Fall 2020 Capitalism, Democracy, and Community Wealth Building

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Office hours: Tuesday and Wednesdays, 2-3 pm via Zoom, or by appointment.

Course Overview

This class focuses directly on the systemic crisis of contemporary democratic capitalism and possibilities for reform and restructuring of our political-economic system in order to better advance racial and economic justice, ecological sustainability, and democratic voice. Our primary focus is the context of the United States although many of the issues we are discussing have global implications.

This course is structured as a serious intellectual inquiry. To undertake a critique of capitalism as a system is a big deal, not to be undertaken lightly. To consider seriously alternatives to the existing system is also a big deal. These are weighty, difficult topics that require serious thought, reflection and debate. The readings selected for this course primarily reflect recent, cutting edge theoretical and practical work addressing these questions, although older ideas are of necessity referenced throughout the course. We will be discussing one serious issue after another, in-depth. Students taking this course will need to commit to not only doing the reading but thinking about the underlying issues in a serious way to benefit from this course.

The first week of the course connects debates about economic systems to debates about economic justice. The first week is a connecting point to “Justice and Civil Society,” but also takes us to a discussion of the ethical case(s) for socialism as expressed by two important thinkers.

Part II of the class examines the current condition of American capitalism through several perspectives: a racial justice perspective, a public health perspective, the lens of political science, and a sophisticated Marxian perspective. These critiques are not mutually exclusive, but engaging with each of them allow for a layered, complex understanding of both the status quo and future prospects.

The remainder of the course then goes to consider various paradigms for reform and change: a social democratic paradigm (Part III), a property-owning democracy (inclusive ownership) paradigm (Part IV), a democratic socialist paradigm (Part V), and a community wealth building paradigm (Part VI). Again, these proposals and paradigms are not mutually exclusive, although there are important debates between these views that need to be engaged.

The final weeks of the course will also place particular emphasis on practice—that is, what local governments, social movement organizations, and other actors can do now to drive change, but also how we might envision large-scale transformational change taking place over the coming generation.

The concept of adaptive leadership refers to the capacity of leaders and groups to respond to new challenges and developments in effective ways. The collision between the current trajectory of American capitalism and democracy, racial justice, economic justice, and ecological sustainability demands an adaptive response. By the end of this class, students will have wrestled extensively what that response should look like, and had the opportunity to develop their own ideas and perspectives on that urgent question.
Course Requirements.

1. Attendance and active participation in every class session. Each unexcused absence will lead to a one-third grade deduction on your final grade.
2. Completion of the assigned reading.
3. Completion of a weekly “5 Thing” reaction paper each week on Blackboard. Post five comments, observations, reactions, or questions about the course reading by **6 p.m. each Thursday**. You also encouraged to respond to other students’ reaction papers.
4. Eight short reflection papers that discuss a question related to the readings from either the previous week (2 page paper) or previous two weeks (3 page paper).
5. Completion of either a ten-page research paper about an interesting example of community wealth building, or completing a take-home final exam consisting of three essays (3-4 pages) each.

Final Grade Components

- Short Reflection Papers: 50%
- Research Paper or Take-Home Exam: 25%
- Weekly Five Thing Reaction paper and Blackboard discussions: 10%
- Course preparation and in-class participation: 15%

Required Book List:

- Paul Adler; *The 99 Percent Economy: How Democratic Socialism Can Overcome the Crises of Capitalism*
- Gar Alperovitz, *What Then Must We Do? Straight Talk on the Next American Revolution*
- Anne Case and Angus Deaton, *Deaths of Despair and the Future of Capitalism*
- William Darity and Kirsten Mullen, *From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the 21st Century*
- Anne Gessler, *Cooperatives in New Orleans: Collective Action and Urban Development*
- Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson, *Let Them Eat Tweets: How the Right Rules in an Age of Extreme Inequality*
- David Harvey, *Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism*
- Lane Kenworthy, *Social Democratic America*
- Naomi Klein, *On Fire: The Burning Case for a Green New Deal*
- Tom Malleson, *After Occupy: Economic Democracy for the 21st Century*

Other readings to be distributed as PDFs
Plan of Study

I. Capitalism and Justice: The Problem


Short Reflection Paper #1 (2 pages) due Tuesday September 1 at noon.

II. Critiques of American Capitalism

Week 2 (September 4) William Darity and Kirsten Mullen, From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the 21st Century. Chapters 3-4 (pp. 51-92), Chapters 9-13 (pp. 167-270)

Week 3 (September 11) Anne Case and Angus Deaton, Deaths of Despair and the Future of Capitalism. Chapters 3-13 (pp. 37-211), 15-16 (pp. 226-262.)

Short Reflection Paper #2 (3 pages) due Tuesday September 14 at noon.

Week 4 (September 18) Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson, Let Them Eat Tweets: How the Right Rules in an Age of Extreme Inequality (complete book)

Week 5 (September 25) David Harvey, Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism. Introduction, Chapters 1-7 (pp. 1-90), Chapters 12-14 (pp. 162-221), Chapter 17, Conclusion and Epilogue (pp. 264-297)

Short Reflection Paper #3 (3 pages) due Tuesday September 28 at noon.

III. Social Democracy and Green New Deals

Week 6 (October 2) Lane Kenworthy, Social Democratic America (complete book)

Week 7 (October 9) Naomi Klein, On Fire: The Burning Case for a Green New Deal (pp. 1-103, pp. 234-293.)

Short Reflection Paper #4 (3 pages) due Tuesday October 13 at noon.

IV. Inclusive Ownership


Short Reflection Paper #5 (2 pages) due Tuesday October 20 at noon.

V. Socialism and Economic Democracy

Week 9 (October 23) Paul Adler; The 99 Percent Economy: How Democratic Socialism Can Overcome the Crises of Capitalism (complete book)

Week 10 (October 30) Tom Malleson, After Occupy: Economic Democracy for the 21st Century (Chapters 2-7) (Invited Guest: Tom Malleson)

Short Reflection Paper #6 (3 pages) due Tuesday November 3 at noon.
VI. Here to There: Community Wealth Building and Democratic Reconstruction


Week 12 (November 13) Melody Barnes, Corey Walker and Thad Williamson, *Community Wealth Building and the Reconstruction of American Democracy* (*Invited Guests: Corey D.B. Walker and Risha R. Berry*) Chapters 1 (Barnes, Walker and Williamson), 2 (Barnes and Williamson), 5 (Sawhill), 6 (Kohn), 7 (Dagger), 13 (Berry), and 15 (Walker and Williamson).

*Short Reflection Paper #7 (3 pages) due Tuesday November 17 at noon.*


Week 14 (December 4) Kali Akuno and Ajamu Nangwaya, *Jackson Rising: The Struggle for Economic Democracy and Black Self-Determination in Jackson, Mississippi.* Parts 2-4 plus additional sections TBA. *Zoom meeting. (Invited Guest: Valaryee Mitchell, Richmond Office of Community Wealth Building)*

*Short Reflection Paper #8 (3 pages) due Tuesday December 7 at noon.*

*Research Paper (10-12 pages) on Community Wealth Building practical example; or Take-Home Final Exam (3 essays, 3-4 pages each), due Tuesday December 14 at 5 p.m.*