

HSTAA 590 – History of Capitalism

Professor Margaret O'Mara (momara@uw.edu)
University of Washington
Autumn 2017
Tuesdays 1:30-3:20 – Savery 169

Course website: <https://canvas.uw.edu/courses/1160734>

This graduate seminar considers key recent works in the history of American capitalism, from the colonial period to the present. Our focus is topical as well as historiographic, considering influential early work in political economy as well as economic, labor, intellectual, and political histories that inform this emergent field. We also will consider comparative sources and methods across social scientific disciplines (sociology, economics, political science).

READINGS

Required texts are listed below for those students interested in reading ahead. All articles will be available in PDF form on Canvas. All books will be available in paperback for purchase at the UW Bookstore.

1. Edward Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told**
2. Jonathan Levy, *Freaks of Fortune**
3. Richard White, *Railroaded*
4. Julia Ott, *When Wall Street Met Main Street**
5. Nathan Connolly, *A World More Concrete*
6. Meg Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics**
7. Louis Hyman, *Debtor Nation**
8. Jennifer Klein, *For All These Rights**
9. Elizabeth Tandy Shermer, *Sunbelt Capitalism**
10. Isaac William Martin, *The Permanent Tax Revolt*

The starred texts are also available as downloadable eBooks, free to the university community via the UW Libraries website. I highlight them for students for whom buying all books would be a financial hardship, but I also **strongly encourage you** to purchase your own paper copy whenever possible, especially if the topic bears on your own research. I do so for two reasons:

- 1) With hard copies, it is infinitely easier to take notes, refer back to key passages and arguments, and—most importantly—have a copy for your own scholarly library that you can reference in years and decades to come.
- 2) The precarious state of publishing (and the abundance of e-book databases) has reduced the revenues earned by scholarly books and the royalties paid to authors. All of these works are by academics; many were originally dissertations. Every purchase of a book will deliver a small royalty to its author and, more importantly, encourage academic presses to continue to publish more monographs like these. One day, you are likely to

have a similar book of your own and will appreciate every student who purchases your book and keeps the whole academic publishing enterprise going!

Regardless of the format in which you read, I will expect everyone to come to each class session with a) a hard or electronic copy of the reading for immediate reference, and b) paper or electronic notes on each reading for your in-class reference and discussion.

ASSIGNMENTS

Discussion Participation and Leadership (25% of grade): Two parts: 1) Sustained, courteous, engaged, incisive participation in class discussion with colleagues and guest speakers over the course of the quarter. 2) Leadership of class discussion during two weeks of the quarter, with discussion questions posted as an announcement to Canvas by 10AM the morning of class. We will sign up for discussion leadership during our first meeting.

Weekly Book Precisions (20% of grade in total): short (1-3pp.) summary of the week's book and its arguments, submitted via Canvas to the instructor no later than 7PM each Tuesday of the quarter. These summaries will be graded C/NC and will also serve as useful records and study guides for you to consult later in your graduate training (e.g. preparing for comprehensive exams). You do not need to include discussion of accompanying articles.

Op-ed (10% of grade): 800-word essay, employing historical evidence to make an argument keyed to a current news item, similar to the guest opinion columns appearing in *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *The Seattle Times*, et al. Due in Week Seven of the quarter. We will workshop these op-eds as a group, and constructive editorial critique of others' work will be part of your grade for this project.

Syllabus (10% of grade): proposed syllabus for an upper-level undergraduate seminar in the study of capitalism, written as if it will be taught in your home department at the UW in Winter 2018, accompanied by two-page narrative explaining pedagogical goals and choices of readings and assignments. Due in Week Eight of the quarter.

Sources & Methods paper (10%): 5-7 pp. essay comparing sources and methods used in approaches to capitalism, comparing those used in your own discipline with those used in at least one other. Digital works and collaborations may be considered in addition to academic articles and books. You may take a general approach (review of field) or compare specific works. Due in Week Nine of the quarter.

Final historiographic essay (25% of grade): 15-20 pp. essay reviewing the major works and interventions in a chosen subfield in the history of capitalism (for example: slavery; taxation; labor). Due 7PM Tuesday December 12 (no extensions permitted).

All page count guidelines are based on double-spaced, 12-point text, typical margins. Please footnote in Chicago style. No bibliographies required. Please submit documents in editable (e.g., Word) format.

SCHEDULE

Warm-up reading (please read during September):

Beckert et al., "Interchange: The History of Capitalism," *Journal of American History*, 101:2 (September 2014), pp. 503-536.

We will dive into the quarter reading and discussing books on **Week One**—so come to our first class session having read Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told*; Ransom; the *Economist* review of Baptist and the author response. Your precis on Baptist should be completed and uploaded by 7PM the evening of October 3.

WEEK ONE: October 3

Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told*

Roger L. Ransom, "Was It Really All That Great to Be a Slave? A Review Essay," *Agricultural History* 48:4 (October 1974), pp. 578-585.

"Blood Cotton," *The Economist*, 6 September 2014

Baptist, "What the Economist Doesn't Get About Slavery," *Politico*, 7 September 2014

WEEK TWO: October 10

Levy, *Freaks of Fortune*

WEEK THREE: October 17

White, *Railroaded*

Mark Rose, "Alfred DuPont Chandler, 1918-2007, An Introduction," *Enterprise & Society* 9:3 (September 2008), pp. 405-410

Richard R. John, "Telecommunications," *Enterprise & Society* 9:3 (September 2008), pp. 507-520

WEEK FOUR: October 24

Ott, *When Wall Street Met Main Street*

Ajay K. Mehrotra and Julia C. Ott, "The Curious Beginnings of the Capital Gains Tax Preference," *Fordham Law Review* 2517, 2536 (2016)

WEEK FIVE: October 31

Connolly, *A World More Concrete*

Carl Nightingale, "The Transnational Contexts of Early Twentieth-Century American Segregation," *The Journal of Social History* 39: 3 (Spring 2006), pp. 667-702.

WEEK SIX: November 7

Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics*

Lizabeth Cohen, "From Town Center to Shopping Center: The Reconfiguration of Community Marketplaces in Postwar America," *American Historical Review* 101:4 (October 1996), pp. 1050-1081.

WEEK SEVEN: November 14

Hyman, *Debtor Nation*

**OP-ED DUE 5PM

WEEK EIGHT: November 21

Klein, *For All These Rights*

**SYLLABUS DUE 5PM

WEEK NINE: November 28

Shermer, *Sunbelt Capitalism*

**SOURCES & METHODS PAPER DUE 5PM

WEEK TEN: December 5

Martin, *The Permanent Tax Revolt*

Isaac Martin, Ajay K. Mehrotra, and Monica Prasad, "The Thunder of History," in *The New Fiscal Sociology: Taxation in Comparative and Historical Perspective* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 1-27.

**FINAL REVIEW ESSAY DUE TUESDAY, DECEMBER 12 AT 7PM