

Colloq: Political Economy

Dr. Rafe Blaufarb

M 12-3pm

Before economics and politics split from each other to form separate disciplines, there was political economy. From about 1750 to 1850, political economy was arguably the most influential intellectual endeavors underway in both Europe and the Americas. Many of its leading lights are now forgotten, but it played a considerable role in shaping the modern world. To invoke its best-known practitioner, Adam Smith, is enough to show the extent of capitalism's debt to political economy. To name its gravedigger, Karl Marx, a philosopher who explicitly framed his most famous work *Das Kapital* as an attack on political economy, amply illustrates its impact. Although the political economists were sometimes called simply "economists," do not be fooled. Unlike today's number-crunching, narrowly focused social-scientists, the political economists of 1750-1850 debated virtually all the burning social and political issues of their day: monarchy vs. republicanism, nobility, the role of religion, colonies, race, slavery, women's capacities, and, of course, all forms of economic activity, from industrialization to peasant agriculture. And they did not shy away from moral philosophy, treating issues such as self-interest, honor, shame, fear, virtue, love, and hate. Political economy was ground zero of intellectual life during the age of Revolution.

Currently, this field of scholarship is very dynamic. Each week, we will read an important recent work and discuss it with the author, who will be joining us virtually. The weekly meetings will include sessions on 1) credit and debt, 2) morality and politics, 3) early modern globalization and Atlantic empire, 4) material culture and fashion, 5) money, 6) labor, 7) revolutionary working-class mobilization, 8) the family, 9) war, and 10) democracy.

This course will help prepare you to teach courses in the age of Atlantic revolutions, intellectual history, economic history, political theory, and European history surveys. It will help prepare you for comprehensive examination fields in Atlantic history, European history, and intellectual history.