Loyola Core: Social Science Course Proposal

Course name: Capitalism

Department: Sociology

Instructor: Dr. Cody R. Melcher, Assistant Professor of Sociology

Expected level: 200-level; accessible to students of first-year and sophomore standing.

**1.** Description: This course will focus on rooting and historicizing racial, gender, and class oppression in the operation of capitalism in the United States. Following a series of theoretical classes on capitalism generally, we will begin the course by grounding the modern intersection of race, gender, and class in a series of slave revolts in the late 16th and early to mid-17th centuries. We will probe, first, the “bottom-up” origins of white supremacy—where we will explore how white workers, in particular, created and sustained social structures that accorded them relative economic, political, and cultural advantages, what W.E.B. Du Bois has referred to as the “wages of whiteness.” Next, we will probe the “top-down” origins of white supremacy; looking first at how slaveholders and, later, capitalists consciously fostered racial difference to thwart working-class solidarity and ideologically justify settler colonialism. We will also discuss instances of interracial working-class rejection of white supremacy. In the next section of the course, we will discuss gender oppression under capitalism, focusing especially on the gendering of labor and domestic work, the social control functions of feminine beauty, and the roots of homophobia. We will end the course with a broadly intersectional discussion of race, gender, class, the environment, and the state, as well as social movements challenging systems of oppression. Readings include primary and secondary material from Karl Marx, W.E.B. Du Bois, Angela Y. Davis, and others.

2. **Format:** This course is proposed as a 3-credit lecture course, typically offered in the spring semester.

3. **Goals:** Every Social Science course in the Loyola Core should address the following five goals.

a. Fosters critical thinking about the social world and about causality in human behavior through the analysis and application of the course’s theoretical and conceptual framework based on empirical evidence.

Course Goal: Show evidence of critical thinking regarding the intersection of race, class, and gender under capitalism; specifically, students should critically discern between various theories of the causes of race, class, and gender

inequalities based on the relationship between theory and data.

b. Provides students with logical, qualitative, and/or quantitative analytic literacy necessary to form evidence-based and logical conclusions about the social world.

Course Goal: Describe the empirical relationship between race, class, and gender inequalities under capitalism using both qualitative, typically historical accounts, and quantitative public opinion and economic data.

c. Provides students with a basic understanding of how scholars conduct social science research and how they use the results to make sense of our diverse social world and/or inform social justice and public policy.

Course Goal: Demonstrate thorough understanding of the social scientific method; specifically, how theory informs empirical analysis, how to critically assess empirical analysis, and how conclusions made from empirical analysis both informs and potentially changes social conditions.

d. Provides students the skill set to critique research, irrespective of discipline, to foster an ability to make independent decisions when presented with scientific data and empirical results.

Course Goal: Understand how the learned concepts, theories, and research apply to everyday life and use this information to inform one’s perspectives on, and potential solutions to, social problems; especially race, class, and gender inequalities.

e. Demonstrates how social scientific disciplinary knowledge grows and changes over time. Course Goal: Uses an historical approach to illustrate how theories of class, race, and gender oppression change over time in response to availability and quality of data, as well as the increasing sophistication of social science methodologies.

4. **Grades and Assessments Chart:** Professors have wide leeway in determining how courses are graded and assessed, and the review process exists to make sure each goal is addressed in an appropriate way.

| Goal | Example Graded  Assignment | Course Assessment |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Fosters critical thinking about the social world and about causality in human behavior through the  analysis and application of the course’s theoretical and conceptual  framework based on  empirical evidence. | Reading responses | Students are required to submit 8 total reading  responses to assigned  readings during the course of the semester. These responses, which are due prior to the class in which the reading is assigned, which prepares students to critically participate in class discussions.  Specifically, students are asked not only to  summarize the major  contours of the reading, but |

|  |  | to critically assess whether or not the reading’s  argument is compelling based on the data  presented. Full credit for the responses depends on whether it is clear the  student, in fact, completed the reading, and whether or not the student critically engaged the substance of the reading.  Benchmark will be 70% of students to achieve desired outcome. |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Provides students with logical, qualitative, and/or quantitative analytic  literacy necessary to form evidence-based and logical conclusions about the  social world. | Midterm Paper (Paper 1) | The midterm paper is a 4- to-5-page paper submitted in response to a prompt. The prompt itself is meant to gauge understanding of the readings and lectures from the first half of the course. In the paper,  students are asked to  engage the evidence  presented in the course (through readings and  lecture) to discern the  causes of racial inequality under capitalism, given competing theoretical  accounts and the evidence presented. Students are required to reference and cite every reading assigned prior to the midterm. Full credit requires a holistic understanding of the course material and synthesizing reading assignments.  Benchmark will be 70% of students to achieve desired outcome. |
| Provides students with a basic understanding of how scholars conduct social | Reading responses | Reading responses,  described above, require students to read the work |

| science research and how they use the results to make sense of our diverse social world and/or inform social justice and public policy. |  | of social scientific scholars, demonstrating to students how research is conducted, how it is presented, what the consequences of the research are, and whether or not their conclusions are compelling based on data presented.  Benchmark will be 70% of students to achieve desired outcome. |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Provides students the skill set to critique research, irrespective of discipline, to foster an ability to make independent decisions  when presented with  scientific data and  empirical results. | Midterm Paper  Final Paper  Reading Responses | All of the written, graded assignments in the course provide the skills necessary to critique research and make independent  decisions when presented with data and empirical results. Each assignment requires students to  critically engage research, determine the theories driving the research,  determine if the data  presented is compelling, and to identify and  critically engage the  research’s methodologies. Benchmark will be 70% of students to achieve desired outcome. |
| Demonstrates how social scientific disciplinary  knowledge grows and  changes over time. | Final Paper (Paper 2) | The final paper for the course, a 5-to-8-page paper written in response to a prompt, is meant to gauge students’ holistic  understanding of the causes and consequences of class, race, and gender  inequalities and how  theories explaining these inequalities have changed over time in response to data availability and the growing sophistication of |

|  |  | social science  methodologies. Students are required to reference and cite every reading assigned after the midterm. Full credit requires a  holistic understanding of the course material and synthesizing reading  assignments.  Benchmark will be 70% of students to achieve desired outcome. |
| --- | --- | --- |

