

HIST 1501 – Comparative Global History: Capitalism
Location: MCCAIN ARTS & SS Aud. 1
Thursdays, 535 pm – 825 pm

Dalhousie University is built on the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq People. This territory is covered by the “Treaties of Peace and Friendship” which Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqiyik (Maliseet) people first signed with the British crown in 1725. The treaties did not deal with surrender of lands and resources but in fact recognized Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqiyik (Maliseet) title and established the rules for what was to be an ongoing relationship between nations. Dalhousie students are encouraged to consult the treaty, available online (via transcription), or in original form at the Nova Scotia Archives in Halifax.

< <https://novascotia.ca/archives/mikmaq/archives.asp?ID=609> >

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Course Related Office Hours: Tuesdays, 1 pm – 3 pm

Course Description:

The story of capitalism can only be told from a global perspective because capitalism is a global system. Today, words like “capitalism” or “neoliberalism” or “globalization” are used without historical specificity and this gives rise to the idea that capitalism is natural and ahistorical. True, people have always traded with one another, but capitalism does not have a monopoly over the trade, markets, or exchange. In this global history of capitalism, we will follow some historical, intellectual, and economic threads that would give rise to a global system of political economy that has been a central feature and condition for global history over the last four hundred years. We will dip deeper into history to understand some of the antecedents of capitalism, particular with reference to Europe, but the bulk of our work is to understand how the rise of modern capitalism is grounded in the rise of corporations, slavery, indentureship, forced gendered divisions of labour, ecological destruction and the curious historical phenomenon of convincing people that alternatives to capitalism are somehow impractical. We integrate the voices and perspectives of a diverse group of scholars throughout the semester, and proceed in a way that offers a chronological narrative of the development of capitalism as a world-making system. Throughout, we will strive to consider what resistance to this uni-versal vision in different contexts.

The class is divided into three sections:

1. Primitive Accumulations, or Creating a World for Capital
2. Commodification, Thingification, and Labour
3. The Geopolitics of Capitalism

It is not possible to offer a complete story of capitalism in a single semester, or perhaps even a single degree. What I am offering you here is a chance to think deeply, critically, and creatively about the world within which you were born. Capitalism is not a thing to love or hate – it has no

emotions nor agency, but it is one of many global structures that contour, limit, and expand the human experience in profoundly unequal ways. In this sense, it is similar to other systems such as racism, heteropatriarchy, or ableism. My promise to you is that if you come to class, do your readings, and commit to doing the work of this class, you will leave it with a very different understanding of the world and your place in it than the one you had on Sept. 7.

Trigger Warning: *We cannot study the history of capitalism without encountering subject material that is emotionally and physically triggering in ways that you might not expect. Please read the syllabus carefully and take care of yourselves as you prepare for class. If you need to step in and step out at different points, feel free to do so even if we aren't in an official break. I will do the same.*

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Describe the historical development of global capitalism
- Make connections between capitalism as a “world-making” system and other related world-making systems such as racism and patriarchy
- to form scholarly questions and gather evidence aimed at informing more in-depth research.
- Engage in respectful debate and dialogue with peers on controversial topics using evidence.

Required Texts:

- Capitalism, a Very Short Introduction (Available in the Dal Book Store)
- Additional articles and chapters available on Brightspace or as links in the syllabus

Assignments:

Assignment	Due	Value (%)
Section 1 Quiz	Oct. 12	15
Section 2 Quiz	Nov. 2	15
Cotton Capitalism Assignment	Dec. 1 (Brightspace)	15
Attendance and Engaged Participation	Throughout	10
Final Exam	TBD	40
Critical Self Assessment	Dec. 1 (Brightspace)	5

Quizzes (30%):

There will be two in-class quizzes, worth 15% each, designed to help students keep a check on their learning. Quiz one cover the topics and readings from section one, and quiz two will cover the topics and readings from section two.

