

History 331/331Z: Capitalism in America
Spring 2011

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Class Time and Location. MWF 11:30 to 12:25. Earth Science 241

Office Hours. MWF 2-5 PM or by appointment.

General Education Requirement. This course does not fulfill any General Education requirements.

Credits. This course is worth 3 credits. The Z section is worth 4 credits.

Course Description and Objectives. This course investigates the history of capitalism in America from multiple perspectives using a wide range of sources. We will engage with several questions, including:

- What does the history of capitalism tell us about the nature of the American democratic experiment?
- What is the relationship between capitalism and technological change?
- Why didn't a socialist or labor party take root here as in Western Europe?
- Is success and failure a consequence of personal characteristics or of larger social and economic forces?

Skills. In this course students will refine the following skills as historians.

- Master in-depth and sophisticated historical literature.
- Evaluate primary evidence and use it to engage critically with secondary sources.
- Speak and write effectively about historical concepts.
- Produce papers in clear and grammatically correct prose, with well articulated arguments adequately supported by primary and secondary evidence.
- Define and design research projects organized around compelling historical questions.

Classroom Etiquette. Classroom etiquette boils down to respect for others.

- Listen to and respond to the opinions and contributions of your classmates in a respectful manner.
- Turn off cellphones and other electronic devices.
- If you use a laptop or netbook, use it only to take notes or obtain relevant information. Do not text, check email, or surf the Internet in class.
- Do not leave and re-enter the classroom unless absolutely necessary.

Plagiarism, Cheating, and Academic Integrity. The following is taken directly from the University Bulletin, at http://www.albany.edu/undergraduate_bulletin/regulations.html. If you have any questions about these issues, contact me BEFORE handing in an assignment or taking a test, since the penalties for violating academic honesty standards are quite severe.

Simply stated, plagiarism is any attempt to claim the work of another author as your own writing. You must use a standard citation format when you draw upon the ideas or words of another author.

Plagiarism

Presenting as one's own work the work of another person (for example, the words, ideas, information, data, evidence, organizing principles, or style of presentation of someone else). Plagiarism includes paraphrasing or summarizing without acknowledgment, submission of another student's work as one's own, the purchase of prepared research or completed papers or projects, and the unacknowledged use of research sources gathered by someone else. Failure to indicate accurately the extent and precise nature of one's reliance on other sources is also a form of plagiarism. The student is responsible for understanding the legitimate use of sources, the appropriate ways of acknowledging academic, scholarly, or creative indebtedness, and the consequences for violating University regulations.

Examples of plagiarism include: failure to acknowledge the source(s) of even a few phrases, sentences, or paragraphs; failure to acknowledge a quotation or paraphrase of paragraph-length sections of a paper; failure to acknowledge the source(s) of a major idea or the source(s) for an ordering principle central to the paper's or project's structure; failure to acknowledge the source (quoted, paraphrased, or summarized) of major sections or passages in the paper or project; the unacknowledged use of several major ideas or extensive reliance on another person's data, evidence, or critical method; submitting as one's own work, work borrowed, stolen, or purchased from someone else.

Cheating on Examinations

Giving or receiving unauthorized help before, during, or after an examination. Examples of unauthorized help include collaboration of any sort during an examination (unless specifically approved by the instructor); collaboration before an examination (when such collaboration is specifically forbidden by the instructor); the use of notes, books, or other aids during an examination (unless permitted by the instructor); arranging for another person to take an examination in one's place; looking upon someone else's examination during the examination period; intentionally allowing another student to look upon one's exam; the unauthorized

discussing of test items during the examination period; and the passing of any examination information to students who have not yet taken the examination. There can be no conversation while an examination is in progress unless specifically authorized by the instructor.

Grading Requirements and Guidelines. This course is graded A-E.

- 20% Class participation and preparedness. We will devote Friday's class to a discussion of that week's assigned readings. Students should complete assigned readings in advance of Friday discussions and be prepared to offer thoughtful comments and questions on the readings and presentations.
- 25% In-class midterm examination, Friday, March 4. Z section students will substitute a 4-6 page paper in lieu of the examination.
- 25% In-class midterm examination, Friday, April 8. Z section students will substitute a 4-6 page paper in lieu of the examination.
- 30% Final paper, 8-10 pages. You will receive topic and guidelines at least two weeks before the due date. Due Wednesday, May 5, 5:00 PM.

Grading Standards.

An **A** or **A-** thesis, paper, or exam is good enough to be read aloud in class. It is clearly written and well organized. It demonstrates that the writer has conducted a close and critical reading of texts, grappled with the issues raised in the course, synthesized the readings, discussions, and lectures, and formulated a perceptive, compelling, independent argument. The argument shows intellectual originality and creativity and is supported by a well-chosen variety of specific examples.

A **B+** or **B** thesis, paper, or exam demonstrates many aspects of A-level work, but falls short of it in either the organization or clarity of its writing, the formulation or presentation of its argument, or the quality of research.

A **B-** thesis, paper, or exam demonstrates a command of course material, but provides a less than thorough defense of the writer's independent argument because of weaknesses in writing, argument, organization, or use of evidence.

A **C+**, **C**, or **C-** thesis, paper, or exam offers little more than a mere summary of ideas and information covered in the course, is insensitive to historical context, does not respond to the assignment adequately, suffers from frequent factual errors, unclear writing, poor organization, or inadequate research.

