For the period covered in this course—from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries in the Atlantic World—money was not an arbitrary marker of value that had organically developed to facilitate trade, but rather was the product of state power, an assertion of sovereignty, and ultimately, a means of ruling. The history of money, then, is fundamentally a political history, one recovered through a focus on elections, policymaking, and the legal system (e.g. the state’s ability to declare some money as suitable for paying taxes or mandating its acceptance as legal tender for settling private contracts). But money’s history is political in a second (and more expansive) sense of the word, relating to the exercise of power in the realm of society and culture. Money—in its tangible form and as an abstract concept—functions to constitute or reflect forms of identity, as well as to construct and contest structural categories of difference like race, gender, and class. Struggles to control money’s availability through law and to control money’s meaning through culture combine to reveal the broader contours of power in the past. If we add in questions about the forms of knowledge and technology (institutionalized and tacit) involved in the making and using of money, then the history of money provides an even greater opportunity to consider the nature of historical change, especially the relationship of the material and the ideological in shaping historical outcomes.

Scholars in any number of fields have theorized money, and in some cases have claimed primacy for the insights of their particular discipline. In this class, we will not presume that what economists say is “truer” than what sociologists say, what anthropologists, say, or what literary theorists say, or vice-versa. Just because scholars in a given discipline make confident claims about what money is or how money works, it doesn’t automatically follow that such characterizations will apply to the specific times and places in the past we are studying. No discipline has a monopoly on explanations for what happened hundreds of years ago, but we will privilege History as a capacious methodology that can draw on theoretical insights from multiple fields while at the same time committing itself to (pardon the cliché) seeing the past as “a foreign country.” Readings this semester will engage scholars in other disciplines, but mostly we will be discussing the work of historians and thinking aloud about their strategies for recovering the texture of lived experience, for reconstructing lost mental universes, and for writing about people in the past not as timeless exemplars of homo economicus, but rather as people embedded in specific times and places with distinctive possibilities and constraints on what can be done and what can be imagined.

Students in the seminar will hone their skills as critical readers, writers, and thinkers. They will also produce substantial research papers that rely on both primary and secondary sources. In these projects, students can develop topics of their own choosing, ideally topics not addressed in the assigned readings on the syllabus. The history of money is vast and expansive and it is my hope that students can identify new topics, approaches, and sources for future versions of this course.
Logistics
Seminar Meetings: Wednesdays 3:00–5:30 p.m
Office Hours: 220 Sharpe House, Tuesdays 1:30–3:30, and by appointment
Contact Information: Seth_Rockman@brown.edu; 863-2819

Course Requirements
Weekly Seminar Writing: 15%. Students will be divided into several groups, each of which will have a responsibility that rotates weekly, most notably (a) writing 350-500 words in advance of seminar in order to frame the discussion; and (b) writing 350-500 words after the seminar in order to assess the conversation and suggest threads to pull into the next week. These essays will circulate to the whole class. We will set the groups and define the responsibilities once enrollments are finalized.

Discussion: 15%. Seminars are successful to the extent that students can organize a sustained productive conversation that delves deeply into the reading. Students who find it challenging to articulate their best thoughts in class are welcome to use other means—emails to the class, for example—to compensate. Here is a rubric for assessing seminar participation:

Outstanding: Contributions in class reflect exceptional preparation. Ideas offered are always substantive, provide one or more major insights as well as direction for the class. Challenges are well substantiated and persuasively presented. If this person were not a member of the class, the quality of discussion would be diminished markedly.

Good: Contributions in class reflect thorough preparation. Ideas offered are usually substantive, provide good insights and sometimes direction for the class. Challenges are well substantiated and often persuasive. If this person were not present, the quality of discussion would be diminished.

Adequate: Contributions in class reflect satisfactory preparation. Ideas offered are sometimes substantive, provide generally useful insights but seldom offer a new direction for the discussion. Challenges are sometimes presented, fairly well substantiated, and are sometimes persuasive. If this person were not a member of the class, the quality of discussion would be diminished.

Non-Participant: This person says little or nothing in class. Hence, there is not an adequate basis for evaluation. If this person were not present, the quality of discussion would be unchanged.

