

## History of American Capitalism: Business, Work, Economy

History 133AC- Spring 2020

Professor Caitlin Rosenthal, crosenthal@berkeley.edu

Lecture: T-Th 11-12:30, Evans 10

Office Hours: Mondays 10-12 (10-11 by appointment, 11-12 drop-in) in 2225 Dwinelle  
**PLEASE SIGN UP**, link on bcourses syllabus and also on my faculty page.

GSI	Section #	Time (1 hr)	Place
Anna Yip yipyipanna@berkeley.edu OHS: Th 12:40-1:40, Barrows 399 and by appointment	DIS 101 DIS 102 DIS 109	Tu 1:00P Tu 2:00P W 11:00A	Wheeler 224 Kroeber 238 Hearst Gym 245
Randy Clopton randallsclopton@berkeley.edu OHS: Tu 2-3 in Qualcomm Cafe and by appointment	DIS 104 DIS 108	W 9:00A Th 10:00A	Valley Life Sciences 2032 Hildebrand B51
Pawel Koscielny pawel.koscielny@berkeley.edu OHS: TBD	DIS 103 DIS 105	Tu 4:00P W 1:00P	Dwinelle 251 Wheeler 104
Karina French ksfrench@berkeley.edu Fr 12 - 1 in Barrows, 399 and by appointment	DIS 106 DIS 107	W 2:00P W 3:00P	Wheeler 124 Dwinelle 254

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*Subject to change! Please check the course website for the most updated version.*

What is capitalism? And when did it come to characterize the American economy? This course will explore the economic history of the United States, from the colonial period to the present. We will analyze the dramatic changes that catapulted a chain of colonies from the fringe of the global economy to its center. As the semester progresses, we will seek out the sources of this dramatic transformation, exploring a variety of overlapping and sometimes conflicting explanations. Is this primarily a story about ideas and economic outlook? Is it about entrepreneurship and innovation? Or about exploitation and expropriation? What role did the government play? What role the individual? Major themes will include the rise of the factory system, slavery and emancipation, immigration and labor, the development of banking and finance, and economic inequality.

In addition to building their knowledge of American history, students will gain theoretical familiarity with three subfields of history: business history, economic history, and labor history. We will explore the ways each of these fields has generated different narratives that celebrate and/or critique American capitalism. And at every turn we will consider how these different narratives alternately highlight and minimize the important roles played by business elites, enslaved people, laborers, women, and immigrants. Rarely was the “invisible hand” colorblind or gender neutral. The course will discuss both famous businessmen and largely-forgotten

workmen, women, and slaves. We will examine capitalism both from above and from below, seeking to understand the causes and consequences of economic change for different groups of Americans.

We will begin the semester at the point of first encounter between the native peoples of North America and the earliest European Americans. Here we will explore changing conceptions of property and the impact of trade on the cultural and economic survival of native peoples. From here, we turn to the institution of slavery and its relationship to economic change. We will consider the experiences of enslaved Africans, devoting several weeks to debating whether slavery was a capitalistic economic system and why that does (or does not) matter for how we think about capitalism today. In the process, we will read excerpts both from slave narratives and from the sophisticated account books planters and slave traders used to manage their business.

During the second half of the semester, we will turn our attention to the impact of big business on the economic prospects of other groups of Americans, exploring the ways capitalism created both new opportunities and new modes of discrimination. Important topics will include the experiences of immigrant laborers and racism in the workplace. We will discuss the role of Chinese workers in the construction of the transcontinental railroad and the importance of laborers from Latin America for the growth of American Agribusiness. We will also explore the racial politics of unions and the ways managers exploited cultural differences to control workers.

Throughout the semester, we will also explore the impact of gender. We will read the letters of the young women operatives entering the workforce at Lowell Mills and examine the ways African American women asserted their freedom by withdrawing from the workforce after emancipation. We will discuss the progress of women in business, but also the persistent wage gap at all levels of employment, from service workers to CEOs.

### **Required texts:**

In this course there will be two types of readings: primary sources produced at the time we are studying, and secondary sources interpreting those times. Generally each week you should expect to read 2-3 primary sources (usually under 25 pages total) and half of a book (usually 100-150 pages in total). Most of the course readings will be available through the course website. There are 5 books of which we will read long segments. These are available for purchase and on reserve at the library. Books marked with an \* are available in electronic versions via oskicat.

Paul Johnson, *Sam Patch, The Famous Jumper* (2004)

Caitlin Rosenthal, *Accounting for Slavery: Masters and Management* (2018)\*

Shennette Garrett-Scott, *Banking on Freedom* (2018)\*

Jefferson Cowie, *Capital Moves: RCA's Seventy-Year Quest for Cheap Labor* (1999)

### **Contacting me:**

You can sign up for office hours via the link at the top of this syllabus (also on my faculty page). If the times don't work for you, we can make a separate appointment by email. On the subject of email, if you contact me I will do my best to get back to you within 36 hours (for example, if you email me during the day on Monday, you can expect to hear back by Tuesday night). I get lots of emails and go to bed early, so if you plan ahead I will be able to be more helpful!