A **D** thesis, paper, or exam demonstrates serious deficiencies or severe flaws in the student's command of course material.

An **E** thesis, paper, or exam demonstrates no competence in the course and indicates a student's neglect or lack of effort in the course.

A student who receives an **A** for participation typically comes to every class with questions or insightful comments about the assigned readings and lectures. An **A** discussant engages others about ideas, respects the opinion of others, and consistently elevates the level of discussion.

A student who receives a **B** for participation typically does not always come to class with questions or comments about the assigned readings and lectures. A **B** discussant waits passively for others to raise interesting issues. **B** level discussants do not adequately listen to other participants or relate their comments to the direction of the conversation.

A student who receives a **C** for discussion attends regularly but typically is an infrequent or unwilling participant in discussion.

A student who fails to attend class regularly and who is unprepared for discussion risks the grade of **D** or **E**.

Required Texts to Buy.

John Steele Gordon, *An Empire of Wealth: The Epic History of American Economic Power*.

Michael B. Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America*.

Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle* (Bedford edition).

Milton and Rose Friedman, *Free to Choose*.

Robert B. Reich, *Supercapitalism: The Transformation of Business, Democracy, and Everyday Life*.

Required Texts on Electronic Reserve.

Alfred Young, "George Robert Twelves Hewes: A Boston Shoemaker and the Memory of the American Revolution," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 1981.

Calvin Colton, *The Junius Tracts*. "Labor and Capital."

George Fitzhugh, *Cannibals All! or, Slaves Without Masters*. Chapters 2 and 3; “Labor, Skill, and Capital,” and “Exploitation, Subject Continued.”

Barbara P. Josiah, “Preparing for the Future: The World of the African American Depositors of Washington, D.C.’s Freedmen’s Savings Bank, 1865–1874.” *Journal of African American History*, 2004.

Charles W. Chesnutt, “The Doll.”

Andrew Carnegie, “Introduction: How I Served My Apprenticeship” and “The Advantages of Poverty,” from *The Gospel of Wealth*.

Course Schedule.

Week 1. Jan. 19 and 21. Introduction to the Course. Perspectives on Capitalism in America.

Reading: Gordon, pp. xiii-56; Katz, pp. ix-xvii; Friedman, pp. ix-xxi; Reich, pp. 3-15.

Discussion Question: How have Americans understood the relationship between capitalism, freedom, and economic security?

Week 2. Jan. 24, 26, 28. Capitalism in the Early Republic.

Reading: Gordon, pp. 57-187; Young.

Discussion Question: How did Americans experience the transition to capitalism after the Revolution?

Week 3. Jan. 31; Feb. 2, 4. Work and Charity in the Early Republic.

Reading: Katz, pp. ix-113; Colton.

Discussion Question: Why do Americans believe in the “self-made man?”

Week 4. Feb. 7, 9, 11. Progress and Poverty in the Gilded Age.

Reading: Gordon, pp. 189-282; Katz, pp. 115-184.

Discussion Question: Henry George, *Progress and Poverty*: “The tramp comes with the locomotive, and alms-houses and prisons are as surely the marks of material progress as are costly dwellings, rich warehouses, and magnificent churches.” Why?

Week 5. Feb. 14, 16, 18. Capitalism on the Color Line.

Reading: Fitzhugh; Josiah; Chesnutt; Carnegie, "Introduction: How I Served My Apprenticeship" and "The Advantages of Poverty."

Discussion Question: How did African Americans seek to improve their economic fortunes after the Civil War? What obstacles did they face?

NO CLASSES DURING WEEK OF FEB. 21-25. WINTER BREAK.

Week 6. Feb. 28; March 2, 4. Capitalism and the Immigrant Experience.

First Midterm Examination, Friday, March 4.

Reading: Sinclair, Introduction through Chapter 16.

Week 7. March 7, 9, 11. Progressive Reform and the Failure of the Socialist Alternative.

Reading: Sinclair, chapter 17 to end.

Discussion Question: Werner Sombart, "Why Is There No Socialism in the United States?"

Week 8. March 14, 16, 18. Capitalism and the American Century.

Reading: Gordon, pp. 283-346; Katz, pp. 185-255.

Discussion Question: Calvin Coolidge: "The chief business of the American people is business." Do you agree?

Week 9. March 21, 23, 25. The Modern Welfare State.

Reading: Gordon, pp. 347-419; Katz, pp. 259-334.

Discussion Question: What role should the state play in ensuring economic security for the poor?

Week 10. March 28, 30; April 1. The Power of the Market.

Reading: Friedman, pp. 1-139.

Discussion Question: Why do conservatives want to limit government intervention into economic affairs?

Week 11. April 4, 6, 8. The Conservative Revolution.

Reading: Friedman, pp. 140-314.

Second Midterm Examination, Friday, April 8.

Week 12. April 11, 13, 15. Capitalism and the Future of Democracy.

Reading: Reich, pp. 15-130.

Discussion Question: Why do liberals argue that government intervention into economic affairs is desirable?

NO CLASSES FROM APRIL 18 TO 25. SPRING BREAK.

Week 13. April 27, 29.

Reading: Reich, pp. 131-225.

Discussion Question: What will the future hold for the relationship between capitalism and democracy?

Week 14. May 3. Course Conclusion and Discussion of Papers.

Final Paper Due, Wednesday, May 5, 5:00 PM.