5. **Competencies**:

a. Critical Thinking: Students will learn to apply the different theoretical perspectives in the causes and consequences of class, race, and gender oppression under capitalism, critically applying these theories given their discernment of data and empirical conclusions.

b. Quantitative Reasoning: Students will learn about analyzing theories and perspectives using data-driven empirical results.

6. **Loyola Core Badge:** The course fits into the DEI Loyola Core Badge.

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**Spring 2023**

**Annotated Syllabus**

**Dr. Cody R. Melcher**

T/Th 9:30AM-10:45AM

Mercy Hall 305

Office Hours: by appointment

Office: 241 Monroe Hall

Email: crmelche@loyno.edu

“Home of the brave, land of the free,

I don’t wanna mistreated by no bourgeoisie.”

-Lead Belly, *The Bourgeois Blues*, 1937

**Course Overview and Description:** This course will focus on rooting and historicizing racial, gender, and class oppression in the operation of capitalism in the United States. Following a series of theoretical classes on capitalism generally, we will begin the course by grounding the modern intersection of race, gender, and class in a series of slave revolts in the late 16th and early to mid-17th centuries. We will probe, first, the “bottom-up” origins of white supremacy— where we will explore how white workers, in particular, created and sustained social structures that accorded them relative economic, political, and cultural advantages, what W.E.B. Du Bois has referred to as the “wages of whiteness.” Next, we will probe the “top-down” origins of white supremacy; looking first at how slaveholders and, later, capitalists consciously fostered racial difference to thwart working-class solidarity and ideologically justify settler colonialism. We will also discuss instances of interracial working-class rejection of white. In the next section of the course, we will discuss gender oppression under capitalism, focusing especially on the gendering of labor and domestic work, the social control functions of feminine beauty, and the roots of homophobia. We will end the course with a broadly intersectional discussion of race, gender, class, the environment, and the state, as well as social movements challenging systems of oppression. Readings include primary and secondary material from Karl Marx, W.E.B. Du Bois, Angela Y. Davis, and others.

**All required readings have been posted to Canvas.**

**Class Policies**

**Communication Policy:** Email is by far the quickest and easiest method for communication. My email is crmelche@loyno.edu. I will only communicate with you through official loyno accounts. That means no Gmail, Yahoo!, Hotmail, etc. You must use your loyno account. *Please do not message me through Canvas.*

**Accommodations:** If you have a documented disability that requires accommodations, you should consult with The Office for Accessible Education (OAE). OAE can be reached at

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oae@loyno.edu. For more information, see: https://success.loyno.edu/services/accessible education.

**Course Drops and Withdrawals:** Please be aware of all rules and deadlines regarding registration procedures. If you need information that I cannot provide, please see the following webpage: https://academicaffairs.loyno.edu/sites/default/files/2022-11/loyola-university-new orleans-spr-2023-cal-11-04-2022.pdf

**Academic Dishonesty, Cheating, and Plagiarism:** A failure to credit other people’s ideas properly constitutes a serious case of academic misconduct and will result in a failing grade for this course and, possibly, suspension or expulsion from the university. If you are unclear as to what does and what does not constitute academic misconduct, make sure to talk to me. All cases of suspected academic misconduct will be dealt with according to the procedures established in the Loyola University New Orleans Academic Honor Code. All assignments submitted for this course will be subject to a plagiarism detecting software.

Loyola’s Academic Honor Code can be found here:

https://bulletin.loyno.edu/regulations/academic-honesty-and-plagiarism#violations **Grading and Assessment**

**Participation and Attendance (20% of Final Grade)**

The class will be organized in such a way to facilitate discussion between students and the instructor. In other words, instead of lecturing *at* you, I will be discussing the course material *with* you. This means that the student is expected to have read the assigned material for that day *before* the class period. The student is to come to class prepared to critically examine the assigned readings. In order to receive full credit, the student must participate in class discussion. This is not a class where everyone will receive full credit simply for showing up. Your grade will be based on your continued demonstration of class engagement.

Students will be allowed two absences before the student’s grade is affected. After four absences, the Participation/Attendance grade will be zero. Attendance will be taken at the end of the class period.

**Reading Responses (40% of Final Grade)**

Students will be required to submit **\*8\* 300-400** word reading responses throughout the course of the semester. Students are expected to summarize the main arguments of the assigned text. **Reading responses are to be submitted prior to the class in which the reading is assigned.**

***At least \*4\* reading responses must be submitted prior to the distribution of the midterm paper on March 2.***

**Midterm Paper (20% of Final Grade)—Distributed March 2; due March 16** Students will be required to write a 4-5 page essay in response to a prompt.

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Late papers will be subject to a 1/3-letter grade penalty for each and every calendar day they are late. Papers are to be typed in Times New Roman, size 12 font, double-spaced, with one-inch margins. Papers are to be submitted \*before class\* on March 23rd.

