



HSTAA 345

MAKING MODERN AMERICA: BUSINESS & POLITICS

Professor Margaret O'Mara (she/her/hers)
Department of History
University of Washington
Winter 2021
Online, MWF 11:30-12:50

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Office hours: email me to set up a 1-1 appointment immediately before or after class

How has American capitalism changed over the century, and who has been responsible for making those changes? How has democratic governance expanded, contracted, and shaped the nature of individual and collective economic opportunity? How have the two major parties changed over time, and how has their relationship to the business community changed over time? Centering these questions, this course explores key moments, movements, and people making modern America from 1920 to the present.

Format:

This 5-credit online class meets three mornings a week, MWF 11:30-12:50. Mondays and Wednesdays are a mix of instructor lectures, discussion, in-class reading and writing, and open office hours with the professor. Fridays are devoted to group work. All sessions will be recorded for viewing by students who are unable to make class, but synchronous attendance is recommended to get the most out of this experience.

Learning goals:

- A refined understanding of how governments, markets, and individuals and groups have functioned as agents of historical change;
- Understanding the causes and contingencies behind America's transition from an agrarian nation to an industrial and post-industrial superpower;
- Sharpened critical thinking and writing about history, including ability to distinguish different types of sources (primary, secondary) and analyze their context and meaning;
- An ability to apply this historical awareness to understanding present-day political, economic, and social structures; and
- Knowing sources and methods for discerning truth and separating fact from fiction.

Readings:

You are not required to purchase texts for this course. Your only course costs will be renting two streaming films (total cost about \$8), and you are welcome to watch together with class colleagues and share the expense, or the popcorn. All other required readings and audio/video are free and in an **electronic course pack** available to enrolled students and auditors on the course Canvas website by the start of Spring Quarter. Expect to read approximately 100 pages per week (or multimedia sources that take approximately the same amount of time to consume). To obtain access to all these sources, please make sure you are signed into your computer with your UWnet ID.

Assignments:

1. Eight 500-700 word **discussion posts** on reading assignments, to be posted on Canvas no later than 11:59PM on Friday. You get one "bye" week on the midterm week, and a second "bye" on the week of your choice. (5% per post, for 40% total)
2. **Participation**, consisting of discussion, group work, peer workshopping and content analysis, and additional in-class and "homework" discussion and research tasks. (ongoing; 10% of grade)
3. **Midterm essay exam**: written exam of original essays on lecture/reading content from the first half of the quarter, responding to prompts posted by instructor, taken online on Canvas over a long weekend, to be submitted no later than 11:59 PM on Monday, February 10. (25% of grade)
4. **Final essay exam**: written exam of original essays discussing lecture/reading content for the full quarter but with particular emphasis on the second half, responding to prompts posted by instructor. Word document or similarly editable format only; no PDFs, please. Taken online on Canvas over a long weekend, to be submitted no later than 11:59PM on Monday, March 16. (25% of grade)

Course schedule (summary):

Week	Subject	Assignments
Week 1	The “roaring” 1920s	Discussion post
Week 2	The crisis of capitalism, and what the New Deal did	Discussion post
Week 3	The war economy	Discussion post
Week 4	“People’s Capitalism” and the early Cold War	Discussion post
Week 5	The business of suburbia	Midterm exam due Friday 11:59PM
Week 6	The space race and the birth of Silicon Valley	Discussion post
Week 7	The revolution will be televised: upheavals of the 1960s	Discussion post
Week 8	1970s economic crisis and its legacies	Discussion post
Week 9	Reagan Revolution and financial transformation	Discussion post
Week 10	The “new” economy	Discussion post
Exam Week		Final exam due Wednesday 11:59PM

On Fridays from weeks 2 to 10, I’ll hold small-group meetings where subgroups of the class will come together with me for an hour-long discussion session (8 students max). After the first week of class, when we will meet as a full class for Friday discussion, you will sign up for **two** weeks in the quarter when you’ll attend a session. You do not need to keep that time free nor attend Friday sessions otherwise.

WEEK 1 – The “Roaring” 1920s

Monday March 29: Introduction to HSTAA 345; American business and politics in 1920

No reading needed before our first class.

Wednesday March 31: 1920s Detroit as the center of American innovation

- 1) Joshua Freeman, “Giant Factories”
- 2) Nancy MacLean, “‘Where Money Rules and Morals Rot’: The Vise of Modernity”

- 3) Frederick Winslow Taylor, Introduction and Chapter 1 of *The Principles of Scientific Management* (1913)

Friday April 2: discussion section, all students and groups attend. In addition to your first discussion post, also remember to sign up for a discussion group and add a post to the class introduction thread.