Final Exam (40%):

Scheduled by the University, the final exam will look very much like the quizzes, only it will cover all three sections of the class. Your quizzes will be excellent review material for the exam, and we will discuss in detail during the term.

Cotton Capitalism Assignment (15%)

Over the course of the semester, carefully study the podcast series “Cotton Capital” recently published by the UK Guardian. You can download or stream the podcast (six parts in total) freely here: <https://www.theguardian.com/news/series/cotton-capital-podcast>

As you listen to each episode, take some notes on what you are learning and what you are thinking about. Try to answer questions such as (but not limited to):

- How is slavery and capitalist development related?
- Are the people of Manchester (the newspaper, the workers in the factory) responsible in some way for slavery? Why or why not?
- What are some examples of resilience demonstrated by African people in the podcast series?
- Is capitalism possible without slavery?
- What can we learn about the relationship between racial thinking and the development of capitalism, and global migration patterns when we consider Brazil’s desire to “whiten” their population in the early 20th century?
- What role can reparations play in adjusting for the rewarding of enslavers (and their investors) at the expense of survivors?
- What’s different about the Guardian’s approach to reparations compared to the way reparations are discussed in North America?
- What complex webs of history led to my arrival in a classroom in Kipuktuk studying the history of capitalism?

By the end of the semester, you must submit a 2 page explanation of what you learned from listening to the podcast. This can include your criticisms, appreciations, and how (if at all) it changed your understanding of capitalism. In your submission, you are required to include your rough notes that you kept as you listened to episode 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6. These can be in the form of an appendix, following your 2-page explanation. They will not be “graded” but will be a way of you “showing your work” and will help you in writing the 2 page assignment.

While it is not due until the end of term, it can be turned in at any time. I encourage you to plug away at it throughout the semester so that you’re not trying to cram it all in at the end of term.

Attendance and Engaged Participation (10%)

Within each class we will have a designated period in which we collectively watch a short (10 – 15 minute) interview between Dr. Parasram and another scholar of capitalism. Your assignment is to discuss the ideas and your views/opinions of what was discussed in small groups. This will

not always happen at the same time in class, but this is the time that we will be taking attendance.

Critical Self Assessment (5%)

Reflexivity is an important and undervalued skill. No one is better equipped than you to evaluate your work and the intellectual progress that you have made. This short assignment will help you begin the process of reflecting on how your own points of views have developed over the course. It is evaluated based on your ability to critical reflect on your own learning process and journey throughout the semester. Details and rubric will be discussed in class.

Class Schedule

September 7: Intro and Orientation.

Readings: This syllabus

Section One: Primitive Accumulations, or Creating a World For Capital

Sept. 14: The Capitalist Uni-verse

This week we explore how the emergence and resilience of capitalism rests on key ontological assumptions grounded in monotheism, individualism, and the special status of “human” beings to dominate the world within a Eurocentric world-view. We will consider the popular belief that capitalism emerges from within Europe, and prod into some of the historical, political, economic, and philosophical reasons for this. We will also discuss ontological diversity, or the starting assumptions about the world that shaped the development of diverse communities with special reference to Turtle Island and South Asia.

Reading: Capitalism: A Very Short Introduction: Chapter 2

Listening: “Well Done” by Kabaka Pyramid. Available online:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h8rCIH-Jbno>

Talking Capitalism with Nivi Manchanda (Queen Mary University London):

- Text: Geographies of Racial Capitalism (will view and discuss in class)

Sept. 21: Enclosing Land, Enclosing Gender

Building on the ontological assumptions of capitalism, this week we investigate how Europe moved away from the “divine right of kings” way of understanding land and property by transforming land and its purpose to serve the early interests of landowners. Following the historical research of acclaimed feminist political economist Silvia Federici and Jewish refugee political economist Karl Polanyi, we focus on how women’s power and economic autonomy was vilified to concentrate economic and political decision making in the hands of men in Europe,

and how the “enclosures” delivered a brutal blow to the idea of everyone having the right to use land.

