

ECO 310 - Economics in Historical Perspective Spring 2024

Mondays and Wednesdays 12:15pm - 1:30pm (Sec. 1) and 5:55pm - 7:10pm (Sec. 2)
NB 1.109 (Sec. 1), NB 1.85 (Sec. 2)

Professor J. W. Mason

Email: profjwmason@gmail.com

Office hours: Mondays and Wednesdays 2pm-4pm

Prerequisites: ENG 102 or 201, ECO 101, and at least junior standing

Course Description. This course is a survey of economic history, from the 16th century to the present day. We are primarily focused on the development of capitalism. That is, how did material and social life come to be organized around the accumulation of profit, and what kinds of alternative arrangements did this replace? Among the central topics we will consider are, first, the development of society's productive capacities – that is, the transformation of the material world to serve human ends. Second, the kinds of hierarchies have existed in production – who has given orders and who has had to obey, and on what authority. Third, how private property rights have been shifted over time, and what alternative forms society has used to organize people's claims on each other. And finally, how money payments have structured productive activity and society in general.

Readings will be drawn from six books on the history of capitalism. Reading scholarly books is one of the main skills we will be practicing this semester. Required reading will average around 50 pages per class. Students are expected to have done the reading prior to class day, and to come to class prepared to discuss it.

Learning Outcomes. Students who successfully complete the class will:

- Gain a sense of the broad outlines of economic history, from the early modern period to the contemporary world, as well as some idea of important debates with economic history.
- Understand the variety of arrangements through which society has organized productive activity, and assigned control over production and its results.
- Learn to see capitalism as a historically specific social system, combining the endless accumulation of money claims, the development of productive forces, and the hierarchical relationship of wage labor.
- Engage critically with a variety of texts, identifying their main argument(s) and most important supporting evidence and placing them in relationship to each other.
- Improve their ability to produce clear, well-organized academic prose through frequent writing assignments.

- Respectfully respond to arguments made by other students in the class.

Grading Grades will be assigned as follows:

Response papers: 35%

Midterm: 20%

Final exam: 30%

Class participation: 15%

Each student will write seven short response papers on individually assigned readings. Since the response papers will serve as starting points for class discussion, they must be turned in the day before class. Students should be prepared to lead discussion on the readings they have written response papers for. Response papers may be shared with the rest of the class.

Most classes will begin with a short writing exercise on the day's topic. These will not be graded, but completion of them will be factored into the participation portion of the grade.

The midterm and final exam will both be in-class but open book: Students will be allowed to use the assigned readings and hand-written notes. For each of the exams, students will write two essays on topics drawing on multiple readings from the semester.

To receive credit for participation, students must demonstrate understanding of the readings through their contributions to class discussions, and must respond to the contributions of other students. All students are expected to do the reading and participate actively in class discussions. There is no formal attendance policy, but an excessive number of absences will result in a penalty to the participation score.

If the majority of students receive grades below B-, a curve will be applied to raise the median to B-. If the majority of students already have a B- or above, no curve will be applied.

Response Papers. Each student will be assigned seven readings, for which they must write a response paper. The papers should be approximately 500 words, or 2 typed pages, in length. The papers must draw on the assigned reading and address one of several prompts that will be distributed in advance. The response papers need not draw on any material beyond the assigned reading, but students are encouraged to link the assigned readings with others – from this class or otherwise – if they see useful connections between them. Response papers should not include long introductions, cover pages, bibliographies or other features of more formal writing. Their purpose is (1) to demonstrate that students have done the reading and thought critically about what it says; and (2) as practice reading a text carefully, finding its key points, and using it to support an argument; and (3) as a starting point for class discussions. Students may change their response paper dates only with advance permission from the instructor.

Completed response papers should be submitted as google documents on the course website. To receive credit they, must be posted no later than midnight the day *before* the class for which the reading is assigned. Late response papers will not be accepted. Students should also bring hard copies to class. Class discussions will draw on students' response papers.

Completed response papers will be graded on a five point scale. To receive two points, the paper must address the prompt chosen and demonstrate that the student has done the reading. To receive four points, the paper must in addition state a definite position and support it with appropriate material from the reading, and demonstrate a clear understanding of the central points. To receive five points, the paper must in addition offer some critical or original insight into the reading, link it in a convincing way to other readings, and/or be exceptionally clearly written and strongly argued.

