American Capitalism: Readings in U.S. Economic and Business History

HISTORY 669
Fall 2008
Thursdays, 6:00-8:30p, TLF 2110

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and by appointment

This course explores key writings on the evolution of capitalism in British North American and the United States from 1607 to the present. The first two weeks are devoted to theoretical questions and methodological approaches central to business and economic history. We then move chronologically through major topics that engage social, cultural, political, and institutional dimensions of business evolution and economic growth and welfare.

Assignments:

Reading and class participation: Each student is expected to complete all the common readings (marked with an asterisk) and all or much of the review books for each week’s class and to participate actively in class discussions. Class participation will comprise 30 percent of the course grade.

Review essays: Each student will be responsible for one weekly topic review essay of approximately 2,000 words that analyzes the common readings and review books from a one week of the course [student names are shown in the schedule of topics below]. The essay should be organized thematically, not as a sequential review of the books and articles. Although you should discuss the central thesis, organization, and sources of each book and article, the essay should be constructed around and dominated by the themes that you have defined. Each presenter should distribute her or his essay to members of the class electronically at least 24 hours before the class session in which she or he will present. You may use the short citation method for these essays – for example: (Chandler, p. 77). The review essay will comprise 30 percent of the course grade.

Synthetic essays: In addition, each student will write two 1,500-2,000-word take-home essays. These essays will respond to general exam-like questions chosen from a list of questions submitted by members of the class. The first take-home essay, due via email October 30, will pertain to course readings through and including October 23; the second, due December 18, will pertain to the remainder. The questions will be distributed one week before the due date. Each synthetic essay will comprise 20 percent of the course grade.

Books and articles: Course books are on reserve in the McKeldin Library (the Reserve desk is next to the check-out station on the first floor). Articles are available online through the course ELMS/Blackboard website.
Policy on absences and late assignments: If you need to miss or come late to class, please inform the instructor beforehand if possible. Written assignments turned in late will be penalized one full grade per 24 hour period unless otherwise arranged with the instructor.

Statement on Academic Integrity: The University of Maryland, College Park has a nationally recognized Code of Academic Integrity, administered by the Student Honor Council. This Code sets standards for academic integrity at Maryland for all undergraduate and graduate students. As a student you are responsible for upholding these standards in this course. It is very important for you to be aware of the consequences of cheating, fabrication, facilitation, and plagiarism. For more information on the Code of Academic Integrity or the Student Honor Council, please visit http://www.studenthonorcouncil.umd.edu/whatis.html

Weekly Discussion Topics and Readings

9/4 – Business History: Theoretical Foundations


9/11 – Economic History: Cliometrics v. Narration


9/18 – Merchants and Puritans


9/25 – Capitalism in the Countryside: The Eighteenth Century [Debbie]


**10/2 – Law, the State, and the Antebellum Economy**


*James Willard Hurst, *Law and the Conditions of Freedom in the Nineteenth Century United States* (Madison, 1956).*


**10/9 – Early Industrialization**


**10/16 – Big Business: Chandler and His Critics**


10/23 – Regulating Big Business


10/30 – Mass Marketing and Consumer Culture  [Fred]


11/6 – Money and Banking before 1933  [Chris]


11/13 – The Great Depression and the New Deal [Matt]


*Peter Temin, Lessons from the Great Depression (Cambridge, MA, 1989).


11/20 – The Rise and Fall of Keynesianism [Bao]


12/4 – Economic Stasis and Deindustrialization [Lloyd]

*Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison, The Deindustrialization of America (New York, 1982).


**12/11 – The “New Economy” and the New Financial World [Bennie]**