**Term Paper (20% of Final Grade)—Distributed Apr. 25; due May 9.** Students will be required to write a 5-7 page essay in response to a prompt.

*Optional:* Students who are either (a) sociology majors (who are required to write a capstone thesis), (b) honors college students (who are required to write an honors thesis), or (c) from any other major requiring a senior thesis, may submit a draft or polished section of their thesis as a term paper. You must demonstrate, however, that your thesis is relevant to the substantive content of the course, and you must demonstrate that material from the course has contributed to the thesis. You must consult with me first if you’d like to do this.

**Late papers will not be accepted**. Papers are to be typed in Times New Roman, size 12 font, double-spaced, with one-inch margins. Papers are to be submitted by May 9th.

**Participation and Attendance: 20%**

**Paper I: 20%**

**Paper II: 20%**

**Reading Responses: 40%**

**100%**

**Grade Scale:**

The following grading scale will be used in determining your final grade:

| A | 94.0%+ |
| --- | --- |
| A- | 90.0-93.9% |
| B+ | 87.0-89.9% |
| B | 83.0-86.9% |
| B- | 80.0-82.9% |
| C+ | 77.0-79.9% |
| C | 73.0-76.9% |
| C- | 70.0-72.9% |
| D+ | 67.0-69.9% |
| D | 63.0-66.9% |
| D- | 60.0-62.9% |
| F | <60% |

**Course Schedule**

**(Subject to Change)**

**Week 1: What is capitalism?**

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Jan. 17: Introduction, syllabus, etc. etc. etc.

Jan. 19: Karl Marx, Selections from *Das Kapital* from *Marx and Modernity: Key Readings and Commentary*, ed. Robert Antonio (Wiley-Blackwell, 2002), pp. 101-129.

Note: Capitalism, the mode of production under which we all live, is predicated on the commodification of labor. Your capacity to labor (what Marx calls your “labor power”) is sold by you to someone else (your employer) in exchange for a wage. Your survival, then (because without a wage you would have no other means of sustaining yourself), is dependent on you successfully engaging the labor market. Of course, you’re also competing with everyone else who owns nothing but their capacity to labor (i.e., other workers). This tends to drive down wages and provides employers with extreme leverage (“You want a raise? There are dozens of people willing to do this job for less than what you’re making now!”).

The most important point, here, is that under capitalism, you are quite literally a commodity: something that is bought and sold on the market. If you decide you don’t want to sell yourself, or if you are not bought (i.e., hired), you will suffer very negative consequences.

Keep in mind, too, where, according to Marx, profit comes from. How do capitalists start with money and end up with more money (the M-C-M` circuit)? (Hint: Exploitation, or paying workers less than the value they create). You should also keep in mind why capitalists exploit workers. Are they evil and inherently greedy people? Well, perhaps some are, but the logic of capitalism forces capitalists to exploit workers to the greatest extent possible. Capitalists compete with other capitalists. All else equal, consumers will purchase commodities that are cheapest (why would you pay more for the same product?). So, capitalists are constantly trying to find ways to make the production of commodities cheaper. One way they do that is by paying workers less. Another way they do that is by replacing workers with machines (technological innovation is a major characteristic of capitalism—not pre-capitalist modes of production like feudalism or slavery—because competition between capitalists forces them to adopt cost-saving innovations, lest they go out of business). All of this is to say that if capitalists don’t exploit workers and continually find ways to cheapen production, they will no longer be capitalists (they’ll “lose” the competition between capitalists). There can be no “good” capitalists: capitalism compels them to act in predictable ways, just as it compels workers to sell their capacity to labor as a commodity.

**Week 2: Which class do you struggle with the most? The bourgeoisie.**

Jan. 23: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (Yale University Press, [1848] 2012).

Jan. 29: Assorted readings on Loyola food service organizing:

Cody R. Melcher, “A Catholic University with a Radical History Faces a Union Drive of its Own.” *Jacobin Magazine* (2022).

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Katie Collins Scott. “College Cafeteria Workers Organize with Support from Catholic Labor Network.” *National Catholic Reporter* (2022).

Maria DiFelice. “Students Advocate for the Unionization of Sodexo Workers.” *The Maroon* (2022).

Note: Last week, we focused on the commodification of labor and where profits come from. Ask yourself, as a worker, do you like this situation? Do you like your entire livelihood being dependent on the market? Do you like the fact that losing your job means intense negative economic consequences? Do you like being a commodity? Do you like being exploited (being paid less than the value you create)?

Typically, workers do not like being commodities and they really don’t like being exploited. Workers tend to rebel against their status as commodities, and they tend to try to limit the rate of exploitation (This is also typically true of all other modes of production. Slaves didn’t like being exploited, either. Hence, Marx’s famous phrase, “The history of all hitherto existing societies is a history of class struggle.”). Employers don’t like this because profits are dependent on exploitation and a steady supply of labor (if wages go up, profits go down, and vice versa). So, employees and employers have an inherently antagonistic relationship. This manifests itself in class struggle: workers demanding (through strikes, unionization, revolutions, etc.) that they be less exploited. Employers resist these demands through violence, the state, and the dynamics of capitalism (there always tends to be workers ready to break strikes because they were previously unemployed, underemployed, etc.; competition between workers matters).

The second set of readings this week are meant to illustrate the concreteness of class struggle. Class struggle is not some abstract thing that happened a long time ago some place far, far away. Class struggle occurs every time you ask for a day off and your manager tells you “No.” It happens when you browse Instagram on your phone while you’re clocked in. In these small, mundane ways, you are resisting your exploitation, and your bosses are attempting to increase the rate of exploitation (forcing you to produce more profit). Going on strike and forming labor unions are another aspect of class struggle; now, however, you’re struggling with your fellow workers for more longstanding and institutional gains: higher wages, better working conditions, more benefits, etc. Workers at Loyola are doing just that right now.