Unsatisfactory: Contributions in class reflect inadequate preparation. Ideas offered are seldom substantive, provide few if any insights and never a constructive direction for the class. Integrative comments and effective challenges are absent. If this person were not a member of the class, valuable air-time would be saved.

Primary Source Essay: 20%. This 6-8 paper due Friday, February 21 at 5:00 pm. It involves locating and analyzing a seventeenth or eighteenth-century treatise on money, putting a primary source in conversation with assigned readings on the syllabus. The primary document can be read electronically or (ideally) at the Hay Library or the John Carter Brown Library.

Research Paper: 50%. This paper is due Saturday, May 9 at 5:00 pm. It will be 15-20 pages in length and use both primary and secondary sources. There are several intermediate deadlines: Friday, March 20: a 2-page memo outlining a possible topic and sources; and Friday, April 17: a 6-page research paper proposal that reveals already having done some primary and secondary source research, plus a bibliography. Students have mandatory meetings with the professor in regard to the paper, especially in the period between April 17 and May 9.
Schedule and Readings

Books for sale at Brown Bookstore and on Reserve at the Rock. Articles and chapters on Canvas.

Note on Syllabus Design: Ann Daly (Ph.D. ’20) and Julia Rock (*19) contributed substantially to the organization of this class.

**Wednesday, January 22: Introductory Meeting**

**Wednesday, January 29: Frameworks and Provocations**


**Wednesday, February 5: A Refresher in Early American History**


**Wednesday, February 12: Atlantic Money**


**Wednesday, February 19: Colonial Money**


**Friday, February 21: 6-8 page paper due**

**Wednesday, February 26: Money and the American Revolution**


**Wednesday, March 4: Money and the New American State**


Robert Morris and Thomas Jefferson, “Notes on Coinage,” seven documents, 1782–1785


Coinage Act of 1792
**Wednesday, March 11: Economic Culture**


**Wednesday March 18: Using Money**


Kimberly M. Welch, *Black Litigants in the Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), ch. 4 (“Your Word is Your Bond”)


**Friday, March 20: Paper Topic Memo Due**

**Wednesday, April 1: Race, Slavery, and Settler Colonialism**


Sharon Murphy, “TBD”


**Wednesday, April 8: Bank Wars and the Money Question, I**


**Wednesday, April 15: Bank Wars and the Money Question, II**


Petitions to US Congress on the Re-chartering of the Second Bank of the United States

Additional Whig polemics on money, to be determined.

**Friday, April 17: Research Paper Proposal Due**

**Wednesday, April 22: Global Money Markets**

Ann Daly, “TBD,” work in progress.


**Wednesday, April 29: possible reading week meeting**
May 9: Due Date for Final Paper

Course Policies

Accommodations: Students who need different accommodations to meet the course requirements should consult SEAS and meet with me to make appropriate arrangements. Whatever the circumstances, please speak with me if you're having a problem in the class and I will work to find a solution. Meetings cannot be recorded without advanced permission.

Attendance: It is a seminar so you need to be at every class session. Meetings are not easily “made up,” especially not by asking for an individual meeting to go over the readings.

Cheating and Plagiarism: Those who violate either the letter or spirit of Brown University regulations will face disciplinary proceedings and may automatically fail the course. See: http://www.brown.edu/academics/college/degree/policies/academic-code

Classroom Environment: Mutual respect and tolerance will further everyone’s learning experience. To that end, participants in this course will exchange ideas in an atmosphere of civility and open-mindedness. Students are encouraged to express themselves openly with the expectation that their voices and opinions will be heard. Also in the spirit of mutual respect, students must value the time of their colleagues by keeping phones out of sight, using technology appropriately (if at all), arriving before class begins, and keeping eating and drinking silent. Adherence to these few basic standards will be reflected in students’ participation grade.

Workload: The total of in-class hours and out-of-class work for this course is approximately 190 hours over the semester. Students seeking to maximize their learning can expect to spend 39 hours in class (3 hours per week for 13 weeks), 96 hours reading for class (approx. 9 hours per week for 12 weeks), 5 total hours on weekly response papers, 50 hours researching and writing an original research paper based on primary source research. Actual times will vary for each student; final grades are not determined by the amount of time a student spends on the course.