2018 Spring Term

History of American Economic Development ECO 405

Time: Thursdays from 5:55-8:35 PM

Location: Room 237 Haaren Hall

Instructor: Dr. Christian Parenti

Office Hours: 5pm to 6pm Tuesdays, and Thursdays or by appointment

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Course Description:

This class will explore the economic and environmental history of the United States. Using a mix of primary documents and recent historiography, we will focus on the interaction between nominally “natural” and “social” forces. Though never reducing social and political events to purely environmental factors, the class readings and discussions will seek to breakdown the conceptual distinction between society and nature. We will read American History as a process in which the human and nonhuman elements of biophysical reality constantly shape and reshape each other. How have disease, climate, and geography interacted with, shaped and been shaped by human forces such as political violence, state formation, economic growth, and religious doctrine? We will examine the socio-economic impacts and causes of events like the European colonization, slavery, warfare, and industrialization.

Course Objectives

- To explore American Economic Development as a simultaneously environmental, political, and social phenomena.
- To understand the role of violence and state power in shaping the economy.
- To understand the historical struggle for economic justice in the United States and how it has shaped the course of economic development.

Learning Outcomes

- To demonstrate knowledge of major socio-economic changes that occurred over the long arch of American History.
To apply both economic and environmental analysis to major historical shifts in US history.
Demonstrate the ability to explain aspects of the modern economy through an understanding of economic history.

Other Student Learning Goals and Objectives

1. Essential interpretive literacy across a wide variety of disciplines, genres, and media.
   a. Ask critical questions
   b. Find unstated assumptions in the text/work
   c. Assess arguments
   d. Offer original interpretations of primary works
   e. Identify and integrate knowledge, methods, or conventions of different fields of study
   f. Engage in an effective comparative study of the primary works of philosophy, history, politics, and religion

2. The ability to communicate effectively in a number of genres and modes, including, but not limited to, common forms of academic writing in the disciplines.
   a. Attend to apply correct language usage and the conventions of academic writing and reference, including the use of appropriate discipline-specific terms and concepts
   b. Synthesize material and articulate ideas clearly, in essays of increasing depth and complexity
   c. Use writing as a means to develop critical thinking and frame problems in comparative and historical contexts in the personal essay, analytical essays, and longer research papers
   d. Produce lab reports, essay exams, response papers, and experimental forms of writing, including group projects and multimedia formats
   e. Orally present extended written work to examining faculty
   f. Communicate and defend their ideas in class discussions, oral presentations, or other collaborative exercises

3. The capacity to set and pursue a sophisticated intellectual agenda and to engage in independent inquiry.
   a. Connect the global cultural heritage with the issues and questions they face in their own lives as the foundation for active citizenship and lifelong learning
   b. Mastery of the means for conducting both primary and secondary research
   c. Independently craft the topic for a graduated series of extended essays or other intellectual projects
d. Produce an annotated bibliography and an abstract of an extended essay’s argument  
e. Develop meaningful, detailed educational plans that fit individual life goals  
f. Direct their own intellectual lives through exploring immediate academic interests and long-term goals, improving learning strategies, participating in programs outside the classroom, and exploring career opportunities  
g. Articulate and pursue personal, educational and career goals congruent with personal values and realistic self-appraisal  
h. Take advantage of appropriate university resources that facilitate achieving intellectual, personal and professional fulfillment  
i. Generalize academic experiences with respect to career development and/or graduate studies  

Course Requirements and means of evaluation:  

The course requirements are comprised of: participation in class discussions; a mid-term exam, and a final research paper. You must bring the reading to class. And you must print out the online readings and bring them to class. We will do close examinations of the text in each class.  

Grading  
Your grade will be calculated as follows:  

Class participation composes one third of your final grade; the midterm is one third; and final paper is one third of your final grade.  

In-class participation means: consistent attendance and regular, thoughtful, informed participation in discussions. Thus, it is not sufficient to simply “show up.” Discussion in this class is mandatory – even for people who are shy. (Try not be shy, life is too short!)  

Remember, we are all in this together and it is incumbent on all of us to foster a group dynamic that allows everyone to learn and participate. Thus, manners and courtesy – crucial parts of professionalism – are expected and considered in calculating your class participation grade.  

Two absences are allowed, but any absence above that knocks your final grade down by one-third, for example from A to an A-, or C+ to a C.  

It is useful to think of letter grades in the following way: an “A” represents truly outstanding work that exemplifies thorough analysis, superior insight, and crystal clear presentation. A "B" signifies highly competent work that accomplishes the task at hand very well, through considerable thought, reasonable analysis, and an organized presentation. A "C" represents adequate work that meets basic requirements but demonstrates no distinction in terms of analytical insight or
organization. A "D" is characterized by poorly or partially completed work that reflects a lack of initiative, inconsistent analysis, and/or erratic presentation. Plus and minus indicate relatively better or poorer work within each category. There is no A+.

**A note on writing:** When writing a paper, each paragraph of an essay—whether long or short—should have a topic sentence that lays out the main idea of the paragraph at the beginning, because organization and clarity are essential to the writing process. Although outlines will not be required, students are encouraged to write them, outlining the main idea in the introduction and restating it in the conclusion.

