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Wednesdays, 3:00-5:00 & by apptmt

History 2480hf  
Law 98060A-1FS  
**The Political Economy of Modern Capitalism**  
**Research Seminar**  
Mondays, 4–6PM

Wasserstein 3007 / Lewis 214 A

Graduate student coordinator: Rudi Batzell ([rbatzell@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:rbatzell@fas.harvard.edu))

This year-long research seminar will explore the political economy of modern capitalism during the past 500 years. This topic is unparalleled in importance. Capitalism predominates over much of the globe today. As a political economic form, it defines not only market dynamics, but also governance structures and social relations. The study of its growth and development therefore attracts scholars from a wide variety of fields. The seminar aims to provide a forum for this intensive inter-disciplinary study of capitalism as a historically situated order by bringing together faculty and graduate students from different departments at the University and beyond.

Historians and historically minded scholars in allied fields have long recognized that political and economic forces inform one another. They investigate the effect of economic structures on individuals and groups, produce accounts of political change sensitive to material interests, and identify agency within given political economic orders. But in doing so, they often treat the socio-political and economic worlds as discrete and intrinsically separate entities, implicitly endorsing the modern conception of the polity and economy as separate “spheres.” Recent historiographic and disciplinary divisions have reinforced that tendency. Much historical research in the last several decades has eschewed political economic inquiry altogether for new questions about the power of culture and the place of race, gender, and religion in social order. At the same time, the disciplinary divide between economics and other disciplines has deepened. Economic historians—increasingly to be found in economics rather than history departments—have approached the market order with tools, including mathematical, developed to understand phenomena particularly defined as economic, often downplaying the political, cultural, and social embeddedness of markets.

Increasingly, historically oriented scholars (in history and economics departments, as well as fields like law) are recognizing the limits of existing approaches to political economy. Explorations of competing influences, political and economic, can entrench the assumption that those fields have their own logics. Sometimes, that assumption produces naturalizing narratives of change. In other accounts, political organization itself moves,

like the market or as part of market development, in almost evolutionary fashion toward modern forms of organization. Other scholarship produces rich accounts of social struggle and contrasts “efficiency” goals with cultural considerations, but fails to interrogate the definition of “efficiency,” or else reifies and abstracts cultural or social considerations. Such limits to our scholarship are especially troublesome given the importance of understanding capitalism as it becomes an increasingly global order.

The seminar aims to identify emerging approaches to political economy and to facilitate interdisciplinary thinking on this important topic among students and faculty at Harvard. It seeks to tap the energy of new scholarship, working across the conventional boundaries that have constrained past work. In particular, we hope to create a unique forum for intellectual exploration and productive research.

Toward that end, the graduate-faculty research seminar is structured to bring together interested faculty and students on a continuing basis. The course will include both reading sessions designed for graduate students and research sessions during which students and faculty participants will present current research. Faculty participants will be drawn from a number of schools.

In 2013-2014, the Workshop will focus on the theme of labor under capitalism. As the study of the history of capitalism has rapidly expanded in recent years as a field of research and teaching, studies of consumption, business elites, management practices and economic policy making have increasingly become dominant. The question how massive numbers of workers have been mobilized to do the harvesting, digging, manufacturing, and servicing that is at the core of capitalist economic activities and how they have responded to their position within capitalist economies has become marginalized. This is in many ways surprising, not least because for many scholars, the advent of wage labor defines capitalism itself. This year, the Workshop tried to address some of these shortcomings of the debates on capitalism by focusing on labor and production.

### **Requirements for graduate students who take the course for credit**

The course will consist of two parts. First, students will be expected to attend our bi-weekly meetings, where scholars interested in themes of political economy will present their works-in-progress. Active participation in these discussions is required, as is reading the main paper to be discussed and any background readings for these sessions. Students are also required to draft a one page document mapping out possible questions for discussion, to be submitted by email the night before the meeting. Students might also be asked to comment on another scholar’s work. Second, students are expected to complete an article-length piece of writing, based on original research and related to the theme of the course. To help guide such research, the instructors will meet periodically with students who are taking the course for credit.

Students who take the seminar for credit are expected to develop a topic for their research on the following timeline. They should be ready to discuss their proposed topic in a meeting in mid-October and, by **October 21**, should plan to hand in a one-page proposal outlining their topic, its significance, and their proposed methodology. By **November 25**, participants will submit an extended research proposal (5 pages) that explains their research problem in some detail, discusses the relevant secondary literature, and lists the (locally accessible) primary sources they will consult. The final

draft of an article-length paper is due on **May 5th**. The final seminar session will offer an opportunity for students to present their research to the wider group.

