

The Global Political Economy: Power and Inequality

PLSC 10300, Summer 2025, July 9-July 25

The University of Chicago

Seminar: 5:00pm – 6:45pm, MTWThF

Office Hours: 6:45pm – 7:00pm, MTWThF

All times are in Central Daylight Time. All sessions will be held via Zoom.

Instructor: Fahad Sajid, PhD (fmsajid@uchicago.edu)

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Course Description

Since the 1970s, economic inequality has been steadily rising. Today, the world's richest 1% own 44% of the world's total stock of wealth. The problem is especially acute in the United States, where three individuals alone own more wealth than the bottom half of the country combined. How did we get here? This course argues that inequality is not natural or inevitable but rather the result of violent dispossession of the weak by the powerful both within and between the countries of the world. We will draw on the work of political economists, historians, journalists, and activists to examine the world-historic causes of socio-economic inequality (such as the roles played by capitalism, colonialism, and chattel slavery), how inequality intersects with identity markers like gender and ethnicity, and the ways in which the climate crisis is pushing the haves and have-nots even further apart. In closing, we will consider how reorienting our economies for "use" as opposed to "profit" may help to reverse this tendency.

Texts

Required readings will be available for download through Canvas, but students may be expected to rent and watch one or two documentary films. Please see the Schedule of Readings for details.

Policies

Grades

The grading scale for *assignments* is as follows:

A+	97-100	A	93-97	A-	90-93
B+	87-90	B	83-87	B-	80-83
C+	77-80	C	73-77	C-	70-73

The grading scale for your *overall grade* in the course is as follows:

		A	95-100	A-	90-95
B+	87-90	B	83-87	B-	80-83
C+	77-80	C	73-77	C-	70-73

Writing

All written assignments must be typeset in 12-point Times New Roman font and submitted as a Word document. Please make sure to double-space and justify your text, set your margins at 1 inch on all sides, and include page numbers.

Attendance

Regular attendance and active participation are key to succeeding at any learning endeavor. Students are allowed one unexcused absence. For each subsequent absence, students will lose a third of a letter grade from their overall course grade. Exceptions will be made on a case-by-case basis. If you are aware of a conflict in advance, please contact us without delay.

Evaluation

Participation (20%)

Students will be expected to attend every class session and to contribute meaningfully to discussion.

Reflection Papers (30%)

Students will submit two reflection papers worth 15% each (600 words) at the end of Weeks 2 and 3. Papers will be due at 11:59pm US Central Time on Sunday, July 20, and Sunday, July 27, through Canvas. Please see the relevant section above for expectations around written submissions.

Final Exam (50%)

The final will be a timed, open-book exam consisting of identification terms, short-answer questions, and an essay question.

Academic Integrity

In addition to the expectation that students produce original work and cite their sources properly, AI writing tools like ChatGPT are strictly prohibited. The penalty for plagiarism will be a failing grade. In the unfortunate event that a student is suspected of plagiarism, we will follow the guidelines set forth in The University of Chicago Student Manual. Click [here](#) for more information.

Please note, finally, that while Wikipedia articles may be used privately to better understand a topic or event, they are not to be cited in academic writing.

Disability Accommodation

The University of Chicago is committed to ensuring the full participation of all students in its programs. If you have a documented disability and, as a result, need a reasonable accommodation to participate in class, complete course requirements, or benefit from the University's programs or services, you are encouraged to contact [Student Disability Services](#) as soon as possible by phone (773.702.6000) or email (disabilities@uchicago.edu).

Zoom Etiquette

For better or worse, Zoom is now very much a part of our lives. To help foster a virtual classroom environment that is conducive to learning and the free and respectful exchange of ideas, here are some tips on how to maintain good Zoom etiquette:

- Keep your camera on at all times.
- Keep the chat free unless you have a technical or logistical question for the instructors.
- Make sure your background is free of distractions and content that could be considered inappropriate.
- Dress and position yourself as you would in an actual college classroom.
- Keep yourself muted unless you have a reasonable interjection or are called upon.
- Use Zoom features such as the “Raise Hand” function to indicate your desire to make a comment or ask a question.
- Do not browse other websites. It is not very difficult for instructors to tell which students are on task and which ones are not.
- Make an effort to refer to your fellow students by their name and chosen pronouns.
- At all times, try to keep your remarks brief, your tone respectful, and your language professional.