**Course requirements:**

1. Reading and informed participation in section and in lecture (30%)
2. Primary source analysis worksheets (10% each)
3. Mid-Quiz (10%)
4. Curator project (20%) – A mini museum catalog for an exhibit of 4-6 primary sources and/or data-based charts. Prepared with analytical captions and citations (100-200 words each) and a coherent introduction (750-1000 words).
5. Choice between a final exam or a research page paper. The paper will be approximately 3500 words (including footnotes and citations, about 10 pages). Writing a paper will involve more time and effort than the exam, and while not restricted to those majoring in history, students who choose this option should understand that it is not an easier alternative than taking the final exam. Those wishing to write a research paper must notify both Professor Rosenthal and their GSI of their intent by 4/1 and schedule a time to meet with their GSI to describe their topic before the start of RRR week. No exceptions! (20%)

The university takes plagiarism (and self-plagiarism) very seriously, and I have previously been forced to report students for plagiarism to the university. This is no fun for anyone. The result is (at a minimum) a *very poor or failing* grade in the class, and it can often be worse depending on the circumstances. If you are not sure what plagiarism is, you can find out more at <http://writing.berkeley.edu/about-us/academic-honesty>

**Discussion Sections:** Sections meet once a week, and will provide an opportunity to discuss course readings and to reflect on themes and arguments presented in lecture. You are expected to attend section on time, to actively participate in discussions, and to engage with other students in a way that is collegial and brings an attitude of respect and curiosity about perspectives that may differ from your own. You may miss up to two sections with no questions asked. After that, unexcused absences will be penalized at 1/3 letter grade off your participation grade for each missed section.

**Primary source worksheets (formal assignment to be distributed):**

In this assignment, you will locate and describe a historical document or database and respond to questions on a primary source analysis tool, to be distributed in class. Your responses to the worksheet questions will be 500-750 words in total. Themes to consider will include: Who produced the document they identify and why? Did race, ethnicity, gender, age, or sexuality, shape the document? Who was the intended audience? What were the economic stakes?

**Primary source short essay preview (formal assignment to be distributed):**

You will use a primary source of your choosing (selected from a digital or physical archive) and deploy the skills you developed in the worksheets to analyze it. In addition, this short essay will place the source in conversation with an article, book, or essay (secondary source) that we read for class. Your essay will be 4-5 pages in length.

**A note on computers:**

You are welcome to use your computer to take notes in lecture. However, you are not welcome to use the internet and may want to consider shutting off your wireless. Please resist the temptation, even for searches related to the class! Please also refrain from using your phone or

other gadgets. All of these activities can be distracting both for me and for your fellow students. I know it is tempting, but I will not be impressed if someone asks me a question and you raise your hand to share the results of Wikipedia! These guidelines also apply to discussion section. Thank you.

### **Late policy:**

You must complete every assignment in order to pass the class. Late work will be penalized at 1/3 of a letter grade every 48 hours (for example A- to B+). There are very few exceptions to this rule. Please book time to see Professor Rosenthal in office hours if you think one of them applies to you.

## **Course Calendar**

### **Week 1**

1. T 1/21 – What is Capitalism? Is it American?  
Jürgen Kocka, “What does Capitalism Mean?”
2. Th 1/23 – Historians, economists, & the study of capitalism  
*Assignment #1 distributed*

### Section

First Charter of the Virginia Company (1606) – distributed in section, no need to read in advance!

### **Week 2**

3. T 1/28 – Europeans, Native Peoples and the “First” Global Economy  
Exchange List for Pelts  
Hudson’s Bay Factor Describes Merchandise Disliked by Indian Customers
4. Th 1/30 — A tour of the colonies: New England, Mid-Atlantic, South, West Indies  
John Cotton, “On the Just Price” (1639)  
Benjamin Franklin Coaches an Ambitious Tradesman (1748)

### Section

William Cronon, “Commodities of the Hunt,” *Changes In the Land*

### **Week 3**

5. T 2/4 – Revolution at home and abroad, the slave trade  
Table from Slave Voyages (browse)  
Voyage of the Slave Ship Sally (browse exhibit)
6. Th 2/6 – Visions of a new nation  
Alexander Hamilton, “Report on Manufactures,” excerpt (1791)

Thomas Jefferson, "Notes on the State of Virginia," excerpt (1781)

