The course counts as an American literature course, a seminar, and an advanced theory course. We will examine representations of commercial life in fiction, film, journalism, economic theory, and a memoir by the first great oil magnate, John D. Rockefeller. We will consider the sorts of narratives that appear in these different genres, including in recent critiques of neo-liberalism. Yes, economic texts involves narratives of the subject (the desires, motives, aspirations, anxieties that constitute a subject). We will ask how characters and persons in these texts experience commercial life in different settings. To what extent do persons and fictional characters identify themselves through commercial relations? How does economic life affect our sense of ourselves?

Course materials. I may decide to order one or two short novels, but generally we will read short literature, excerpts or discrete chapters from economic (and some political) texts, or brief essays by economic theorists. We will read short literature by Thomas Paine, Benjamin Franklin, Mark Twain, Alice Dunbar-Nelson, Herman Melville, Louise Erdrich, Don DeLillo, and several others, and study a few films, like Margin Call (2011), which we will view when we consider materials about the global financial crisis @2008. We will also study the Harold Lloyd spectacular (at the time) Safety Last! (1923) and Frank Capra’s It’s a Wonderful Life (1946). We will read recent newspaper articles about economic life and read excerpts by economic theorists like Adam Smith, Milton Friedman, John Maynard Keynes, Thorstein Veblen, Karl Marx, and Joseph Stiglitz. We will examine several critiques of neo-liberalism, by Etienne Balibar, for example. We will examine the economic materials as narratives, recounting the progress of economies but also the aspirations of individuals and populations. Generally, we will attend carefully to the language and strategies of all the course materials, so that we can learn how to interpret them. The range of materials will give us a broader view of the issues than reading fewer, longer texts. All of the films we study should be available for streaming through the Marriott Library, though sometimes the stream is more consistent through Netflix or YouTube or other websites.

Most of the selections from economic theory are accessible to a general audience. The excerpts from John Locke and Adam Smith and the essays by John Maynard Keynes and Milton Friedman—all very famous figures—are straightforward as well as brief. Each author tells a lively story. Thorstein Veblen wrote more difficult prose (he did so deliberately, for reasons I will explain when we study him), but the excerpt is not that long and not that hard, and Veblen introduces a crucial concept, “pecuniary emulation,” as well as the better known “conspicuous consumption.” The 20-page excerpt we will study from Karl Marx’s Capital, on the inevitable concentration of capital, is hard to read, a result of his writing style, quirks of German, and problems of translation. But this excerpt, I think, explains a key element of modern economic activity. (Consider the frequency of mergers nowadays. Google and Amazon, for example, constantly seek means to expand their footprint, as in Google’s acquisition of YouTube or Amazon’s recent acquisition of Whole Foods and the online pharmacy PillPack. The U.S. government has just permitted T-Mobile and Sprint to merge. Globalization was well underway in the 19th century.) Marx thinks people desire the concentration of capital (and thus the huge growth of a few firms at the expense of smaller firms and at the expense of labor), even as we protest many of the effects of these increases in economies of scale. The Marx is difficult, but you will forever think differently about large scale capitalization and consumer demand. And the Marx prepares to understand some recent critiques of neo-liberalism.
PROVISIONAL WEEKLY SYLLABUS

This course was rescheduled from a T/Th class to a MW class on October 16. I have not yet had a chance to adjust the present T/Th schedule on the syllabus.

All readings for this course are available on Canvas, or in at a web address. I have ordered no texts for the course; you may have to rent one or two of the films. Submit all formal essays by email; send to h.horwitz@utah.edu. When you submit essays, you MUST attach the essay as a Word file (.doc or .docx; don’t paste the text into the email) and label the file with your name (not my name or a topic name) (for example: Jones1stEssay, or Jones_DeLillo; not HorwitzEssay#1 or TwainEssay#1).