**Week 3: Paris Conference**

Jan. 31: NO CLASS

Feb. 2: NO CLASS

**Week 4: The origins of capitalism**

Feb. 7: Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism: A Longer View* (Verso, 2002), pp. 1-33. Recommended: Robert Brenner, “Property and Progress: Where Adam Smith Went Wrong,” in Chris Wickham ed., *Marxist History Writing for the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford University Press, 2007).

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Feb. 9: Charles Post, “The American Road to Capitalism,” in *Case Studies in the Origins of Capitalism*, eds. Xavier Lafrance and Charles Post (Palgrave-Macmillan, 2019). Recommended: Charles Post. *The American Road to Capitalism: Studies in Class structure, Economic Development and Political Conflict, 1620-1877* (Haymarket Press, 2011).

Most people assume that capitalism, in some form, has always existed. Capitalism, and the moral qualities capitalism rewards—greed, callousness, selfishness, etc.—are just “human nature”; something inherent to the biological wiring of humans. However, capitalism is a very recent mode of production, having started in western Europe in the 16th century. In a major blow to the “capitalism is human nature” folks, capitalism also came about seemingly randomly; the accidental result of class struggle.

Prior to capitalism, the mode of production in much of pre-modern Europe was feudalism. Feudalism was characterized by peasant free-holding, which is to say that peasants—the primarily producers under feudalism—were granted non-monetary ownership of land. If you were a feudal peasant, you and your extended family owned a large plot of land that you could not sell (because you don’t live in a monetary economy; land is not yet monetized). On this plot of land, you produced all of the food and other things you need to survive. You are, in a phrase, self-subsistent farmers. Feudalism is still a class system though. Under feudalism, peasants are still exploited, but, much differently than workers under capitalism. Feudal lords used violence (or the simple threat of violence) to force peasants to produce surpluses, which would be expropriated by the lords.

Just like every class system, the peasants didn’t particularly like this exploitative relationship. So, they very commonly revolted (think roving bands of peasants with pitchforks and torches roaming the countryside). There were a series of very large peasant revolts that swept all of Europe in the century after the plague. The peasant revolts in Eastern Europe were forcefully defeated, and the lords there were successfully able to “enserf” the peasants, effectively enslaving them. The peasant revolts in France, however, were extremely successful. The peasants were able to decrease the rate of exploitation substantially and some French farmers still retain traditional (non-monetary) ownership of land as a result. The peasants of England, however, represent a middle ground of sorts. They weren’t enserfed like the Eastern Europeans, and they didn’t flat-out win like the French. Basically, instead of the old pattern of exploitation through violence, the English lords were able to impose a monetary fee on the transference of property. While that sounds minor, this forced the entire English economy to radically change.

Let’s say you’re a peasant. When you die, you have to transfer the ownership of land to one your sons. But, there is now a monetary fee to transfer property. If your son cannot pay this fee, anyone else can—which means your family loses the land they use to survive. So, how do you solve this problem? You need cash. So, instead of producing self-subsistence goods on your land, you now have to produce goods for sale on the market. You have to produce commodities which you will exchange for cash. With this cash, you can transfer (buy) land. But by shifting the function of land—from self-subsistence to producing cash commodities—you’ve also introduced competition to an economic system which had no competition previously (everybody else is producing goods—typically, at this point, wool—for sale on the market, too). As you know, you can lose this competition: which many peasants did. Some peasants were better than others at

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producing on the market, and they bought the farms of the losers. What did the losers do? Well, since they had nothing left to sell besides their capacity to labor, they became the first workers under capitalism. So, that minor change which came out of the feudal class struggle in England, resulted, ultimately, in the origin of capitalism.

We will see next week that many of those landless peasants could not be absorbed immediately as workers, resulting in tens of thousands of starving landless peasants roaming the countryside demanding food and shelter. England’s solution to that problem was to ship them off to the colonies (mostly colonial Virginia) as indentured servants. Before we get there, though, there is the question of whether and when capitalism existed in the American colonies. So, there are two relevant questions: (1) was American slavery capitalist? and (2) was there anything akin to capitalism in the colonies before the Revolutionary War?

The second reading argues that while American slavery contributed to the global development of capitalism—by providing the raw material for capitalist production—it, in itself was not capitalist. Why? Because capitalism requires a workforce that can be fired. Competition between capitalists forces them to find cheaper ways to produce goods; typically, through the introduction of labor-saving machinery. In other words, they want to reduce the number of workers. Slave owners are systematically disincentivized to adopt labor-saving technology because *they’ve already purchased their workers for life*. They can’t just lay their workers off; doing so would represent a huge loss of investment. Slaveowners can only increase profits by (a) expanding the land they own, and (b) forcing the slaves to work harder. They cannot increase profits through the introduction of labor-saving technology. Plantations also tended to be self-subsistent (they produced everything they needed, besides luxury goods, on the plantation). This was the case because slaves were “employed” at all times; when they weren’t doing farm work, they were made to do something else. This meant that slaveowners, besides in the selling of their commodities, relatively rarely engaged the market for consumables, and almost never engaged the labor market.