Essays without thematic ideas or arguments—those that lapse into mere narration or description, or whose arguments are buried within the text—will be graded in accordance with their low level of organization. The goal of each essay is to develop one or two general points, and to illustrate and substantiate them with examples from the assigned and recommended readings as well as supplemental research. The point of an essay is to persuade your readers that you have found an exact fit between your argument and the evidence used to substantiate it. Remember: an essay is only as convincing as its arguments and evidence, and the tighter the fit between them, the more convincing the essay.

**Plagiarism:** It is imperative that you do not plagiarize when you write. Plagiarism is defined as follows: “The practice of taking someone else's work or ideas and passing them off as one's own.” Plagiarism can range from copying text to really taking important ideas and using them without citing or referencing in any way their original source. To intentionally plagiarize can have extremely serious consequences on one's education and later career. In the age of the Internet, when cutting and pasting text is a common practice while doing on-line research, plagiarism can happen inadvertently, by mistake. That does not lessen the seriousness of the problem. Even when committed innocently, in error, plagiarism is totally unacceptable and has major consequences.

As a student it is your responsibility to police your work to make sure you do not commit plagiarism.

**Ethics.** Please refer to the NYU Student handbook for policies on academic integrity, ethics, warning and probation, diversity and disability, sexual harassment and the academic appeals process.
Reading List

Most assigned readings will be available online.

Class 1

“Part VIII: Primitive Accumulation,” Chaps 26, 27, 28, 29, and 30 in Karl Marx, *Capital Vol*

George Bataille *Accursed Share* intro and first 4 chapters

Class 2 Conquest and Slavery


C Mann 1493 Chapter 2,.pdf

W. Cronon, “Commodities of the Hunt,” in *Changes in the Land*

Class 3 Race and Resistance

“Nitarikyk’s Slave,” Chapter 3 and “A ranging sort of People” Chapter 4 in S. Warren, *The Worlds the Shawnees Made: Migration and Violence in Early America*

“Drawing the Color Line,” chapter 2 and “Persons of Mean and Vile Condition” 3 in H. Zinn, *A People’s History*

https://libcom.org/library/peoples-history-of-united-states-howard-zinn TWO


Optional:
“Black Maroons in War and Peace” in Eugene Genovese *From Rebellion to Revolution*
“The Political Economies of Western Europe and Northern Africa Compared,” Chapter 4 in E. Mielants Origins of Capitalism and Rise of The West

John K. Thornton “The African Background To American Colonization”


**Class 4  Political Economy of the New State**

H. Zinn, “A kind of Revolution,” Chapter 5 in A People’s History

Alexander Hamilton “Report on Maufactures”


**Class 5  Bison and Native American Economies**

Geoff Cunfer and Bill Waiser, Bison and People on the North American Great Plains, pages 1-47.

Pekka Hamalainen, Comanchee Empire, chapters 4 and 5.


**Class 6  Slavery and Capitalism**


Bonnie Martin “Neighbor to neighbor capitalism: local credit networks and the mortgaging of slaves,” chapter 4” in S Beckert and Seth Rockman, eds., Slavery's Capitalism
Joshua Rothman chapter 5 “the contours of cotton capitalism: speculation, slavery, and economic panic in Mississippi, 1832 – 1841,” in S Beckert and Seth Rockman, eds., Slavery's Capitalism


Class 7 Internal improvements Rivers and Steamboasts


Robert Gudmestad, Steamboats and the Rise of the Cotton Kingdom, select chapters.

Richard White, “Spatial Politics” Chapter 4, Railroaded,

Class 8 The Civil War

Mark R. Wilson, ”The Business of Civil War: Military Enterprise, the State, and Political Economy in the United States, 1850-1880” select chapters

Dubois,” the general strike.”


Class 9 Water vs. Coal


Class 10 The Industrial Landscape

Cronon Nature's Metropolis select chapters
Chapter 2 "Invention" in David E. Nye, America’s *Assembly Line*, (MIT Press, 2013)

**Class 11 The Dust Bowl, the New Deal, and WWII**

Donald Woster, *Dust Bowl*, select chapters. To be Purchased

Paul Conkin, *Revolution Down on the Farm*, select chapters. (PDF)

**Class12 The Rise and Fall of American Growth**


Chapter 16 “The Great Leap Forward From The 1920s to The 1950s What Set of Factors Created It?” and

Chapter 17, innovation: can the future match to great innovations of the past?

Chapter 18 “any quality and other headwinds: Longmont American economic growth slows to a crawl…”

**Class13 Inequality and Repression**

Plotnkk, Smolensky, Evenhouse, and Reilly Chap 4 in, “Twentieth-Century U.S. Inequality and Poverty” *Cambridge Economic History of the United States*

Christian Parenti, “The Making of the American Police State: How did we end up with millions behind bars and police armed like soldiers?,” *Jacobin*

Christian Parenti, “If We Fail: the effects of climate change are already upon us. Here’s what the 2020s and 2030s will look like if we fail to change things” *Jacobin*

**Class 14 TBA**

**Class 15 TBA**