WEALTH AND CULTURE
A 21st Century Challenges Course

In 2012, there were more than 1,000 billionaires in the world. Their private jets, vacation homes, mansions, cars, yachts, and attire are objects of both desire and envy. While globalized images that fuel fantasies of luxurious consumption are ubiquitous, the possibility of living out those dreams of vast wealth remains minimal or nonexistent for most of the world’s people.

How are wealth and poverty experienced, and how does the global economic crisis register in the daily lives of people in North America, Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Europe? Looking beyond media headlines, how do precariousness, austerity programs, and economic crisis shape new political subjectivities and debates among citizens about the compatibility of wealth and democracy, and about what constitutes a fair economy? Why has the gap between the ultra-rich and the rest widened to historically unprecedented levels? How has the nature of wealth changed over time? How do scholars explain today’s global economic crisis? How do people cope with increasing economic precariousness? Course themes include what constitutes wealth, why it is accumulated, how competition for it is institutionalized; how it is won, lost, exchanged, and displayed; and what moral and social obligations people believe its possession entails.

The format of class meetings includes lectures, group discussions, films, in-class writing exercises, and work groups. Readings are drawn from anthropology as well as other disciplines.

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Core Curriculum Goals
Group I: 21st Century Challenges
a. Analyze the degree to which forms of human difference shape a person’s experiences of and perspectives on the world.
b. Analyze issues of social justice across local and global contexts.

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Department Learning Goals Met by this Course
Identify, explain, and historically contextualize fundamental concepts, modes of analysis, and central questions concerning the anthropological study of wealth, and demonstrate proficient use of this knowledge. Students will be able to demonstrate proficiency in their use of critical thinking skills; and will be able to express themselves knowledgeably and proficiently in writing and speaking about central issues in this area of scholarly inquiry.

This interdisciplinary course will help students to develop critical analytical skills for interpreting today’s global economic crisis as it is portrayed in both scholarship and mass media. It will enable students to probe popular conceptions of the economy, demystify its workings, understand historical reasons for today’s great divide between affluence and poverty, explore how people cope with increasing economic precariousness, analyze how rules of economic competition are defined and
institutionalized, and assess competing notions of economic justice in a world where the incomes of the wealthiest individuals exceed those of entire nations.

**Course Objectives**

- To provide students with concrete knowledge about historical reasons for today’s great divide between affluence and poverty, and to examine how people cope with economic precariousness.
- To introduce students to key concepts and debates in the study of consumption, production, and exchange; and to analyze the place of culture in those debates.
- To explore how ideas about wealth and the purpose of the economy shape perceptions of self, family, society, nation, and citizenship.
- To help students develop critical analytical skills for interpreting today’s global economic crisis as it is portrayed in both mass media and scholarship.

**Required Texts:** Articles and book chapters will be available on the Sakai course site or through databases such as AnthroSource that are accessible online through Rutgers libraries. Readings are drawn from anthropology, economics, political science, history, sociology, psychology, journalism, and literature. Supplemental materials include ethnographic and popular films.

**Requirements** include regular attendance, completing assigned readings on time (so that you are prepared to discuss them in class), participation in class discussions, two in-class examinations during the semester, a 30-minute quiz on December 6, and pop quizzes. Quizzes and exams will cover assigned readings, lectures, and films. There will be no final exam.

**Pop quizzes** will be given during the first 10 minutes of some class meetings. These quizzes cannot be made up and cannot be taken by those who arrive late to class. The lowest pop quiz score will be dropped.

**Grades** will be determined as follows:

- Pop quizzes = 20%
- In-class exam #1 (Oct. 4) = 25%
- In-class exam #2 (Nov. 8) = 25%
- 30-minute quiz during week 14 (Dec. 6) = 15%
- Attendance and participation = 15%

**Make-ups of the two in-class exams and 30-minute quiz will not be allowed except in emergencies (medical or death in the family).** If you miss an exam you must notify the instructor of the reason no more than 24 hours later, and provide documentation of the reason. (Be sure to notify the instructor by both voice mail and email.) *Travel plans are not an acceptable reason for missing an exam.* *Make your travel arrangements so that you will be in class when exams are given.*

**Attendance:** Students are expected to attend all classes. The only excused absences are for medical reasons, a death in the family, or a religious holiday. (See statement below about requirement for advance notification of a necessary absence due to a religious holiday.)
If you expect to miss one or two classes (for allowable reasons), please use the University absence reporting website [https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra](https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra) to indicate the date and reason for your absence. An email is automatically sent to me. **Students are required to see a Dean of Students for assistance in verifying the circumstances of any absence longer than one week, or when an exam is missed.**

Points will be deducted for class absences as follows: 30% of the total possible points for the attendance and participation portion of the grade will be deducted if three classes are missed; 75% will be deducted if four classes are missed; 100% if five classes are missed. Anyone who misses five or more class meetings (28% of the total number of meetings) is advised to drop the course.

