AMH5930: Readings Seminar in American Capitalism

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Wednesdays, 3-6 p.m.
Room 113, Keene-Flint Hall

Course Introduction
This course will be a broad-based survey in the history of American capitalism from the early evolution of a market economy, the rise of industrialism, and through the ascendance of American consumerism. Although the narrative of American enterprise forms the basic structure of AMH5930, we will also examine the social, cultural, and political impact of capitalism by exploring several core questions. How did commercial and financial markets evolve in the American context? Who were the winners and losers in the Industrial Revolution and how did class formation evolve in the United States? How did the American state(s) shape a political climate that attempted to serve the interests of workers, individual entrepreneurs and large, multi-divisional corporations? Could American capitalism negotiate moments of crisis such as the Panic of 1837 or the Great Depression without undergoing major change? Why did the consumerist vision of American society triumph by the post-World War II period? In order to address these questions and others, students will read and discuss many of the cutting-edge, award-winning studies in the growing field of American capitalism and engage them in brief comparative reviews, but there is no prerequisite expertise in economics or business history necessary.

These reading seminars are designed to give you an introduction to the historiography of a particular time period or subject matter in American history. They are also designed to allow you to work on your analytical and writing skills. For this reason, your grade will be determined by a combination of your contributions in the week-to-week seminar discussions and also your performance on a number of written assignments. Students will work on practical skills such as critiquing a book’s argument, writing a cogent review and engaging in a comparative analysis of multiple works of history.

Course Requirements
There will be two major components to this course. First, students will be expected to read and analyze the assigned readings for each class meeting. This includes discussing the major arguments of the assigned books during class. Our comprehension and discussion of the assigned readings is the basic foundation of this seminar, so attendance and participation in every class meeting is essential. Unanticipated absences do occur from time to time, but since participation is an essential part of this class, any absences above one will result in a failing grade in the class. Discussion and participation will make up 40% of your final grade.
The second major component of this class will be five (5) book reviews. One of these readings will deal only with the assigned reading; the three other ones will compare the assigned reading with an outside source. These reviews will not simply summarize the book—they will focus upon the major arguments of the author, analyze the sources employed in the work, and provide your own assessment of the effective use of evidence and argument. The first book and final book reviews should be about 1,000 words and will cover the second week’s reading (Appleby, The Relentless Revolution) and the final week’s reading (Roubini & Mihm, Crisis Economics: A Crash Course in the Future of Finance). The second, third, and fourth book reviews will be longer, comparative essays of 1,250-1,500 words that compare the assigned reading with one of the suggested readings for that week. These comparative book reviews will be distributed throughout the semester and students will be expected to make a brief presentation of the book to the colloquium during the class session. These papers will make up 60% of your final grade in the course.

It should go without saying, but I will not tolerate plagiarism or any other form of academic dishonesty for this course. For any questions regarding UF’s policy on academic honesty, please consult the following website: http://www.dso.ufl.edu/judicial/. Should you require any accommodations as a result of a disability, please let me know as soon as possible. For any questions regarding UF’s policy on disability accommodations, please consult the following website: http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/.

Seminar Schedule (Subject to Revision)

January 8  Course Introduction and Expectations

January 15  The Big Picture

Main Reading:


Supplemental Readings:

Joseph Schumpeter, Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy (1942)


January 22  **Buying and Selling in Early America**

**Main Reading:**


**Supplemental Readings:**


January 29  **Class Formation in the Early American Republic**

**Main Reading:**


**Supplemental Readings:**


**February 5  Boom and Bust in Antebellum America**

**Main Reading:**


**Supplemental Readings:**


**February 12  Slavery and American Capitalism**

**Main Reading:**


**Supplemental Reading:**


**February 19  Financial Risk in 19th Century America**

**Main Reading:**


**Supplemental Reading:**


**February 26 The Landscape of American Industrialization**

**Main Reading:**


**Supplemental Reading:**

March 12  American Imperialism

Main Reading:


Supplemental Reading:


March 19  The Corporation in American Life

Main Reading:


Supplemental Reading:

March 26  The New Deal’s Legacy

Main Reading:


Supplemental Reading:


April 2  Borrowing to Prosperity

Main Reading:


Supplemental Reading:


**April 9  The Sunbelt’s Consumerist Creed**

**Main Reading:**


**Supplemental Reading:**


**April 16  Post-Industrial America**

**Main Reading:**

**Supplemental Reading:**


**April 23  A Usable Past?**

**Main Reading:**


**Contact Information**

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Office Hours: Tuesdays, 2-3 p.m., Wednesdays, 10-11 a.m., and by appointment.