

History 246 and Political Science 246: History of American Capitalism, Spring 2017

CRN 35179 (History) and 35182 (Poli Sci)

Lincoln Hall 210

Mon. and Wed. 11-11:50 a.m.

Discussion Sections (All students must register for ONE of the following two sections):

CRN 35180 (History) and 35183 (Poli Sci), Fri. 11-11:50 a.m., Education, Theater, Music, and Social Work Building 2219

CRN 35181 (History) and 35184 (Poli Sci), Fri. 12-12:50 p.m., Lincoln Hall 304

Instructor: Jeffrey Sklansky

University Hall 921

Office Hours: Wed. 1-2 p.m., Thurs. 1-2 p.m.

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Teaching Assistant: Heather Wilpone-Welborn

University Hall 1000

Office Hours: Mon. 1-2 p.m., Fri. 10-11 a.m.

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Course Description:

“Capitalism is a system in which goods and services, down to the most basic necessities of life, are produced for profitable exchange, where even human labor power is a commodity for sale in the market, and where, because all economic actors are dependent on the market, the requirements of competition and profit maximization are the fundamental rules of life.”

Ellen Meikins Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism* (1999)

This course surveys the development of capitalism in colonial British America and the United States, with special attention to property, labor, finance, public policy, ideology, and class relations. Major topics include the ways in which the imperatives of private profit, competition, and commodity-production came to govern political, economic, and social relations in early America; the relationship between capitalist development and the growth of chattel slavery; the ascendance of paid labor as a major mode of organizing work and production; the commodification of land, the rise of capitalist agriculture, and the transformation of Americans' relations with the natural environment and natural resources; the rise of big business, mass production, and mass consumption; financial panics and economic depressions; suburban development and “urban crises”; financialization and globalization. The course takes a historical approach to understanding the structures of wealth, money, and markets that govern daily life and shape American politics today, including economic growth and inequality, financial crises, conflicts over natural resources such as oil and water, urban development, “crises of care,” and the geopolitics of food.

Required Books (available at the UIC Bookstore and on reserve at the Daley Library):Jürgen Kocka, *Capitalism: A Short History*

Call No.: HB501 .K63 2016eb (available online as eBook)

Seth Rockman, *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore*
Call No.: HD8085.B33 R63 2009

William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*
Call No.: F548.4 .C85 1991

Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*
Call No.: F574.D49 N4835 1996

Nelson Lichtenstein, *The Retail Revolution: How Wal-Mart Created a Brave New World of Business*
Call No.: HF5429.215.U6 L53 2009

Course Requirements:

1. *Class participation* (10 percent of course grade). All students are expected to complete the assigned reading for each week in preparation for the discussion section, and then to participate actively in class discussion. A grade of “C” is given for consistent attendance, preparation, and participation; a grade of “B” for particularly *active* and *engaged* participation; and a grade of “A” for *superior* participation throughout the term.

2. *Written assignments* (45 percent of course grade). Students must complete three written assignments designed to develop their ability to read and respond critically to the required books. These include a *summary* of the second assigned book (Seth Rockman, *Scraping By*), worth 10 percent of the course grade; a *review* of the third assigned book (William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*), worth 15 percent of the course grade; and an *interpretive essay* based on either the fourth assigned book (Thomas Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*) or the fifth assigned book (Nelson Lichtenstein, *The Retail Revolution*), worth 20 percent of the course grade. You may choose to write interpretive essays on both the fourth and the fifth assigned books, in which case whichever grade for this assignment is higher will count toward the course grade. For detailed instructions, see the separate document, “Written Assignments.” **Please note: All written assignments must be submitted BOTH in hard copy AND electronically on the course Blackboard site.**

3. *Midterm and final exams* (45 percent of course grade). Both will be take-home exams designed to develop students' ability to synthesize and analyze all of the lectures, readings, and films, examining specific issues and periods in depth and detail while critically considering broad themes of the course as a whole. The midterm is worth 20 percent and the final exam is worth 25 percent of the course grade. **Please note: The exams must be submitted BOTH in hard copy AND electronically on the course Blackboard site.**

Course Policies:

Absences and late arrivals: Students are responsible for attending all classes on-time. If you need to miss class, be sure to email the instructor or teaching assistant ahead of time—at least one day before the class you will miss if possible. Any two unexcused absences from your discussion

section, or any two instances of arriving late for either lecture or discussion section, will lower the class participation portion of your course grade by one grade.

Late papers: Due dates for the take-home essays are listed in the schedule of readings and assignments below. Late papers will be graded down by one grade for each day they are late.

Computers, cell phones, etc.: Use of laptop computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices during class is NOT permitted except by special arrangement with the instructor.