**Religious Holidays:** Please notify the instructor during the first two weeks of the semester if you will observe a religious holiday that will prevent you from attending a class meeting. You may arrange to make up the missed session and any required work (sometimes through an oral quiz on assigned readings)—if you **notify the instructor during the first two weeks of the semester.**

**Lateness:** To avoid disrupting the class, students should arrive on time. Repeated lateness will result in substantial point deductions from the attendance portion of your grade.

**Classroom atmosphere:** We are all responsible for creating a friendly, relaxed, and productive classroom atmosphere. That requires listening respectfully to everyone, phrasing comments constructively and politely, turning off cell phones and other electronic devices, coming to class on time, and refraining from reading the newspaper or working on other assignments during class. (No recording devices may be used during class.) *How well you practice these common courtesies will be reflected in the class attendance and participation portion of your grade.*

**Communication:** All students are responsible for timely attention to email and Sakai postings for this course and therefore should check the Sakai site and their Rutgers email accounts regularly. Dates and assignments may change; all changes will be announced in class or posted on Sakai or both. To access Sakai go to [http://sakai.rutgers.edu](http://sakai.rutgers.edu), log in with your Rutgers userid and password, and use the course membership tool to access class materials.

**Students with disabilities** requesting accommodations must follow the procedures outlined at [http://disabilityservices.rutgers.edu/request.html](http://disabilityservices.rutgers.edu/request.html).

**Ethics/Academic Integrity:** Be careful to avoid plagiarism and cheating. See the Rutgers academic integrity policy at [http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/integrity.shtml](http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/integrity.shtml). Violations include cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, denying others access to information or material, and facilitating violations of academic integrity.

You are responsible for knowing what plagiarism is. For tips about how to consult sources without plagiarizing—how to take notes so that you don't plagiarize by accident, see [http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/rul/lib_instruct/instruct_document.shtml](http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/rul/lib_instruct/instruct_document.shtml)

Students should take a 20-minute interactive tutorial on Plagiarism and Academic Integrity: [http://sccweb.scc-net.rutgers.edu/douglass/sal/plagiarism/Intro.html](http://sccweb.scc-net.rutgers.edu/douglass/sal/plagiarism/Intro.html)

**Additional Resources:**
--Current and historical data on income inequality in the United States, by economists Thomas
Piketty and Emmanuel Saez: <http://elsa.berkeley.edu/~saez/>
--Glossaries of terms relevant to the financial crisis (on Sakai site)

References/Optional: What Is Culture?

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SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READINGS

Week 1/Sept. 4 & 6  RICHISTAN


Film: Born Rich, Part 1

Week 2/Sept. 11 & 13  THE GREAT WEALTH GAP


Film: Born Rich, Part 2

Reference/Optional:

Week 3/ Sept. 18 & 21  THE GREAT RISK SHIFT

Week 4/Sept. 25 & 27 THE INSECURE AMERICAN


Film: Roger and Me (excerpts)

Week 5/Oct. 2 & 4 SECRETS OF SUCCESS IN AMERICA...AND THE CONVERSATION WE AVOID


--Stephanie Greenwood, ed., 2007, 10 Excellent Reasons Not To Hate Taxes. New York and
London: The New Press. 3 Excerpts: David Cay Johnston, “Introduction” (pp. 1-9); Matthew Gardner, “Progressive taxes are a good deal” (pp. 10-21); and Chuck Collins, “Taxes pay for economic opportunity” (pp. 85-96).

**EXAM #1, Thursday, Oct. 4**

Week 6/ Oct. 9 & 11  **ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE “MYSTIQUE” OF FINANCE**

http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/2008/oct/31/creditcrunch-gillian-tett-financial-times
   [To access Powell’s article, go to http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/cms/findarticles and then to “search indexes and databases.” Log in with your netid, and then go to “indexes and databases” and then to Wiley Online Library and enter search terms for the Powell article.]

Film: *Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room*, Part 1

**WALL STREET AND THE ECONOMY OF APPEARANCES**


Film: *Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room*, Part 2

**GLOBAL FINANCIAL CRISIS**

--Short online videos explaining the crisis TBA.

Film: *Inside Job*
Optional/Supplemental Resources

EXTRA CREDIT

Week 9/Oct. 30 & Nov. 1 BUILDING THE HUMAN ECONOMY

Week 10/Nov. 6 & 8 DEVIL PACTS, MARKET MENTALITIES, CONSUMER DESIRE

Film: A Way to Move On

EXAM #2, Thursday, Nov. 8

Week 11/Nov. 13 & 15 THE WAL-MART DEBATE
--Wal-Mart Watch http://walmartwatch.com

Film: Wal*Mart: The High Cost of Low Price
Week 12/Nov. 20  **GENDER, CORPORATE DISCIPLINE, MOBBING**  

[Guest Instructor: Tayo Jolaosho]


**Thanksgiving break, Nov. 22-25**

Week 13/Nov. 27 & 29  **MORAL ECONOMY?**


Week 14/Dec. 4 & 6  **ANOTHER WORLD IS POSSIBLE**


--Occupy movements (readings TBA)

**30-MINUTE QUIZ, THURSDAY, DEC. 6**

Week 15/Dec. 11  **COURSE WRAP-UP**

--TBA [30-minute quiz if Dec. 6 is a snow day]