Readings:

- Karl Polyani, “Habitation versus Improvement” in *The Great Transformation* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1944) pp 35 – 44 (Brightspace)
- Silvia Federici, “The Accumulation of Labour and the Degradation of Women: Constructing “Difference” in the Transition to Capitalism” in *Caliban and the Witch* Just from page 61 – 75. Said differently, from the beginning of the chapter to footnote 39 if you reading the free online version of the book. (Brightspace)

Listening:

- Sisters by A Tribe Called Red Featuring Northern Voice:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QbrvwaVXJ48>

Talking Capitalism with Dr. Jenna Marshall (Kings College London)

- Background reading: “Inside Barbados’ Historic Push for Slavery Reparations” written by Janell Ross, Photography by Christopher Gregory-Rivera. Available online:
<https://time.com/6290949/barbados-reparations/>

Sept. 28: The East India Companies and the Birth of Colonial/Modern Capitalism

This week we explore the formal “birth” of modern capitalism through considering the role of state chartered companies – the Dutch East India Company and the English (later British) East India Company. The idea of investing money through purchasing a future share of profits is essential here, as is the political economic context of “economic nationalism” and the historical arrival of Europeans into the regional/world economies of Asia. Building on previous weeks’ work, we will consider how philosophical/political/economic/gendered politics in Europe incentivized development of economic nationalism and state-corporations through centering the interests of propertied and monied men.

Readings:

- Capitalism A Very Short Introduction Chapter 1
- Karl Marx, *Capital* Vol. 1, Chapter 31. Available online:
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch31.htm>

Listening:

- We Got The Guillotine by the Coup: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=acT_PSAZ7BQ

Talking Capitalism with Dr. Isaac Saney (Dalhousie University)

- Background reading is the same as required reading this week.

Oct. 5: Settler Colonialism, Primitive Accumulation, and Grounded Normativity

Rounding out our section on Primitive Accumulations, we consider how the process of transforming society to make it legible to a universalist and capitalist world view differed in the context of settler colonial Canada. Having studied the bourgeoisie revolutions within Europe, the imperial capitalist context of colonial India, the settler-colonial context is considerably different because rather than transforming people into workers, the primary aim, following Dene political scientist Glen Sean Coulthard, was to remove people and usurp land at all costs.

Readings:

- Glen Coulthard, “For The Land” in *Red Skins White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).
- Leanne Simpson, “The Brilliance of Beaver: Learning from an Anishnaabe World” available online: <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/ideas/the-brilliance-of-the-beaver-learning-from-an-anishnaabe-world-1.5534706>

Listen: “My Country Tis of Thy People You’re Dying” by Buffy Saint-Marie available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wUbMoyolxmU>

Talking Capitalism with Dr. Sharri Plonski (Queen Mary University London)
For background reading, see Brightspace.

Section II: Commodification, Thingification, and Labour

Oct. 12 : Industrial Revolutions: Capitalism and Slavery (Quiz 1)

In this class we shift our focus to the historical process through which human beings, land, animals, are treated as “commodities” within the development of global capitalism. We proceed by reconsidering the moment of “industrial revolution” and removing it from the factories of England and grounding them instead in the plantations of the West Indies.

Reading:

- Robbie Shilliam, “Forget English Freedom, Remember Atlantic Slavery: Common Law, Commercial Law and the Significance of Slavery for Classical Political Economy” *New Political Economy* 17/5(2012): 591 – 609
- Eric Williams, “The New Industrial Order” in *Capitalism and Slavery* (University of North Carolina Press, 2021), 140 – 154.

Listening: The Song of the Agitators by Khari Wendell McClelland:
<http://khariwendellmcclelland.com/music-1>

No Talking Capitalism this week, in lieu of Quiz 1.