So, if American slavery wasn’t capitalist, did capitalism exist someplace else in the American colonies? The article again says “no.” Non-slaves and non-indentured servants tended to squat on land which they used as self-subsistent farms. While this land was formally owned by someone, there was no way to enforce property laws because the government wasn’t powerful enough (no standing army, etc.). A major impetus for passing the Constitution was to establish a federal state strong enough to enforce land deeds, which would turn the squatters into renters (like in England, the squatters had to start producing commodities for sale on the market if they were going to have to pay a cash rent). So, the Constitution effectively started capitalism in the US by creating a state strong enough to enforce property laws.

I understand that this is a complicated history, and I don’t expect you to memorize the details. I do expect you to understand, though, that there is nothing “natural” about capitalism: it has a very specific historical beginning, it needed to be imposed continually, and was violently resisted everywhere that imposition has taken place.

**Week 5: White Supremacy and Capitalism**

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Feb. 14: Theodore Allen. *Class Struggle and the Origin of Racial Slavery* (SUNY,1975). Recommended: Theodore Allen, *The Invention of the White Race, Vol. I-II* (Verso, 2012).

Feb. 16: Noel Ignatiev. *How the Irish Became White* (Routledge, 1995), Chapter 3 “The Transubstantiation of an Irish Revolutionary.”

Recommended: Nell Irvin Painter. *The History of White People* (Norton, 2010).

Okay, remember all those peasants that were kicked off their land with the advent of capitalism? What happened to them? Well, dealing with that population was the major “social problem” for England during the 1600s. Industry and capitalist farming could employ some of the landless population, but neither expanded quickly enough to absorb a huge chunk of that population. So, the English state tried a few things. First, they invented the prison and the crime of “vagrancy,” the latter being defined, essentially, as not being employed. The first prisons were essentially “poor houses,” places where landless and unemployed peasants worked menial (and usually meaningless) jobs for food and shelter. Second, and much more consequentially, they began forcibly exporting landless peasants (children included) to the colonies.

This is the major difference between non-capitalist and capitalist colonization during the period. Non-capitalist France, Spain, Portugal, etc. didn’t have landless peasants to deal with. So, if they wanted labor for their colonies, they had to use (typically African) slaves. England didn’t need slaves: they had a surplus population they needed to get rid of anyway. All of this is to say, that the major labor force in the English colonies throughout the 1600s were not African slaves; they were English (former) peasants, who were indentured (temporarily enslaved). While there were African slaves in English colonies, they were a distinct minority (probably never more than 20% of the labor force). The most important point here, though, is that nothing like race, as we know it today, existed during this period. Race is an invention, the advent of which comes out of this period.

We know that people don’t like being exploited. Indentured servants were no exception. Servants were typically indentured for a period over seven years. The life expectancy of an indentured servant was often much shorter than that of the indenture, however. Often, their owners would simply work them death (the economy of the English colonies, at this point, was primarily dedicated to tobacco, rice, and indigo farming). So, the servants revolted, almost constantly. But, what’s unusual about this period is that “white” indentured servants and “Black” slaves often revolted together. They also intermarried, had children together, and, generally, cohabitated. There was no such thing as racism; not yet.

In 1676, indentured servants and African slaves had had enough. They planned a massive revolt (now known as Bacon’s Rebellion), turned revolution. They successful fought the British army, drove them out of the colony, burned the colony’s capital (Jamestown) to the ground, forcing the governor to flee for his life on a rowboat. Eventually British reinforcements were brought in, and the rebels were offered clemency if they laid down their arms. Once the rebels were unarmed, they were slaughtered or jailed. So ends the rebellion.

If you were a slaveowner, or an English statemen during this period, would you want these revolts to keep happening? Probably not. So, what would you do? Well, here’s what they did:

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they freed the English servants, and they brought in more African slaves. They racialized freedom; giving the former servants countless privileges (the most important privilege obviously being freedom itself), from landownership to lucrative employment in the disciplining of African slaves (slavedrivers, slavecatchers, etc.). In other words, they invented “whiteness.” Being white now meant having certain systematic advantages in society, giving these newly white workers a reason to perpetuate the system as whole. No longer would these workers unite with African slaves to fight exploitation; now, they would uphold and support that system of exploitation, because they materially benefited from its operation. They were given a “stake” in the perpetuation of capitalism. And that’s what whiteness has been ever since.

Various waves of European immigrants have come to the US as sources of labor. None of them came to the US as “white.” Irish people were not considered white; neither were Italians, Slavs, Jews, etc. How, then, did they become white (since we typically consider them to be white today)? The story of becoming white is the story of embracing white supremacy. Irish people, as the second reading illustrates, became white in the mid-1800s by embracing white supremacy. They supported the southern Democratic party electorally (the party of slavery), they perpetuated countless race riots, and, very consequentially, they started a series of draft riots in New York during the Civil War; refusing to fight for the freedom of an “inferior” race. Eventually, this made them white.

A major question in the social sciences is the extent to which non-Black minority groups in the US are doing this today. Are, for instance, some Hispanic groups embracing white supremacy in an attempt to be racialized as white (the designation of “white Hispanic” is very new)? Think of the racial politics of people like Ted Cruz, Marco Rubio, George Santos, and others; a majority of border patrol agents on the US-Mexican border are…Hispanic. What about Asian-Americans? (The recent series of anti-affirmative action cases were brought before the Supreme Court were done so on the behalf of Asian-American students, not white students).

**Week 6: Mardi Gras**

Feb. 20: NO CLASS

Feb. 23: NO CLASS

**Week 7: Capitalism as the root of working-class racism**

Feb. 28: W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America: 1860-1880* (Free Press, [1935] 1992), Chapters 1-2 (“The Black Worker” and “The White Worker”)

March 2: Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (University of California Press, 1971), Chapter 12.