WEEK 2 – The crisis of capitalism and what the New Deal did

Monday April 5: origins of the Great Depression; Hoover vs Roosevelt

- 1) Julia Ott, “‘The Free and Open People’s Market’: Political Ideology and Retail Brokerage at the New York Stock Exchange, 1913-1933”
- 2) Eric Rauchway, “The World in Debt”
- 3) Herbert Hoover, “American Individualism” (excerpts, 1922)

Wednesday April 7: the New Deal and its political and economic legacy

- 1) Eric Rauchway, “Reflation and Relief” and “Managing Farm and Factory”
- 2) Ira Katznelson, “Limiting Liberalism: The Southern Veto in Congress”

Friday April 9: Green discussion section

WEEK 3 – The war economy

Monday April 12: American nationalism and identity in World War II

- 1) Wendy Wall, “The Spectre of ‘Divide and Conquer’” and “The House I Live In”

Wednesday April 14: War Powers, the Manhattan Project, and war’s economic legacy

- 1) Thomas Sugrue, “Arsenal of Democracy”
- 2) Jennifer S. Light, “When Computers Were Women”

Friday April 16: Blue discussion section

WEEK 4 – Cold War democracy

Monday April 19: the U.S. as economic and atomic superpower; McCarthyism

- 1) Randall Woods, “The Trials of Multilateralism: America, Britain, and the New Economic Order, 1941-1947”
- 2) Ellen Schrecker, “McCarthyism: political repression and the fear of communism”

Wednesday April 21: winning hearts and minds; “People’s Capitalism”

- 1) Kenneth Osgood, “Eisenhower’s Dilemma: Talking Peace and Waging Cold War”
- 2) Mary Dudziak, “Holding the Line in Little Rock”

- 3) Dwight Eisenhower, Speech on Little Rock, September 1957 (13 min)

Friday April 23: Yellow discussion section

WEEK 5 – The business of suburbia

Monday April 26: residential real estate markets and public policy; cars and roads; consumption as citizenship

- 1) David Freund, “A Free Market for Housing”
- 2) Lizabeth Cohen, “From Town Center to Shopping Center”
- 3) The Walt Disney Co., “Magic Highway, U.S.A.” (1958; 49 min)

Wednesday April 28: critiques; corporate culture; environmentalism

- 1) C. Wright Mills, “Are We Losing Our Sense of Belonging?” (1954)
- 2) William H. Whyte, “A Generation of Bureaucrats” (1956)
- 3) John Keats, “The Crack in the Picture Window” (1957)

MIDTERM goes online Thursday April 29 at 5PM

Friday April 30: No section; no discussion post; midterm due 11:59PM

WEEK 6 – The space race and the birth of Silicon Valley

Monday May 3: the military-industrial complex; Sputnik; race to the Moon

- 1) Watch *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964) – available to rent on multiple streaming platforms

Wednesday May 5: the military-industrial complex and advanced electronics; Sunbelt migration and industrialization

- 1) Margaret O’Mara, “From The Farm to the Valley”
- 2) Kim-Mai Cutler, “East of Palo Alto’s Eden”

Friday May 7: Red discussion section

WEEK 7 – The revolution will be televised

Monday May 10: fights for civil and economic rights

- 1) Elizabeth Hinton, “The War on Black Poverty”
- 2) Thomas Jackson, “Power to Poor People”
- 3) Pamela Walker Laird, “Entangled: Civil Rights in Corporate America Since 1964”

Wednesday May 12: the American war in Vietnam

- 1) Melvin Small, “ ‘Hey, Hey, LBJ!’ American Domestic Politics and the Vietnam War”
- 2) Watch *The Fog of War* (2003) – available to rent on multiple streaming platforms

Friday May 14: Green discussion section

WEEK 8 – 1970s economic crisis and its legacies

Monday May 17: Watergate; stagflation and globalization

- 1) Benjamin Waterhouse, “From Consensus to a Crisis of Confidence”
- 2) Jefferson Cowie, “Nixon’s Class Struggle”
- 3) Pete Hamill, “The Revolt of the White Lower Middle Class” (1969)

Wednesday May 18: post-industrialism, neoliberalism, new conservatism

- 1) Bethany Moreton, “The Soul of the Service Economy”
- 2) Ajay Mehrotra, “The Myth of the Overtaxed American”
- 3) Ronald Reagan, “A Time for Choosing” (1964)
- 4) Clare Boothe Luce, “Is the New Morality Destroying America?” (1978)

Friday May 20: Blue discussion section

WEEK 9 – Reagan Revolution

Monday May 24: Reaganomics; the end of the Cold War; Wall Street boom

- 1) Meg Jacobs, “The 1980 Election: Victory Without Success”
- 2) Gil Troy, “Wall Street”
- 3) William Knoblauch, “Containing *The Day After*”
- 4) WABC News, “The Day After: Nuclear-attack movie horrifies America” (13 min)

Wednesday May 26: Bill Clinton and the New Democrats

- 1) Lily Geismer, “From Taxachusetts to Massachusetts Miracle”
- 2) Michael Nelson, “Clinton and Welfare Reform”

Friday May 28: Yellow discussion section

WEEK 10 – the “new” economy

Monday May 31: Memorial Day; no class

Wednesday June 2: the history of the present

- 1) Nelson Lichtenstein, “Wal-Mart’s Tale of Two Cities”
- 2) A.K. Sandoval-Strausz, “Latino Landscapes”
- 3) *Left Behind America* (PBS *Frontline*, 2018) (53 minutes)

Friday June 4: Red discussion section

FINAL EXAM questions will be available on Canvas on Tuesday June 8 at 5PM; exam due on Canvas on Wednesday June 9 at 11:59PM.

Class policies, grade scale and more are available on the HSTAA 345 Canvas page.