Schedule of Readings (bird’s-eye view)

1. Wednesday, July 9 Introduction: Why Study Inequality

Part I: Primitive Accumulation

2. Thursday, July 10 Enclosure, Cotton Mills, and the Birth of Capitalism
3. Friday, July 11 Chattel Slavery and the Making of the Atlantic World
4. Monday, July 14 Colonialism I: Dynamics of Dispossession in British Africa
5. Tuesday, July 15 Colonialism II: Spotlight on Occupied Palestine

Part II: “Market Logics”

6. Wednesday, July 16 Neoliberalism I: Market Fundamentalism in Latin America
7. Thursday, July 17 Neoliberalism II: Counterrevolutionary Class Project
8. Friday, July 18 Neocolonialism I: Dependency, Debt Traps, and the Global South
9. Monday, July 21 Neocolonialism II: Unequal Exchange

Part III: Global Disparities

10. Tuesday, July 22 The Climate Crisis
11. Wednesday, July 23 Gender Inequality

Part IV: Conclusion

12. Thursday, July 24 A Better World Is Possible
13. Friday, July 25 Final Exam

Schedule of Readings (detailed view)

1. Wednesday, July 9 – Introduction: Why Study Inequality

- **Watch.** Richard Wilkinson, “How economic inequality harms societies,” TED, July 2011, 00:16:37 (https://www.ted.com/talks/richard_wilkinson_how_economic_inequality_harms_societies/details).
- Heather Boushey, “Investment,” in *Unbound: How Inequality Constricts Our Economy and What We Can Do About It*, pp. 139-41, 167-89 (Harvard University Press, 2019).
- George Monbiot, “Rightwing populists will keep winning until we grasp this truth about human nature,” *The Guardian*, April 13, 2025 (<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/apr/13/trump-populists-human-nature-economic-growth>).
- Alana Semuels, “Why So Few American Economists Are Studying Inequality,” *The Atlantic*, September 13, 2016.

Part I: Primitive Accumulation

2. Thursday, July 10 – Enclosure, Cotton Mills, and the Birth of Capitalism

- **Listen.** “BC: Before Capitalism,” Season 7, Episode 2 of *Scene on Radio: Capitalism*, June 26, 2024, 48:15:00 (<https://sceneonradio.org/s7-e2-bc-before-capitalism/>).
 - **Note:** start at 00:21:40.
- Jason Hickel, “Capitalism: A Creation Story,” in *Less is More: How Degrowth Will Save the World*, pp. 39-80 (Penguin Books, 2020).
 - **Note:** read until p. 62.
- Sven Beckert, “Mobilizing Industrial Labor,” in *Empire of Cotton: A Global History*, pp. 175-98 (Alfred A. Knopf, 2014).

In class:

- The increase of pasture [...] by which your sheep, which are naturally mild, and easily kept in order, may be said now to devour men and unpeople, not only villages, but towns; for wherever it is found that the sheep of any soil yield a softer and richer wool than ordinary, there the nobility and gentry, and even those holy men, the abbots! not contented with the old rents which their farms yielded, nor thinking it enough that they, living at their ease, do no good to the public, resolve to do it hurt instead of good. They stop the course of agriculture, destroying houses and towns, reserving only the churches, and enclose grounds that they may lodge their sheep in them. As if forests and parks had swallowed up too little of the land, those worthy countrymen turn the best inhabited places into solitudes; for when an insatiable wretch, who is a plague to his country, resolves to enclose many thousand acres of ground, the owners, as well as tenants, are turned out of their possessions by trick or by main force, or, being wearied out by ill usage, they are forced to sell them; by which means those miserable people, both men and women, married and unmarried, old and young, with their poor but numerous families (since country business requires many hands), are all forced to change their seats, not knowing whither to go; and they must sell, almost for nothing, their household

stuff, which could not bring them much money, even though they might stay for a buyer. When that little money is at an end (for it will be soon spent), what is left for them to do but either to steal, and so to be hanged (God knows how justly!), or to go about and beg? And if they do this they are put in prison as idle vagabonds, while they would willingly work but can find none that will hire them; for there is no more occasion for country labor, to which they have been bred, when there is no arable ground left. One shepherd can look after a flock, which will stock an extent of ground that would require many hands if it were to be plowed and reaped.