**\*Midterm Paper assigned\***

The invention of whiteness gave white workers a stake in the perpetuation of capitalism in the US. While they are still exploited by capital, the system of white supremacy gave those workers

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racialized as white systematic economic, political, social, cultural, and psychological advantages. So, instead of pursuing their economic interests as workers, they tended to pursue their economic interests as whites. This is extremely important. They did not embrace white supremacy because

they were ideologically racist, predisposed to racial prejudice, etc. They embraced white supremacy because it gave them palpable advantages in a capitalist society. They then invented ideological reasons (e.g., biological racism) to justify their behavior. Racial inequality is not caused by ideology; racial inequality causes ideology.

We also have to remember the logic of capitalism for workers. What happens to workers under capitalism if they can’t find unemployment? Well, at best, they suffer extremely negative economic consequences. At worst, they die. (This is the whip of hunger; under slavery, slaves were compelled to work through violence. Capitalism doesn’t need violence to get you to work. Your survival depends on it). White supremacy, for white workers at least, helps make survival under capitalism easier. They get preferential access to better jobs, are less likely to be unemployed, have better educational opportunities, the list goes on. So, white workers try to expand and fortify these advantages.

Of course, workers of color don’t like this state of affairs, since it directly harms them. White advantage comes on the back of Black disadvantage. So, while white workers attempt to expand and fortify the “wages of whiteness,” workers not racialized as white attempt establish economic, political, and social equality between the races. This results in a struggle between workers of different races. As Du Bois describes it, this is what makes the American class struggle “exceptional”: workers spend much less of their activism confronting their bosses than they do fighting each other. White workers concentrate their activism expanding white advantage; while workers of color concentrate their activism on eliminating the barriers to the equal inclusion in the socio-economic structure.

**Week 8: Dividing to Conquer**

March 7: Warren C. Whatley, “African-American Strikebreaking from the Civil War to the New Deal,” *Social Science History* 17.4 (1993): 525-558.

March 9: C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (Oxford University Press, 1955), Chapters 2-3 (“Forgotten Alternatives” and “Capitulation to Racism”).

(This is a big chunk of reading; Michelle Alexander in *The New Jim Crow* faithfully summarizes this chunk on pp. 30-35).

While white workers perpetuate white supremacy because it gives them palpable advantages, why might capitalists perpetuate white supremacy? Well, I hope this is obvious (and is illustrated in Bacon’s Rebellion): capitalists really don’t want a united working class. A united working class can organize and decrease the rate of exploitation (decreasing profits). So, they do everything in their power to “divide and conquer” the working class by race. One way they have done this historically is through the strategic use of Black workers as strikebreakers. This was especially common in the early 20th century. Essentially, the pattern looked like this: white workers would go on strike and unionize (because they wanted higher wages, better working conditions, etc.). Capitalists would send labor agents to the South, asking Black sharecroppers if

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they’d like to quadruple their wages, escape the Jim Crow South, and leave the farm behind. Most said yes. These Black workers were then shipped (and I mean this literally; many were put on windowless cargo cars) to the North. The Black workers were then used to break the strikes of the white workers (You’ve probably learned about this era in high school under the name “The Great Migration,” with the implication that this was a relatively uncaused move by Black workers from the South to North. In reality, it was a capitalist-led attempt to use Black workers to destroy the nascent labor movement).

Of course, we can understand why Black workers would do this: doing so would increase their quality of life exponentially. But what do you think the white workers thought of this? Well, they didn’t like the fact that their strikes were failing because of Black workers. They especially didn’t like that they were losing their jobs to these “scabs” (again, under capitalism, losing your job has especially negative consequences). So, they shifted their activism away from the bosses to “punishing” the Black workers. Thus began the largest wave of race violence in the 20th century. Every major American city experienced a largescale race riot during the 1910s-1920s as a direct result of Black strikebreaking. Just as in Bacon’s rebellion, capitalists used race to “divide and conquer” the working class.

Much more similarly to Bacon’s Rebellion, from 1870 to 1900ish, the South experienced a huge wave of interracial working-class solidarity in the form of sharecropper organizing. Essentially, white and Black sharecroppers in the South were tired of the slave-like conditions and formed labor unions (the largest of which was called the Farmers’ Alliance). They were so successful that they formed a political party, which they called the Populist Party. The Populists won major elections in every state in the South, and nearly won the presidency in 1896. This terrified the ruling class of the South. An interracially united working class challenging the contours of Southern agricultural capitalism? What could they do? Well, they did the same thing they did in 1676. They reinvented white supremacy.

Most people assume that Jim Crow laws were passed immediately after the end of the Civil War. In reality, most Jim Crow laws were passed after 1890, and, in some states, they were not passed until the 1910s. Why were they passed? The ruling class needed to “divide and conquer” the Populist movement. What better way than to physically divide them through segregation?

**Week 9: Capitalism and Imperialism**

March 14: W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Souls of White Folk,” in *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil* (Dover, [1920] 1999).

Recommended: Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (Houghton Mifflin, 1999)

March 16: Stephen Kinzer, *All the Shah’s Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror* (Wiley, 2008), Chapters 1, 3-4.

**\*Midterm Paper due\***

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Imperialism existed prior to the advent of capitalism. But how does capitalism change the logic of imperialism? Historically, capital attempts to do two major things through colonization: First, it exploits the labor of colonized people, typically through the production/extraction of raw materials. Often, this is accomplished through the imposition of non-capitalist modes of labor (i.e., slavery). Second, capital attempts to establish economic dependence on the metropole. So, whereas the territory, prior to colonization, might rely on self-subsistence agriculture, the colonizer will attempt to force the population to be market-dependent for survival. Of course, the only source of those commodities needed for survival are sold by the colonizers (at an inflated price) to the colonies.