Academic honesty: Please familiarize yourself with UIC's academic integrity policy, which can be found here: <http://www.uic.edu/ucac/cat1315/GR.shtml#qa>. Any instances of plagiarism or other academic dishonesty will result in an "F" on the assignment, and a formal complaint will be filed with the Dean of Students.

Students with disabilities: If you are a student with a documented disability and require special accommodations, or if you require special arrangements in the event of evacuation, please let the instructor know as soon as possible.

Schedule of Topics, Readings, and Assignments

All assigned readings are either from the required books or posted on the course Blackboard site.

Week 1 (Jan. 9 and Jan. 11): Introduction: What is Capitalism?

Required Reading: Jean-Christophe Agnew, "The Threshold of Exchange: Speculations on the Market"; Kocka, *Capitalism*, pp. 1-94.

Week 2 (Jan. 16 and Jan. 18): The Transition to Capitalism in Early Modern England

No class on Jan. 16, Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

Required Reading: Gerrard Winstanley, "Declaration from the Poor Oppressed People of England" (1649); Kocka, *Capitalism*, pp. 95-169.

Week 3 (Jan. 23 and Jan. 25): The Transition to Capitalism in Colonial British America

Required Reading: Daniel Vickers, "Competency and Competition"; Rockman, *Scraping By*, pp. 1-99.

Week 4 (Jan. 30 and Feb. 1): The Transformation of Household Relations, 1789-1837

Required Reading: Catharine Beecher, *Treatise on Domestic Economy* (1842), ch. 1; Rockman, *Scraping By*, pp. 100-193.

Film: "A Midwife's Tale"

Week 5 (Feb. 6 and Feb. 8): The "Market Revolution," 1789-1837

Required Reading: Michael Merrill, "The Anticapitalist Origins of the United States"; Rockman, *Scraping By*, pp. 194-262.

Week 6 (Feb. 13 and Feb. 15): Capitalist Development and Antebellum Slavery

Summary of Rockman, Scraping By, due in class Feb. 13.

Required Reading: Sven Beckert, “Emancipation and Empire: Reconstructing the Worldwide Web of Cotton Production in the Age of the American Civil War”; Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis*, pp. 5-147.

Week 7 (Feb. 20 and Feb. 22): The “Labor Question”: The Commodification of Labor and Industry, 1820-1860

Required Reading: Thomas Skidmore, *The Rights of Man to Property!* (1829), ch. 4; Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis*, pp. 148-262.

Week 8 (Feb. 27 and March 1): The “Land Question”: The Commodification of Land and Natural Resources, 1845-1870

Required Reading: Henry George, *Progress and Poverty* (1879), ch. 2; Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis*, pp. 263-385.

Week 9 (March 6 and March 8): The “Money Question”: The Commodification of Currency and the Reconstruction of the Fiscal State, 1789-1912

Review of Cronon, Nature’s Metropolis, due in class March 8.

Week 10 (March 13 and March 15): The “Trust Question”: The Corporate Reconstruction of Capitalism, 1890-1920

Midterm exam due in class March 13.

Required Reading: Andrew Carnegie, “Wealth” (1889); Sugrue, *Urban Crisis*, pp. 3-88.

Film: “The Richest Man in the World”

SPRING BREAK (March 20-March 24)

Required Reading: Sugrue, *Urban Crisis*, pp. 89-178

Week 11 (March 27 and March 29): The Rise of Mass Consumption and Consumer Culture, 1870-1930

Required Reading: Annie Marion MacLean, “Two Weeks in Department Stores” (1899); Sugrue, *Urban Crisis*, pp. 179-271.

Week 12 (April 3 and April 5): The Great Depression and Periodic Crises of Capitalism

Interpretive essay on Sugrue, Urban Crisis, due in class April 3.

Required Reading: Adolf Berle and Gardiner Means, *The Modern Corporation and Private Property* (1932), ch. 1; Lichtenstein, *Retail Revolution*, pp. 1-111.

Film: “A Job at Ford’s”

Week 13 (April 10 and April 12): The “Affluent Society” and the War on Poverty: Suburban Dreams and Urban Crises, 1945-1968

Required Reading: John Kenneth Galbraith, *The New Industrial State* (1967), chs. 1 and 6; Lichtenstein, *Retail Revolution*, pp. 112-236.

Week 14 (April 17 and April 19): Dependency and Development at Home and Abroad in the Cold War Era, 1945-1968

Required Reading: Garrett Hardin, “The Tragedy of the Commons”; Lichtenstein, *Retail Revolution*, pp. 237-357.

Week 15 (April 24 and April 26): Financialization and Globalization, 1968-2008

Interpretive essay on Lichtenstein, Retail Revolution, due in class April 24.

Film: “Inside Job”

Final Exam due by 5 p.m. Wednesday, May 3