Oct. 19: Industrial Revolutions: Capitalism and Indentureship:

Continuing the theme of commodification and labour, we consider the “political economy of improvement” this week by examining how the formal end of slavery in the British empire gave rise to the practice of “indentureship.” This was a crucial moment in the evolution of the capitalist system, as it was debated by influential economists and politicians like David Ricardo, and saw a shift in the moral framing of colonialism away from mercantilism and towards the idea of free trade and ostensibly “free” but still coerced labour.

Reading: Radica Mahase, “ ‘Plenty a dem run away’ – resistance by Indian indentured labourers in Trinidad, 1870 – 1920” *Labour History* 49/4(2008): 465 – 480.

Listening: Capitalism Gone Mad by The Mighty Sparrow
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cOWuqD77Klo>

Talking Capitalism with Rohan Kalyan. Background Reading on Brightspace.

Oct. 26: The Idea of “Laissez-Faire” and the Morality of Capitalism

Continuing our study of capitalist transformation, this week we take up the concept of “laissez-faire” as a discourse and the moral positioning of capitalism and colonialism as antecedents to the 20th century notion of “development.” We study the difference between “laissez-faire” in principle and in practice, alongside the developing culture of capitalism, modernity, and the rise of workers’ consciousness.

Readings:

- Karl Polyani “The Birth of the Liberal Creed” in *The Great Transformation* page 141 - 157
- Max Weber, “The Spirit of Capitalism” *The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* trans. Talcott Parsons. (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1930). Pp 47 - 78

Listening: The Internationale, as performed by David Rovics:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= eDo5IS7-7w>

Talking Capitalism with Dr. Chris Hurl (Concordia University) Background reading: explore the Free Trade Activist History website, available: <https://freetradehistory.ca/>

III: The Geopolitics of Capitalism

Nov. 02: De-Industrialization and Under-Development (Quiz on Section II)

This week leaves behind the direct focus on commodities and shifts to the formal end of colonialism in the British empire. The continuities and differences between colonial and postcolonial trade will be explored, with close reference to the idea of “under-development” and economic development.

Reading:

- Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Cape Town: Pambazuka Press, 2012) pp 1 – 31

Listening: The Virus by A Tribe Called Red, featuring Saul Williams and Chippewa Travellers:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4_5VAKdHMeK

No Talking Capitalism this week in lieu of Quiz 2.

Nov. 09: Capitalism, Communism, and Third World Alternatives

This week we take up the bipolar nature of the post-colonial, cold-war context of capitalism by following the geopolitics of choosing between the so-called “West” and the “East” and how newly independent countries sought to chart their own way.

Reading:

- Capitalism A Very Short Introduction Chapter 5 “Has Capitalism Gone Global?”
- The Issue of Mr. O’Dell, directed by Rami Katz and available online:
<https://roarmag.org/films/the-issue-of-mr-odell/> (watch the half hour long documentary)

Listening: Babylon System by Bob Marley and the Wailers:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mzv1El5gDnE>

Talking Capitalism with Dr. John Munro (University of Birmingham). Background reading, see Brightspace

Nov 16 (No Class, Reading Break)

Nov. 23: Political Ecology & Capitalism in the Anthropocene

This week we focus our attention on the intersection of political ecology and economy as we consider the economic and global implications of the “Anthropocene” or the geological age in which human beings become capable to planetary change.

Reading:

- Teresia K. Teaiwa, “Bikinis and other spaces/pacific n/oceans” *The Contemporary Pacific* 6/1(1994): 87 – 109

- M'sit No'kmaq et. Al, "Awakening the sleeping giant": re-Indigenization principles for transforming biodiversity conservation in Canada and beyond." *Facets* 6/1(2021): available online: <https://www.facetsjournal.com/doi/10.1139/facets-2020-0083>

Listening: Somos Sur by Ana Tijoux ft. Shadia Mansour:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EKGUJXzxNqc>

Talking Capitalism with Dr. Lisa Tilley (School of Oriental and African Studies) Background

Reading: "Rise: From One Island to Another" by Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner and Aka Niviâna. Watch the poem/video online here: <https://350.org/rise-from-one-island-to-another/>

Nov. 30: Capitalism In/As Crisis

We round out our class by considering how capitalism, as a global system, appears to be "in" crisis, but also considering how the very crisis itself might be grounded in the attributes of capitalism that have developed over the course of colonial modernity.