The Du Bois reading illustrates this logic in the case of the Flemish (Belgium) colonization of the Congo. Belgium wanted to colonize the Congo primarily to use the territory to produce rubber. So, it enslaved the Congolese population, and forced them to work on rubber plantations. The colonization of the Congo was also the cause of the first modern genocide: anywhere from 1.5 to 13 million Congolese were killed by the Flemish from 1885-1908 in an attempt to control rubber production in the region. Du Bois also gives us a more accurate view—than the standard high school history version—of the causes of World War I. WWI occurred, essentially, because the European powers wanted to colonize Africa, and they came into conflict regarding which Europeans would control which territories. As Du Bois puts it, “it is colonial aggrandizement which explains, and alone adequately explains, the World War.” Capitalist Europe, Du Bois tells us, fought to “divide up the darker world and administer it for Europe’s good.”

The second reading brings us closer to the contemporary politics of capitalist colonialism. Iran, then known as Persia, was effectively colonized by the British through a series of wars in the 1800s. Eventually, the UK gained control over the natural resources of the country (e.g., oil). So, the sale of oil (and other natural resources) from Iran directly benefited British colonialists, while Iran itself wallowed in poverty. In 1952, Mohammad Mosaddegh was elected prime minister of Iran on the platform of nationalizing the oil industry (which is to say, taking the oil back from the British, and redistributing the profits from the sale of oil to the entire population of Iran). Do you think the British liked this? No. So, in 1953 the CIA led a coup in Iran, eventually overthrowing Mosaddegh and reinstalling Mohammad Reza Pahlavi as the Shah of Iran, who subsequently ruled the country as a US-backed dictator. The oppressive policies of the Shah eventually led to the Iranian Revolution of 1978, resulting in the current religious oligarchy.

So, why are politics in the Middle East the way that they are now? Capitalist colonialism. (By the way, if you’ve ever gotten gas at a BP Gas Station, you’ve actually given money directly to the British colonists of Iran. The company that gained control of Iran’s oilfields was called “British Petroleum,” or “BP,” for short).

These politics are repeated throughout much of the Global South, from Latin America, to Africa, to Asia, to the Middle East. These politics, too, are representative of current political conflicts in these areas. Typically, each of these countries has a left-wing political party that attempts to nationalize whatever industry had been colonized, and there is a right-wing political party that supports the current state of affairs (typically because they benefit from colonization and are backed by the colonizing state). This just played out dramatically in Bolivia: Evo Morales (the first indigenous president of Bolivia) was elected on the platform of nationalizing, among other

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things, the lithium industry. When he tried to do this, there was a US-backed coup, and the installation of an anti-nationalization politician as president. Elon Musk, who uses lots of lithium in the batteries for his electric cars, famously tweeted, in reference to the coup: “We will coup whoever we want.”

**Week 10: Capitalism and Gender Oppression**

March 21: Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race, and Class* (Vintage, 1983); Chapter 13 (“The Approaching Obsolescence of Housework”).

Recommended: Johanna Brenner & Maria Ramas, “Rethinking Women’s Oppression,” *New Left Review 144* (1984).

March 23: Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are Used Against Women* (Harper, 2002); “Introduction” to “Work,” i.e., pp. 1-57.

Just like imperialism, gender oppression preceded capitalism. But capitalism changes the logic of gender oppression dramatically. Women, under capitalism, are expected to contribute disproportionately to so-called “domestic labor” (e.g., cooking, cleaning, child-rearing, etc.). Angela Davis, who I hope you are all familiar with, argues against some feminists who perceive that this problem could be solved through the compensation for domestic labor. In other words, women would be paid for cooking, cleaning, and child-rearing—which is, typically, uncompensated under capitalism (it’s interesting to think about the consequences of this labor being uncompensated; capitalists can pay workers less as a result of uncompensated domestic labor. We will discuss why this is the case). Davis thinks that compensating women for domestic labor doesn’t actually solve the problem of domestic labor being non-creative, unfulfilling, and menial. So, paying women to do shitty work doesn’t save them from having to do shitty work.

Davis thinks the problem of domestic work can only be solved by socializing domestic work, i.e., absorbing it into the larger economy. All workers should have their homes cleaned by professional cleaners, all workers should have their food provided by professional chefs, and children should be reared by professionals. This will make domestic work more efficiently completed, and resolve the gendering of work in general. Some people might perceive this as unrealistic or utopian: but Davis rightly points out that this is how wealthy people already live under capitalism.

The Wolf reading argues that female beauty, as a concept, changes over time to meet capitalism’s need to control women’s behavior. What a capitalist society considers beautiful at any given point is not in any sense representative of “objective beauty,” but of a set of behaviors that society wants women to embrace. Importantly, Wolf argues, when women challenge gender inequality, beauty is consciously emphasized societally to diffuse activism.

**Week 11: Capitalism and Sexuality**

March 28: Michel Foucault, “We ‘Other Victorians,’” in *The History of Sexuality Vol. I* (Pantheon, 1978).

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March 30: Kristen R. Ghodsee, “Why Women Had Better Sex Under Socialism,” *The New York Times* (Aug. 12, 2017).

Recommended: Kristen R. Ghodsee, *Why Women Have Better Sex Under Socialism: And Other Arguments for Economic Independence* (Hachette, 2018).