*Assignment #1 due Friday 2/7 at 11:59pm*

Section

Caitlin Rosenthal, *Accounting for Slavery*, preface, intro, ch. 1-2

**Week 4**

7. T 2/11 - Industrialization: From Workshops to Factories  
Lowell Mill Girls Letters (Hannah Williamson Wilson, 1836, Harriet Farley in the Lowell Offering, 1844, Mary Ann Cowles, 1847)
8. Th 2/13 - On the Plantation: Slavery's Capitalism  
Slave Solomon Northup, "Cotton Growing" (1854)  
Alexander Telfair, Instructions to His Overseer (1832)

Section

Paul Johnson, *Sam Patch*, all

**Week 5**

8. Th 2/18 – First Bank of the US simulation
9. T 2/20 – Commodities, transportation, and the settlement of the west  
Chicago Board of Trade, first annual report (skim)

Section

Caitlin Rosenthal, *Accounting for Slavery*, chapters 3-5 and conclusion

**Week 6**

10. T 2/25 – Economics of the American Civil War
11. Th 2/27 –MIDQUIZ (45 minutes only)

Section

Bancroft visits

**Week 7**

*Assignment #2 distributed this week*

12. T 3/3 – Big business: technology, system and efficiency  
William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, Chapter 5 (Meat)  
Daniel McCallum's Organizational Chart
13. T 3/5 – Multinationals and globalization

Singer Trade Cards (in class, no need to review in advance)

Section

Richard White, "Information, Markets, and Corruption," *JAH* (2003)  
Alfred Chandler, ch. 8 of *The Visible Hand* (1977) – e-book via oskicat

**Week 8**

14. T 3/10 –Scientific Management in the Age of the Octopus  
Modern times (watched in class, no need to review in advance)

15. Th 3/12 – Triangle Shirtwaist Factory documentary (Prof Rosenthal away)

Section

Harry Braverman, "Labor and Monopoly Capital"  
F.W. Taylor, *The Principles of Scientific Management*, Intro & Ch. 2 (1911)

**Week 9**

16. T 3/17 – Freedom and Free Enterprise

WEB DuBois on Booker T Washington, from *Souls of Black Folk* (1903)

Booker T Washington, "First Annual Address as President," National Negro Business League (1900)

17. Th 3/19 – Women at work, managing capitalism

Section

Shennette Garrett-Scott, *Banking on Freedom*, Introduction, Ch. 3, Epilogue

*Assignment #2 due Friday 3/20 at 11:59pm. Museum catalog assignment distributed.*

**Week 10**

*Spring Break*

**Week 11**

18. T 3/31 – Crash and Depression

Studs Terkel, *Hard Times*, read or listen to 4 selections of your choice  
(<http://studsterkel.matrix.msu.edu/htimes.php>)

19. Th 4/2 – Making a New Deal?

No reading for lecture (you have a whole book to read for section next week!)

### Section

Barry Eichengreen, “Uses of the Past,” 2012.

### **Week 12**

20. T 4/7 – US Abroad: War/Postwar/Decolonization

No reading for lecture (you have a whole book for section this week!)

21. Th 4/9 – Beyond Scientific Management: Marketing and Human Relations

William H. Whyte, *Organization Man*, “How to Cheat on Personality Tests”

### Section

Jefferson Cowie, *Capital Moves*, all

### **Week 13**

22. T 4/14— Capitalism in a golden age?

N. D. B. Connolly, [“How did African Americans Discover they Were Being Redlined?”](#) (and associated primary source)

23. Th 4/16— Watch in class: Tupperware documentary & discussion

*Exhibit catalog due Friday 4/17 at 11:59pm via course website*

### Section

N.D.B. Connolly, “Mapping Inequality,” digital resource. Read introduction and browse other resources selecting one map or graph for discussion.

<https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/#loc=2/41.247/-105.519&text=intro>

### **Week 14**

24. T 4/21 - 1970s/80s – Liberating the “free” market: Deregulation

Milton Friedman, “The Social Responsibility of Business is to Increase its Profits” (1970)

25. Th 4/23 Outsourcing, and the service economy

Sam Walton, “10 Rules that Worked for me”

### Section

Discussion of *Enron: Smartest Guys in the Room* movie, link to watch available via course website

### **Week 15**

26. T 4/28 – 1990s/2000s – Asset Light Business Models: Financialization and the Knowledge Economy

William Jefferson Clinton defends Marc Rich, “My Reasons for the Pardons” (2001)

Roger Lowenstein, “Walk Away from your Mortgage!” *New York Times* (January 2010)

27. Th 4/30 – Capitalism today?

Sheryl Sandberg, “Don’t Leave Before You Leave,” *Fortune* (2009)

Anne-Marie Slaughter, “Why Women Still Can’t Have it All,” *The Atlantic* (2012)

### Section

Selections from *Silicon City* (course website)

### **Week 16: RRR week**

*If you have chosen to write a paper in lieu of the final, it is due by the beginning of the final exam period. No exceptions. If your paper is not done, you should be sitting in the exam writing away!*