

The Political Economy of Modern Capitalism: Seminar
History 2480hf/ Law 98060A-1FS
2014-2015

Sven Beckert (FAS, History) and Christine Desan (Law School)
Location: Robinson Lower Library
Meeting Time: M 4:00-6:00 pm

In 2014-2015, the Workshop on the Political Economy of Modern Capitalism takes "Inequality" as its focus. Inequality, a long-running theme in approaches to capitalism, has exploded into contemporary debate with the publication of Thomas Piketty's book, *Capital in the 21st Century*. Piketty's argument takes inequality as a distributive issue, building on a long tradition including Adam Smith, Karl Marx, and social welfarist theories. Inequality may also be a civic concern, one that goes to the quality of political voice, community engagement, or legal process that people experience rather than the quantity of wealth they can claim. The Workshop will explore these different attempts to grapple with "inequality," as well as divergent approaches that distinctively conceptualize the problem and its relationship to modern capitalism.

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 20, should plan to hand in a one-page proposal outlining their topic, its significance, and their proposed methodology. By November 26, 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 16th. The final seminar session will offer an opportunity for students to present their research to the wider group.

Fall Semester

9/8 Introduction

9/22 Reading and Discussion

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, 241-258.

James Madison, "Parties," Jan. 23, 1792, *National Gazette*, in *PJM*, XIV, 197-198.

_____, "A Candid State of Parties," Sept. 22, 1792, *National Gazette*, in *PJM*, XIV, 370-372

_____, "Who Are the Best Keepers of the People's Liberties?" Dec. 20, 1792, *National Gazette*, in *PJM* XIV, 426-427.

Karl Marx, *Wage Labour and Capital*, translated by Harriet Lothrop (New York: New York Labor News Company, 1902).

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

9/29

"Exceptional. The Astors, the New York Elite, and a Story of American Inequality," Shamus Khan (Sociology, Columbia University); Faculty Comment: Dr. Rashmi (History, University of Hyderabad); Student Comment: Charles Petersen (American Studies, Harvard)

10/20

“The Quest for Equality and Respect: Dealing with Discrimination and Stigmatization in the United States, Brazil, and Israel,” Michele Lamont (Sociology, Harvard University); Comment: Bryant Etheridge (History, MIT); Student Comment: Shaun Nichols (History, Harvard)

11/3 Reading and Discussion

Gøsta Esping-Andersen, *Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*, pgs. 1-54

Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the 21st Century* (Belknap Press, 2014), pgs. 1-35, 237-376

Charles Tilly, *Durable Inequality* (University of California Press, 1998), chapters 1 and 3

Comments: Rachel Steely (History, Harvard) and Ella Antell (History, Harvard)

11/17

"From Small Farms to Progressive Plantations: Counterinsurgency, Land Policy, and Inequality in the American Colonial Philippines, 1900-1916," Theresa Ventura (History, Concordia University); Faculty Comment: John Womack (History, Harvard University); Student Comment: Aaron Bekemeyer (History, Harvard)

12/1

“Meritocracy and the Crisis of Capitalism,” Daniel Markovits (Yale Law School); Faculty Comment: Stephen Shay (Professor of Practice, Harvard Law School); Student Comment: Robert Niles (Harvard Law School)

Spring Semester

2/9

"Possessive Collectivism: Ownership and the Politics of Credit Access in Late Twentieth-Century America," Greta Krippner (Sociology, University of Michigan); Comment: Joseph Singer (Bussey Professor of Law, Harvard Law School), Student Comment: Carly Knight (Sociology, Harvard)

3/2

“Fiscal Struggles and the Rise of Civic Equality in Old Regime France,” William Sewell (History and Political Science, University of Chicago); Comment: Mary Lewis (History, Harvard University), Student Comment: Manuel Rincon-Cruz (East Asian Studies, Harvard)

Special Event (note change of time & venue): Friday 3/6 @ 2 PM, Lowell Lecture Hall

Thomas Piketty (Professor of Economics, Paris School of Economics)

3/14-22: Spring Recess

3/30

“The Constitution of Opportunity: Reclaiming Constitutional Political Economy,” William Forbath & Joseph Fishkin (University of Texas Law School); Comment: Vicki Jackson (Thurgood Marshall Professor of Constitutional Law, Harvard Law School), Student Comment: Andrew Block (American Studies, Harvard)

4/6

Sophus A. Reinert (Assistant Professor of Business Administration, Harvard Business School)

4/20

Student Presentations

5/16

Exam period ends: Deadline for final paper