Readings will be available from the course website.

## **Schedule**

### **Fall 2013**

#### **Mon., Sept. 9: Introductory Meeting**

#### **Mon., Sept. 23: Reading Session: Canonical Approaches to Labor in the Political Economy**

**[Meet in Wasserstein Caspersen Center Room 3007]**

Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, in Robert Heilbroner, ed., *The Essential Adam Smith*, Book I: Introduction, 159-161; Chapter 1, 161-171; Chapter 8, 194-208; Chapter 10, 210-219.

Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol 1: Chapter 10, “The Working Day” Sections 1, 2, 5; Chapter 15 “Machinery and Modern Industry”; Chapter 25 “The General Law of Capitalist Accumulation” Sections 1-3; Part VIII “The So-Called Primitive Accumulation” Chapters 26-33.

Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1920). Trans. Talcott Parsons. “Author’s Introduction” and selection from Chapter 5.

Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (1944 / 2001): 33-48, 56-63, 65-76.

#### **Thurs., Oct. 3 - Sat., Oct. 5: The Global E.P. Thompson, Conference [Conference convenes in the Thai Auditorium, CGIS South]**

The Global E. P. Thompson: Reflections on the *Making of the English Working Class* after Fifty Years

Students in the Workshop are strongly encouraged to register and attend:  
<http://studyofcapitalism.harvard.edu/global-thompson-program>

#### **Mon., Oct. 7: Reading Sessions: Approaches to the Study of Labor under Capitalism**

**[This and all subsequent meetings will be in Lewis 214 A]**

Marcel van der Linden on Global Labor History (introduction and one chapter).

E.P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," *Past and Present*, 50: 76-136 (1971).

Eric Hobsbawm, "Political Shoemakers" chapter 7 in *Worlds of Labour: Further Studies in the History of Labour*

EP Thompson, Introduction of the Making.

Marshall Sahlins, "The Original Affluent Society," in *Stone Age Economics* (1972): 1-39.

Ira Katznelson, The Making of the Working-Class, Introduction.

Walter Rodney, The Making of the Guyanese Working Class (intro and two chapters).

Reminder: One-page paper proposal due to course website **October 21**. Groups will meet at individually scheduled times to discuss the paper proposals.

**Mon., Oct. 28:**        **Suresh Naidu**, *SIPA, Columbia University*  
The Economics of Unfree Labor in the Nineteenth Century  
  
Commentator: John Womack, *Harvard University*

**Mon., Nov. 11:**    **Shaun Nichols**, *Harvard University*  
Making Crisis Work: Migrant Labor, Mobile Capital, and the  
Creation of an Industrial Regime in Massachusetts  
  
Commentator: Andrew Gordon, *Harvard University*

**Mon., Nov. 25:**    **Ed Baptist**, *Cornell University*  
Towards a Theory of Slave Labor  
  
Commentator: Norberto Ferreras, *WIGH Postdoctoral Fellow,*  
*Universidade Federal Fluminense, Brazil*

Reminder: Five-page paper proposal due to course website **November 25**. Groups will meet at individually scheduled times to discuss the paper proposals.

**Spring 2014**

- Mon., Feb 10:**        **Cindy Hamamovitch**, *William & Mary* “  
Coolies by Another Name? Colonial Labor, Guest Workers, and  
the End of Empire”  
(JOINT MEETING with the Global History Seminar)  
  
Commentator: Emmanuel Akyeampong, *Harvard University*
- Mon., Feb. 24:**        **Steven Hahn**, *University of Pennsylvania*:  
Gilded Age Capitalism  
  
Commentator: Alexander Keyssar, John F. Kennedy School of  
Government, Harvard University
- Mon., March 10:**       **Ken Kawashima**, *University of Toronto*  
On the Method and Concept of Surplus Populations in the Thought  
of Karl Marx and Uno Kozo  
  
Commentator: John Trumbour, *Labor and Worklife Program,*  
*Harvard Law School*
- Mon., March 31:**       **Nancy Folbre**, *UMass Amherst*  
The Rise and Decline of Patriarchal Capitalism  
  
Commentator: Nancy Cott, *Harvard University*
- Mon., April 14:**       **Alessandro Stanziani**, *Centre de Recherches Historiques, EHESS*  
Bondage in Eurasia, 17<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> century  
  
Commentator: TBD
- Mon., April 28:**       **graduate student paper presentations**

**Reminder: Final papers due May 5**