- Thomas More, *Utopia* (1516)

- They hang the man and flog the woman
Who steals the goose from off the common
Yet let the greater villain loose
That steals the common from the goose
- Anon. (England c. 1760)

3. Friday, July 11 – Chattel Slavery and the Making of the Atlantic World

- Edward Baptiste, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (Basic Books, 2016).
 - “Introduction: The Heart,” pp. xiii-xxvii
 - **Note:** read until the end of p. xxiii.
 - “Right Hand: 1815-1819,” pp. 75-110
 - **Note:** read the sections beginning and ending on pp. 75-83, 94-100, and 105-110, respectively.
 - “Left Hand: 1805-1861,” pp. 111-44

In class:

- Simón Rios, “\$8: The Complicated Story Behind One of the Most Repeated Statistics About Boston,” NPR WBUR Boston, July 8, 2021
(<https://www.wbur.org/news/2021/07/08/greater-boston-black-families-net-worth>).

4. Monday, July 14 – Colonialism I: Dynamics of Dispossession in British Africa

- Adam Hochschild, “The Wood That Weeps,” in *King Leopold’s Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa*, pp. 150-66 (Houghton Mifflin Co., 1998).
- Caroline Elkins, “Pax Britannica,” in *Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain’s Gulag in Kenya*, pp. 1-30 (Henry Holt and Co., 2005).
 - **Note:** read only the section beginning p. 12 and ending p. 18.
- Judith van Allen, “‘Sitting on a Man’: Colonialism and the Lost Political Institutions of the Igbo Women,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 6, no. 2 (1972): 165-81.

Extension:

- Mahmood Mamdani, “Decentralized Despotism,” in *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*, pp. 37-61 (Princeton University Press, 1996).

5. Tuesday, July 15 – Colonialism II: Spotlight on Occupied Palestine

- Khalid Rashidi, “Introduction,” in *The Hundred Years’ War on Palestine: A History of Settler-Colonialism and Resistance, 1917-2017*, pp. 1-15 (Metropolitan Books, 2021).
- **Watch:** *Louis Theroux: The Settlers*, from BBC (2025), 1:01:58 (<https://www.filmsforaction.org/watch/louis-theroux-the-settlers/>).
- Megan K. Stack, “For Palestinians, the Future Is Being Bulldozed,” *New York Times*, December 9, 2023.
- Emma Graham-Harrison and Quique Kierszenbaum, “Thousands of Israelis join violent, racist march through Jerusalem’s Muslim quarter,” *The Guardian*, May 26, 2025 (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/may/26/thousands-join-israeli-flag-march-through-muslim-quarter-of-old-city-in-jerusalem>).

In class:

- Mandalit del Barco, “‘Sounds like censorship to me.’ O cinema co-founder slams proposed eviction over film,” NPR WBEZ Chicago, March 15, 2025 (<https://www.npr.org/2025/03/15/nx-s1-5328740/miami-beach-o-cinema-no-other-land>).
- **Watch.** “No Other Land – Official UK Trailer,” Dogwoof, August 30, 2024, 00:02:29 (<https://youtu.be/-pI2IXKtlew?si=B4G2QwQFuKIRCEHn>).

Bonus:

- “A Threshold Crossed: Israeli Authorities and the Crimes of Apartheid and Persecution,” Human Rights Watch, April 27, 2021 (https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2021/04/israel_palestine0421_web_0.pdf).
- “Amnesty International investigation concludes Israel is committing genocide against Palestinians in Gaza,” Amnesty International, December 5, 2024 (<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/12/amnesty-international-concludes-israel-is-committing-genocide-against-palestinians-in-gaza/>).

Part II: “Market Logics”

6. Wednesday, July 16 – Neoliberalism I: Market Fundamentalism in Latin America

- Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2007).
 - “The Other Doctor Shock: Milton Friedman and the Search for a Laissez-Faire Laboratory,” pp. 56-83
 - “States of Shock: The Bloody Birth of the Counter-Revolution,” pp. 87-115
 - “Cleaning the Slate: Terror Does Its Work,” pp. 116-37

7. Thursday, July 17 – Neoliberalism II: Counterrevolutionary Class Project

- Loïc Wacquant, “Welfare ‘Reform’ as Poor Discipline and Statecraft,” in *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity*, pp. 76-109 (Duke University Press, 2009).
 - **Note:** read until the section ending p. 98.