Reading: Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* Book Five, Chapter II, Section, "Taxes Upon The Rent of Houses" pp 1062 – 1071.

Listening: Work by Bob Marley & The Wailers:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GzvEcBWcGmo>

Talking Capitalism with Dr. Alex Khasnabish (Moun Saint Vincent University). Background reading: "No Shelter" by Rage Against the Machine. Available Online:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lG7sww5NtVA>

Policies

AI Policy:

Look, I'm not a luddite and I understand that technology is evolving all the time. The mechanisation of knowledge has a lot of serious implications for people learning to think critically for a living. Consider, for example, how hard it is to read, cite, and learn from knowledge produced in the global south about the global south when you're in the global north. I'm worried that AI is being offered as a way to comb the entirety of knowledge quickly for the purpose of providing seemingly harmless quick pointers, but this is going to accelerate the process of Eurocentric myopic thinking, making it ever illegible and self-referential in social science research. For at least 500 years, marginalized scholars, teachers, and students have been fighting the epistemic violence of erasure, and when we mechanize the very process of learning and writing we are further playing into the hands of a broader elite society aimed at contouring the parameters of free thought and, *literally*, commodifying it. As social science and humanities students, we have an obligation to do better. I'm not saying AI doesn't have a place in the future, but we need to be cognizant of its limitations, the harm it brings, and the good it can produce

with care. Remember that you are a student, this is your practice space to master your craft before you're expected to do this without training wheels, so to speak. Historians do a lot of archival research, and there are times when I wished I could "google" the archive, but then I would miss everything that I find in the spaces that I wasn't already expecting. Don't deny yourself the joy and excitement of intellectual discovery and personal growth in a mechanical pursuit of facts that probably don't exist anyway. Don't use AI for this class, you don't need it. Trust yourself and trust the methods you are learning. You got this.

Writing and Style:

Please see the History Department's Style Guide for helpful hints, guidelines, and resources for essay writing: <https://www.dal.ca/faculty/arts/history/current-students/style-guide.html>

Students of History are strongly encouraged to follow the Chicago Manuel of Style, which can be accessed in quick form here: http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html

Late Policy:

Seminars only work well when you fulfill your commitments to get your work in on time. This includes your weekly reading assignments. Sometimes extraneous circumstances beyond your control affect your ability to get your work in on time. **Late penalties of 2.5% per day will be levied on late submissions.** Please place a high premium on time management and take a semester-length approach to planning your work.

SECTION B: UNIVERSITY STATEMENTS

Internationalization

At Dalhousie, "[thinking and acting globally](#)" enhances the quality and impact of education, supporting learning that is "interdisciplinary, cross-cultural, global in reach, and orientated toward solving problems that extend across national borders."

Academic Integrity

At Dalhousie University, we are guided in all of our work by the values of [academic integrity](#): honesty, trust, fairness, responsibility and respect. As a student, you are required to demonstrate these values in all of the work you do. The University provides policies and procedures that every member of the university community is required to follow to ensure academic integrity.

Accessibility

The Student Accessibility Centre is Dalhousie's centre of expertise for matters related to student accessibility and accommodation.

If there are aspects of the design, instruction, and/or experiences within this course (online or in-person) that result in barriers to your inclusion please contact:

- the [Student Accessibility Centre](#) (for all courses offered by Dalhousie with the exception of Truro)
- the [Student Success Centre in Truro](#) for courses offered by the Faculty of Agriculture

Your classrooms may contain accessible furniture and equipment. It is important that these items remain in place, undisturbed, so that students who require their use will be able to fully participate.