Week #1 (January 7): Introduction
   excerpt from John Locke, “Of Property”
   (Jan. 9) excerpt from Adam Smith, Wealth of Nations
   excerpts from Thomas Paine, Common Sense
   begin reading Matters of Composition (MC), Sections 1 & 2, & 7

Week #2 (Jan. 14): Mark Twain, “The £1,000,000 Bank Note”
   (Jan. 16): excerpts from Thorstein Veblen, Theory of the Leisure Class
   TWO-PAGE OPTIONAL, DIAGNOSTIC ESSAY on Paine, due Friday

Week #3 (Jan. 21): Benjamin Franklin, 1758 Preface (“The Way to Wealth”)
   Franklin, “The Nature and Necessity of Paper Currency” (1729)
   Franklin, “The Internal State of America” (1785?)
   Maurizio Lazzarato, “Neoliberalism, the Financial Crisis
   and the End of the Liberal State,” Theory, Culture, & Society
   Read in MC, Sections 10 & 11

Week #4 (Jan. 28): Herman Melville, “The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus
   of Maids”
   Alice Kessler-Harris, excerpt from Out Of Work
   (Jan. 30): Alice Dunbar-Nelson, “Mrs. Newly-Wed and Her Servants”
   (@ 1900)
   Nelson D. Schwartz, “At Carrier, the Factory Trump Saved,
   Morale Is Through the Floor,”
**Week #5 (Feb. 4):** *Real Women Have Curves* (2002, dir. Patricia Cardoso)
(Feb. 6): finish *Real Women Have Curves*

Paton & Lazazzera, “Inside Italy’s Shadow Economy”
*(NY Times, 9/20/2018)*


**Week #6 (Feb. 11):** *Safety Last!* (1923, dirs. Newmeyer and Taylor; starring Harold Lloyd)
(Feb. 13) finish *Safety Last!*

Keith Bryant & Henry Dethloff, “Retailing,” from *A History of American Business*

**FIRST ESSAY DUE: Friday, by 5 PM.**

**Week #7 (Feb. 18):** Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume 1, excerpt from Chapter 25, “The General Law of Capitalist Accumulation”

**Week #8 (Feb. 25):** John D. Rockefeller, from *Random Reminiscences of Men and Events* (1904)

Bryant & Dethloff, “Multinational Corporations,” from *A History of American Business*

(Feb. 27): John Maynard Keynes, “Saving and Spending” (January 1931)

Milton Friedman, “Relation between Economic Freedom and Political Freedom” (1964)

Review in MC, Sections 10 & 11

**Revision of first essay, due Friday, Feb. 28**

**Week #9 (March 3):** Charles Chesnutt, “The Goophered Grapevine” (1887)

(March 5): *It’s a Wonderful Life* (1946, dir. Capra)

**SPRING BREAK, NO CLASSES, March 8-15**

**Week #10 (March 17):** Don DeLillo, “Hammer and Sickle”
Frederic Jameson, “Culture and Finance Capital,”  
*Critical Inquiry* (Autumn 1997): 246-65  
(March 19): Richard A. Posner, chapter from *A Failure of Capitalism*  
Joseph Stiglitz, excerpts from *Freefall*  
Review in MC, Sections 10 & 11  
SECOND ESSAY DUE: Friday

Week #11 (March 24 & 26): *Margin Call* (2011, dir. Chandor)  
PROPOSAL FOR SEMINAR ESSAY DUE: Friday

Week #12 (March 31): Robert J. Schiller, “Narrative Economics,”  
Michel Foucault, lecture 10 and excerpts from lecture 5, *The Birth of Biopolitics*  
Review in MC, Sections 10 & 11

Week #13 (April 7): Student presentations start  
(April 9): Student presentations  
Revisions of second essay due Friday

Week #14 (April 14): Student presentations  
(April 16): Student presentations  

Week #15 (April 21): Student presentations  
FIVE PAGES OF SEMINAR ESSAY DUE: Monday  
(for students presenting on April 16 or April 21, 5 pages due Friday)

SEMINAR ESSAY DUE: Wednesday, April 29