- *Inside Job*, directed by Charles Ferguson, 2010, 1:48:00 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T2IaJwkqgPk>).
 - **Note:** start at 00:10:20.

- 8. Friday, July 18 – Neocolonialism I: Dependency, Debt Traps, and the Global South**
 - Jason Hickel, *The Divide: A Brief Guide to Global Inequality and its Solutions* (William Heinemann, 2017).
 - “Preface: Beginnings,” pp. 7-9 of file
 - “One: The Development Delusion,” pp. 11-32 of file
 - “Five: Debt and the Economics of Planned Misery,” pp. 118-47 of file
 - **Listen.** “The human cost of cobalt: modern slavery in the Democratic Republic of the Congo,” by WBUR’s On Point, March 2024, 00:46:33 (<https://www.wbur.org/onpoint/2024/03/13/human-cost-cobalt-modern-slavery-in-the-democratic-republic-of-congo>).

- 9. Monday, July 21 – Unequal Exchange**
 - **Watch.** *True Cost*, directed by Andrew Morgan, 2015, 1:32:00 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rwp0Bx0awoE>).
 - Reading TBD

Part III: Global Disparities

- 10. Tuesday, July 22 – The Climate Crisis**
 - Paul J. Crutzen, “Geology of Mankind,” *Nature* 415 (Jan 2002): 23.
 - “Extreme Carbon Inequality,” Oxfam, December 2, 2015 (https://www-cdn.oxfam.org/s3fs-public/file_attachments/mb-extreme-carbon-inequality-021215-en.pdf).
 - Jeff Goodell, “Island States,” *The Water Will Come: Rising Seas, Sinking Cities, and the Remaking of the Civilized World*, pp. 165-89 (Little, Brown and Company, 2017).
 - Jeff Goodell, “The Sweat Economy,” in *The Heat Will Kill You First: Life and Death on a Scorched Planet*, pp. 157-75 (Little, Brown and Company, 2023).

In class:

- Benjamin Franta, “Shell and Exxon’s secret 1980s climate change warnings,” *The Guardian*, September 19, 2018 (<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/climate-consensus-97-per-cent/2018/sep/19/shell-and-exxons-secret-1980s-climate-change-warnings>).

Extension:

- Andreas Malm, “Learning from Past Struggles,” in *How to Blow Up a Pipeline: Learning to Fight in a World on Fire*, pp. 5-63 (Verso, 2021).

11. Wednesday, July 23 – Gender Inequality

- Salar Mohandesi and Emma Teitelman, “Without Reserves,” in *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, pp. 37-67 (Pluto Press, 2017).
 - **Note:** read until the section ending p. 45.
- Cho Nam-Joo, *Kim Jiyong, Born 1982*, trans. Jamie Chang (Liveright, 2021).
 - “Childhood, 1982-1994,” pp. 13-40
 - **Note:** read until the section ending p. 27.
 - “Marriage, 2012-2015,” pp. 114-55
- Hyung Eun Kim, “Kim Ji-young, Born 1982: Feminist film reignites tensions in South Korea,” BBC, October 22, 2019 (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-50135152>).

In class:

- **Watch.** “Life in the Taliban’s Afghanistan,” by VICE News, Feb 2022, 00:44:06 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iFi_Rgm-T8).

Part IV: Conclusion

“The philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it.”

Karl Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach* (1845)

12. Thursday, July 24 – A Better World Is Possible

- Kōhei Saitō, “Capitalism’s Scarcity, Communism’s Abundance,” in *Slow Down: The Degrowth Manifesto*, trans. Brian Bergstrom, pp. 145-73 (Astra House, 2024).
- Peter S. Goodman, “Co-ops in Spain’s Basque Region Soften Capitalism’s Rough Edges,” *The New York Times*, December 29, 2020.
- Anu Partanen, “The Nordic Theory of Everything: Pippi’s Longstocking’s Magic,” in *The Nordic Theory of Everything: In Search of a Better Life*, pp. 47-62 (HarperCollins, 2016).
- Francesca Mari, “Imagine a Renter’s Utopia. It Might Look like Vienna,” *New York Times Magazine*, May 23, 2023.

13. Friday, July 25 – Final Exam