Conduct in the Classroom – Culture of Respect

Substantial and constructive dialogue on challenging issues is an important part of academic inquiry and exchange. It requires willingness to listen and tolerance of opposing points of view. Consideration of individual differences and alternative viewpoints is required of all class members, towards each other, towards instructors, and towards guest speakers. While expressions of differing perspectives are welcome and encouraged, the words and language used should remain within acceptable bounds of civility and respect.

Diversity and Inclusion – [Culture of Respect](#)

Every person at Dalhousie has a right to be respected and safe. We believe inclusiveness is fundamental to education. We stand for equality. Dalhousie is strengthened in our diversity. We are a respectful and inclusive community. We are committed to being a place where everyone feels welcome and supported, which is why our Strategic Direction prioritizes fostering a culture of diversity and inclusiveness (Strategic Priority 5.2).

Code of Student Conduct

Everyone at Dalhousie is expected to treat others with dignity and respect. The [Code of Student Conduct](#) allows Dalhousie to take disciplinary action if students don't follow this community expectation. When appropriate, violations of the code can be resolved in a reasonable and informal manner—perhaps through a restorative justice process. If an informal resolution can't be reached, or would be inappropriate, procedures exist for formal dispute resolution.

Fair Dealing policy

The Dalhousie University [Fair Dealing Policy](#) provides guidance for the limited use of copyright protected material without the risk of infringement and without having to seek the permission of copyright owners. It is intended to provide a balance between the rights of creators and the rights of users at Dalhousie.

SECTION C: UNIVERSITY POLICIES, GUIDELINES, AND RESOURCES FOR SUPPORT

Instructors may choose to include Section C with their Syllabus or may instead refer to it, providing a link, in their Syllabus. The University Policies, Guidelines and Resources for Support for Section C and their respective links will be made available on the [Centre for Learning and Teaching \(CLT\) website](#), on the homepage of the [Learning Management System \(LMS\)](#) and on the [Dalhousie Academic Support website](#).

Dalhousie courses are governed by the academic rules and regulations set forth in the [Academic Calendar](#) and the [Senate](#).

Important student information, services and resources are available as follows:

Provide list of links as below OR use links above to direct students to these resources:

University Policies and Programs

- [Important Dates in the Academic Year](#) (including add/drop dates)
- [Classroom Recording Protocol](#)
- [Dalhousie Grading Practices Policy](#)
- [Grade Appeal Process](#)
- [Sexualized Violence Policy](#)
- [Scent-Free Program](#)

Learning and Support Resources

- Academic Support - Advising [Halifax](#), [Truro](#)
- [Student Health & Wellness Centre](#)
- [On Track](#) (helps you transition into university, and supports you through your first year at Dalhousie and beyond)
- [Indigenous Student Centre](#). See also: [Indigenous Connection](#).
- Elders-in-Residence: The [Elders in Residence program](#) provides students with access to First Nations elders for guidance, counsel and support. Visit the office in the [Indigenous Student Centre](#) or contact the program at elders@dal.ca or 902-494-6803.
- [Black Student Advising Centre](#)
- [International Centre](#)
- [South House Sexual and Gender Resource Centre](#)
- [LGBTQ2SIA+ Collaborative](#)
- [Dalhousie Libraries](#)
- [Copyright Office](#)
- [Dalhousie Student Advocacy Service \(DSAS\)](#)
- [Dalhousie Ombudsperson](#)
- [Human Rights & Equity Services](#)
- [Writing Centre](#)
- [Study Skills/Tutoring](#)
- Faculty or Departmental Advising Support (Note: there is a different link for each faculty, and possibly for different departments or programs)

Safety

Required links to provide, if any of the following apply to discipline/course:

- [Biosafety](#)
- [Chemical Safety](#)
- [Radiation Safety](#)
- [Laser Safety](#)