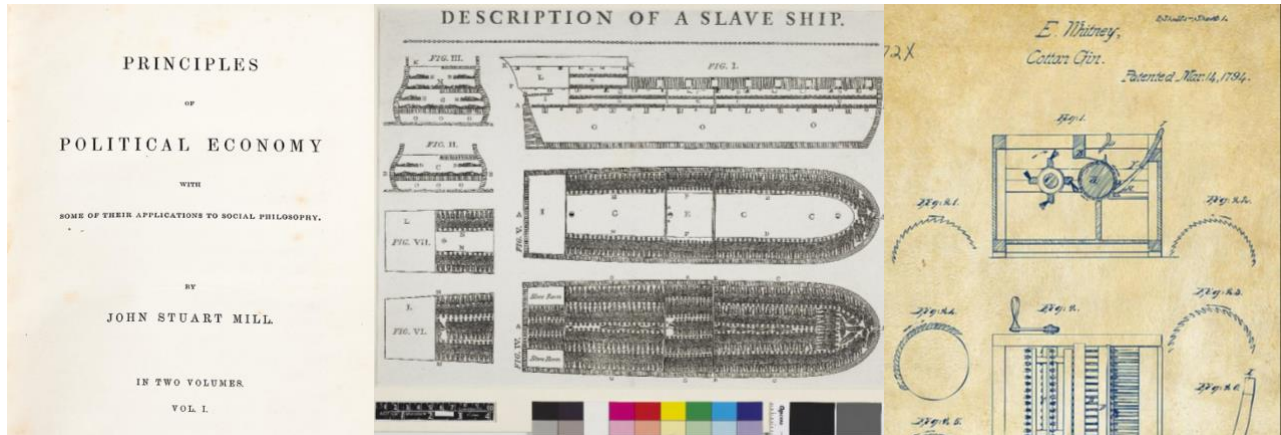


The Rise of Capitalism
Dartmouth College
Political Economy Project and Department of Government



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Course Description

This class explores key texts, concepts, and themes in modern political theory during the rise and development of capitalism, from the late seventeenth century to the present. Throughout its history, capitalism has been continuously justified, critiqued, and redefined by way of such key political ideas as liberty, equality, property, and progress. Likewise, political theory has been fundamentally shaped by historical transformations in economic life bound up with the development of modern capitalist societies, from agrarian capitalism and the Industrial Revolution to colonial slavery and the high-tech economy. Our approach will be to place primary texts in Western political thought within the socioeconomic contexts in which they were originally written and read, paying particular attention to how political thinkers have responded to pivotal events, innovations, crises, and policies that marked the capitalist societies in which they lived. Each week will focus on a specific moment of convergence between political theory and the history of capitalism. In the first two weeks, we will read classic works on the history of capitalism by social and political theorists in order to gain conceptual clarity on what capitalism is as well as when and how it began. In subsequent weeks we will: read founding works of early-modern political economy against the backdrop of England's monetary and agrarian crises in the late seventeenth century; explore Enlightenment debates about commercial society through the lens of global commerce and colonial slavery in the eighteenth century; probe the connections between liberal political thought, imperialism, and industrial capitalism in the nineteenth century; and analyze the ways in which neoclassical political economy and critical theory emerged and transformed in response to the rise of neoliberalism and the global high-tech economy since the latter half of the twentieth century. Through readings, in-class discussions, presentations and a research paper, students will acquire an in-depth understanding of central concepts and problems in Western political theory and develop the necessary skills to analyze, discuss, and write about such concepts and problems within a long-range socioeconomic context.