Extra Credit. Students may receive extra credit by attending lectures and events sponsored by the economics department. Each lecture is worth 1 point toward the final grade, up to a maximum of 3. To get these points, it's necessary only to attend the lecture and sign in. The schedule of speakers will be announced in class and via email.

No other extra credit is available.

Plagiarism Policy. All quotes from the reading, or from other sources, must be clearly marked as such. **Any passage, of even a few words, that you have copied from another source must be in quotes.** If it is from the reading, you should give the page number in parentheses following the quote; if it is from some other source, give the exact name of the source. (Do *not* include a formal bibliography, just give the name of the source in the text or in parentheses following the quote.) If you use language that is not your own without clearly identifying it, that will be considered plagiarism and will result in a zero for the assignment. Provided you follow this rule, you are encouraged to draw on any readings from this class or from previous classes that seem relevant to the topic. Do not use Wikipedia or web searches.

Students are encouraged to discuss the class material outside of class, and to seek advice or feedback from other students on the assignments. However, all work you turn in must be your own. Students cannot write joint papers, or have assignments written by them for others.

Students should be aware of John Jay's policy on academic honesty. It is available online at http://www.jjay.cuny.edu/web_images/Policyand_Procedures.pdf.

Office hours. Office hours are a core part of the course. Part of my responsibility as a John Jay professor is to be available to meet with students outside of class. If you are having trouble in this class, the first thing you should do is come talk to me. Regular office hours are listed on this syllabus. If you have classes or other commitments during those times, contact me and we will arrange another time. I

encourage you to come to office hours at some point during the semester even if you feel you are doing well in the class.

Readings. All readings listed on this syllabus are required. You are expected to do all required reading prior to the class for which it is assigned, and to bring a copy of the book to class that day. Readings are drawn from the following books:

Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton*

Jonathan Levy, *Ages of American Capitalism*

Peter Stearns, *The Industrial Revolution in World History*

Joshua Freeman, *Behemoth: A History of the Factory and the Making of the Modern World*

Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World*

Joe Studwell, *How Asia Works: Success and Failure in the World's Most Dynamic Region*

Students are expected to purchase the Beckert and Levy books. Purchasing the remaining books is recommended but not required.

Additional optional readings will be posted on the course website.

Course Outline. There may be changes to these readings over the course of the semester. Any change will be announced in class and by email. It is your responsibility to be aware of changes to the assigned reading.

- Jan. 29 Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations"
- Jan. 31 *Empire of Cotton*, ch. 1-2
- Feb. 5 *Ages of American Capitalism*, ch. 1-2
- Feb.7 *Empire of Cotton*, ch. 3; *Ages of American Capitalism*, ch. 3
- Feb. 21 *Ages of American Capitalism*, ch. 4-5
- Feb. 22 *Empire of Cotton*, ch. 4-5
- Feb. 26 *The Industrial Revolution in World History* , ch. 1-4
- Feb. 28 *Empire of Cotton*, ch. 6-7
- March 4 *Behemoth*, ch. 1-2
- March 6 *Empire of Cotton*, ch. 8-9
- March 11 Eric Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction*, p. 55-81, 148-179
- March 13 *Ages of American Capitalism*, ch. 6-7
- March 18 MIDTERM
- March 20 *Empire of Cotton*, ch. 10
- March 25 *Ages of American Capitalism*, ch. 8-9
- March 27 *Ages of American Capitalism*, ch. 10
- April 1 *Empire of Cotton*, ch. 11-12
- April 3 *Late Victorian Holocausts*, ch. 1-2
- April 8 *Late Victorian Holocausts*, ch. 3, 10
- April 10 *Ages of American Capitalism*, ch. 11; *Behemoth*, ch. 4
- April 15 *The Industrial Revolution in World History* , ch. 6-9
- April 17 *Ages of American Capitalism*, ch. 12
- May 1 *Behemoth*, ch. 5
- May 6 *Empire of Cotton*, ch. 13-14
- May 8 *How Asia Works*, p. 10-76
- May 13 *How Asia Works*, p. 77-159
- May 15 *Behemoth*, ch. 7