) 263-2378.

SCHEDULE OF LECTURES AND READINGS – SEE NEXT PAGE

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SCHEDULE OF LECTURES AND READINGS

Lecture topics are subject to change. The readings are best read in the order that they appear on the schedule. Except for Rampolla's book, which you should purchase or use at College Library Reserves, the readings are (or will be) available on our Learn@UW website.

JANUARY 20  INTRODUCTIONS – COURSE OVERVIEW

JANUARY 22  THINKING ABOUT THE HISTORY OF CAPITALISM – ANALYTICAL TOOLS

Reading for discussion in lecture


JANUARY 27  THE NATURE OF COLONIAL CAPITALISM

Keyword: bill of exchange

Reading for discussion in lecture


JANUARY 29  THE IMPERIAL POLITICAL ECONOMY

Keyword: colony

Due in Learn@UW dropbox by 2:30 pm today: Brief analysis (5%) of the Beekman letters – what do they tell us about the world of business in his time? Max. 400 words; see the grading rubric on Learn@UW.

FEBRUARY 3  BREAKING WITH THE COLONIAL PAST –REV./POST-COLONIAL TUMULT

Keyword: (first) Bank of the United States

Reading for discussion in lecture


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February 5  
**A NEW INSTITUTIONAL POWER – THE CORPORATION**  
**Keyword:** general incorporation  
**Reading for discussion in lecture**  
- “An Act to Incorporate the Farmers’ and Mechanics’ Bank [of Philadelphia],” March 16, 1809, *Statutes at Large of Pennsylvania*

February 10  
**RACE, GENDER, AND PROPERTY IN ANTEBELLUM CAPITALISM**  
**Reading for discussion in lecture**  

February 12  
**Capital and Credit in Antebellum Capitalism**

February 17  
**THE NEW TRANSPORTATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES**  
**Keyword:** “American System” (of railroad construction)  
**Research assignment** – handed out in lecture today – due Feb. 24  
**Reading for discussion in lecture**  
- Excerpts from the annual reports to the shareholders of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, 1827, 1837, 1847, 1857.  
  - Explore the book’s companion website at [http://railroads.unl.edu](http://railroads.unl.edu), focusing on the Topic: Railroad Work and Workers.

February 19  
**WHAT WAS SO REVOLUTIONARY ABOUT “INDUSTRY”?**  
**Keyword:** “American System” (of manufacturing)

February 24  
**CIVIL WAR – REFIGURING STATE AND ECONOMY**  
**Keyword:** “American System” (the policy package)  
**Research assignment** – due in Learn@UW dropbox by 2:30 pm today

February 26  
**NEW STRATEGIES OF GROWTH – INTEGRATING ENTERPRISES**  
**Keywords:** horizontal integration, vertical integration  
No assigned reading this week – use the time to catch up on your reading

March 3  
**SOCIAL RELATIONS OF CAPITALISM TRANSFORMED – I: LABOR**  
**Keyword:** Homestead

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Reading for discussion in lecture

  - A Congressional View (Hon. William C. Oates, Chairman of the Congressional Investigating Committee)
  - A Constitutional View (George Ticknor Curtis)
  - A Knight of Labor’s View (T. V. Powderly, General Master Workman of the Knights of Labor)

**March 5**

**Social Relations of Capitalism Transformed – II: Capital**

**Keyword:** plutocracy

Reading for discussion in lecture


**March 10**

**The “Weak” American State – Myth and Reality**

**March 12**

**New Social Barriers to Entry – Race, Gender, and the New Economy ca. 1900**

**Keyword:** “The Black Edison”

Mid-term take-essay question handed out today – due March 24

Reading for discussion in lecture


**March 17**

**The Great War – Consolidating the Mass Production Economy**

**Keywords:** dollar-a-year men, Simplified Practice

Reading for discussion in lecture

o “National Garment Retailers' Association Arranges Meeting at Waldorf-Astoria, November 27, to Discuss the Conservation of Wool,” American Cloak and Suit Review 14, no. 6 (December 1917), 139-145.

o "Advertising and the Wool Shortage," Printers' Ink, December 6, 1917, 137.


MARCH 19  THE NEW INTERDEPENDENCE – “SYSTEMS” IN THE 1920S

MARCH 24  THE GREAT DEPRESSION – CRISIS OF CAPITALISM?
Mid-term take-essay question due in Learn@UW dropbox by 2:30 pm today

Reading for discussion in lecture


MARCH 26  WORLD WAR AGAIN – FORGING MODERN AMERICAN CAPITALISM
Keyword: “military-industrial complex”

MARCH 30 – APRIL 3  SPRING BREAK

APRIL 7  THE SURPRISE OF POST-WORLD WAR II PROSPERITY
Keyword: National Defense Highways Act

Reading for discussion in lecture


  ▪ Arthur J. Goldberg, “The Role of Government.”

APRIL 9  NEW STRATEGIES OF GROWTH – CONGLOMERATION AND FRANCHISING

APRIL 16  THE PROBLEM OF THE CORPORATION

Reading for discussion in lecture


**April 14**

**American Business Pushes Abroad**

Keyword: multinationals

**April 21**

**Why the “New (Social) Regulation”**?

Keyword: OSHA

Reading for discussion in lecture


**April 23**

**Crisis Again? The 1970s**

Keyword: pseudo-professionalism

Reading for discussion in lecture


**April 28**

**A New Era of Capitalism? I. Reversing Course – Strategies and Structures**

Final take-home essay question handed out today – due May 13

**April 30**

**A New Era of Capitalism? II. A New Market Revolution**

Keyword: “forced capitalists”

Reading for discussion in lecture


**May 5**

**A New Era of Capitalism? III. Technological Revolutions**

Keywords: nanotechnology, machine learning

**May 7**

**A New Era of Capitalism? IV. Globalization**

**May 13**

**Final take-home essay due**

Due in Learn@UW dropbox by 9:45 am today