Unlike imperialism and gender oppression, homophobia did not exist—at least not the extent that it does now—prior to the advent of capitalism (think of the celebration of male-on-male sexual contact in Ancient Greece and Rome, for instance). The prudish morals regarding sex are also a modern invention. So, why are we all “Victorians”? According to Foucault, all capitalism wants of workers are to (a) work and (b) reproduce (create more workers). So, morality had to change to shame any behavior that did not perpetuate working and reproducing. Sex became a thing that only occurs between men and women, and was only “legitimate” when done to reproduce. Premarital sex, sex for pleasure’s sake, and, especially sexual contact between people of the same sex became morally forbidden because it did not perpetuate the imperative to work and reproduce. Homosexual sex was specifically singled out because it could not result in the production of new workers. As Foucault puts it: “if sex is so rigorously repressed, this because it is incompatible with a general and intensive work imperative.” We will discuss Foucault’s other contributions to sociology, many of which deal with the specific changes the advent of capitalism causes (perhaps most famously, in the invention of discipline).

The Ghodsee reading will controversial. Ghodsee conducted a series of ethnographies of women living in socialist societies, and compared them to women living in capitalist societies. She found, on average, that women living in socialist societies were more sexually satisfied than women living in capitalist societies (she measures this by the rate of female orgasms). Why might this be the case? Ghodsee argues that women in capitalist societies are often financially dependent on men; so, they stay with men who they would otherwise leave if they could. Perhaps these men are abusive, not respectful, don’t contribute to homelife, or they just don’t like them. In any case, women tend to stick with them because, if they don’t, there will be significantly negative economic consequences. In socialist societies, on the other hand, women are not economically dependent on men. Typically, they are economically dependent on the state, which guarantees them employment and/or income. So, women in socialist societies don’t stay with men they have reason to leave. As a result, they live more sexually satisfying lives.

**Week 12: Easter Break**

Apr. 4: NO CLASS

Apr. 6: NO CLASS

**Week 13: Capitalism and the Environment**

Apr. 11: Naomi Klein. “Capitalism vs. the Climate.” *The Nation* (2011).

Apr. 13: Fred Magdoff and John Bellamy Foster. “What Every Environmentalist Needs to Know about Capitalism.” *Monthly Review* (2010).

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I’m going to keep this one brief, because I think the effect of capitalism on the environment is more or less straightforward. Even capitalists themselves acknowledge that economic development is usually bad for the environment. They might argue that capitalism can fix the problem of environmental degradation, but they will often admit that capitalism caused the problem in the first place. We will discuss the likelihood of the former being true.

I will mention, though, one major debate in environmental sociology. According to geologists, we are currently in the “Anthropocene”: the age of humans. The Anthropocene is characterized, primarily, by human-caused climate change. However, some geologists have argued that “Anthropocene” is a misnomer. Humans, as such, did not cause climate change. Capitalism did. So, some geologists have begun to call our current geological era the “Capitalocene”: the age of capital.

**Week 14: Capitalism and the State**

Apr. 18: John McPhee, *The Control of Nature* (Farrar Straus Giroux, 1989), Chapter 1 (“Atchafalaya”).

Apr. 20: Fred Block, “The Ruling Class Does Not Rule: Notes on the Marxist Theory of the State,” in *Revisiting State Theory: Essays in Politics and Postindustrialism* (Temple Uni., 1987). Recommended: Cody R. Melcher, “Progressive Illusions, Radical Promises: The Working Class and the State,” *Left Voice* (2019).

We will continue our discussion of capitalism and the environment in a local context this week. Capital destroys the environment, but it also tries to control the environment. For instance, American commerce is reliant on the Mississippi River. New Orleans exists because of its port. Rivers, however, change course constantly, and the Mississippi River is no exception. If the river changed course, though, New Orleans would no longer exist, neither would Baton Rouge, St. Louis, or any of the hundreds of petrochemical factories built on the river. So, capital uses the state to control the flow of the river. It has done this, primarily, through the Atchafalaya lock system (or the Old River Control Structure) and an increasingly large levee system. While these systems have successfully locked the river in place, they also make natural disasters more catastrophic, and actually prevent seasonal flooding (seasonal flooding is a good thing; it pushes sediment on land, making the soil more fertile, while raising the land, making hurricane flooding less intense). Because the river can’t seasonally flood, the water level rises, necessitating larger levees. The water level is so high relative to land now that every spot in New Orleans is actually below the river. New Orleans is essentially a cereal bowl surrounded by water. So why are natural disasters getting worse? Not just because of climate change, but because the infrastructure is designed to benefit capital, not human life.

We will also discuss how the state functions in general this week, specifically given the fact that capital can move.

**Week 15: Capitalism and Popular Culture**

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Apr. 25: Harold D. Weaver, Jr. “Paul Robeson: Beleaguered Leader.” *The Black Scholar* 5.4 (24- 32).

**\*Final Paper assigned\***

Apr. 27: Dealer’s choice.

We will be listening to a lot of music this week, so be prepared. There are two ways to approach the effect of capitalism on music. One would be to discuss how capitalism makes music a business, with music becoming popular not because it is “good,” but because a major corporation thinks they can make money off of it (same goes for movies and other forms of popular culture: why do you think Disney keeps remaking the same movies?). We won’t focus on this too much. We will focus on how workers have used music to resist capitalism; as a mechanism to express disdain for exploitation and work, and as a mechanism to organize a resistance to capitalism. We will focus particularly on folk music and the blues, uniquely American musical genres to match the uniquely American forms of racialized capitalist exploitation.

The second reading of the week will be chosen collectively by the class. What have we not covered this semester that you would like to learn about?

**Week 16: Summary and Conclusion**

May 2: No new readings

May 4: No new readings

**\*Final Paper due on May 9th\***

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