

American Money

Money is famously difficult to talk about: too awkward, too divisive, too complicated, too abstract, too personal. In this course, we look at how contemporary American writers, philosophers and filmmakers have chosen to talk about money, and how these conversations involve questions of class, justice, work, race and gender. In the first unit of the course, students will watch the 2015 film *The Big Short* and read sociological writing about the culture of Wall Street, in order to explore how the film portrays [the values and practices of the financial industry](#). Unit Two focuses on arguments made by contemporary philosophers and journalists about how individuals and governments should spend their money in order to reflect their values and create a just and healthy world: readings will include Ta-Nehisi Coates's article "[The Case for Reparations](#)", Silvia Federici's manifesto "Wages Against Housework" and Michael Sandel's work on morals and markets. We will ask questions such as: [What is money?](#) How do we decide what monetary value to place upon love, or a nation's racist history, or [body parts](#)—and is there anything that should *not* have a price put on it? How does money interact with race, class and gender in the United States, and how does it mediate our personal relationships? The final unit of the course presents students with a selection of recent films and television series, including *Magic Mike* (2012), *Support the Girls* (2018) and *Mad Men* (2007-15), that raise questions about the relationship between money, work and gender. Focusing on one of the suggested films or television shows, students will undertake their own research and, in conversation with the scholarship of other critics, write a paper about how money and value function in their chosen work.