

Trump” (p. 244). Surely other factors—both structural and long-term as well as contingent—came into play.

*Turbulent Empires*, then, is best read as a reporter’s notebook about economics and politics in the post-1945 world. While it lacks the you-were-there sense of Robert Kaplan’s writings, Mason’s book takes an expansive view of the post-World War II world and offers some useful insights in prose that is unburdened by academic stuffiness.

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Accounting for Capitalism: The World the Clerk Made. *By Michael Zakim.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018. ix + 247 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. Cloth, \$50.00. ISBN: 978-0-226-97797-3.

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Reviewed by Brian P. Luskey

Michael Zakim’s new book is an exemplar of recent scholarship on American capitalism in the nineteenth century. Zakim’s succinct, elegant, and smart prose will not surprise readers of his previous work (*Ready-Made Democracy* [2003] and *Capitalism Takes Command* [2012]). The impressive methodological breadth of the book under review might do so. Zakim finds capital’s history in unlikely places, from material objects to the built environment, from people’s bodies to the compiling of the federal census. Like the best practitioners in the field, though, he is adept at showing how these multiple methodologies are absolutely necessary if we are to comprehend the intimate relationship between capitalism and American society.

Capitalism, Zakim explains, constituted an economic and social revolution that unfolded in the commercial counting room as much as in the artisanal crafts. At desks and store counters, a burgeoning group of young, male clerks took hold of an array of materials—pen, ink, paper—to produce that revolution in text and transaction. Their busy-ness created columns of debts and credits, correspondence, and contracts that did not merely reflect the market. Clerks’ work made the flow of capital and credit legible and, in cultural terms, legitimate. Clerks, the foot soldiers in this revolution, encountered the considerable health risks of hunching over desks in service to capital’s commands. Digestive, optical, and postural maladies were the clerks’ lot, born of their alienation from farm and workshop and the industrial revolution

they experienced and recorded. While clerical handwork made some young men sick, American observers were sickened by the apparent degeneration of American manhood behind the inkstand and till.

Capital made men in subtler and more fundamental ways, too. Whereas older cultural histories (mine included) claimed that identity emerged in roiling debates made up of clerks' assertions of self and the replies of anxious and critical contemporaries who sought to make sense of them, Zakim contends persuasively that identity was prepackaged in and by capital's industrializing processes. "Individualism," he shows, "promot[ed] the private self into the foundation of public order," but ultimately only funneled commercial men more completely into capital's vortex (p. 109). The striver's self-making, therefore, was one of capital's entrapments, mediated through bookkeeping institutes, mercantile libraries, and the store-bought diaries that functioned for clerks as personal "balance sheet[s]" not unlike the ledgers they tallied for employers (p. 119). Clerks, who typically bathed themselves in excessive self-regard and carped about a lack of respect, were convinced that they would succeed to positions of proprietorship through hard work and perseverance. They would have been dismayed by the logics and fictions—which they only dimly understood—that made them into "human capital," Zakim's summation of capitalist transformation's bleak essence in antebellum America (p. 197). As prescient writers such as Henry David Thoreau knew, however, most everyone had to bend to capital's incessant pressure to become his or her own bookkeeper or risk the consequences of imminent failure. The only opposition mustered against this powerful economic and social system was made by the languishing and ineffectual "loafer" who, like Herman Melville's "incomprehensible" Bartleby, "would prefer not to" (p. 84). In the end, as Zakim shows in a compelling chapter on statistics, the numeracy that made markets legible and legitimate would encompass American society and put into question its vaunted individualism.

The subtitle of this book, then, undersells what I think Zakim accomplishes in this book. *Accounting for Capitalism* is about how capital made "individualistic" American individuals in ways not of their choosing. Clerks—read: all Americans—made neither themselves nor the system in which they were forced to operate. Capital came to govern Americans and their society before the Civil War, and Zakim's book constitutes a broad-gauged examination of agency and its absence in modern capitalism. However, because Zakim evokes Eugene Genovese's *The World the Slaveholders Made* (1969) and the subtitle of his *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (1974), I must ask, in light of the field's current emphasis on slavery and capitalism: Whither the Slave Power in this exploration of the Money Power? Zakim's focus is

on young men in the rapidly growing northeastern metropolis, and that is, for any one book, more than enough. His excellent work should be read alongside new monographs like Caitlin Rosenthal's recent *Accounting for Slavery* (2018) to appreciate the ways worshipping mammon, acceding to its demands, cultivating its attendant processes, and succumbing to its competitions and coercions defined the nation as a whole in the nineteenth century.

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The Moral Economists: R. H. Tawney, Karl Polanyi, E. P. Thompson, and the Critique of Capitalism. *By Tim Rogan.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017. viii + 263 pp. Notes, index. Cloth, \$39.95. ISBN: 978-0-691-17300-9.

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Reviewed by Jim Tomlinson

*The Moral Economists* is a highly impressive but also very curious book. It is avowedly political in purpose, but this political endeavor leads to a highly theoretical text. The aim is to search for a theoretical foundation for a solidaristic politics and to do so by reexamining the work of the three historians of modern capitalism listed in the title. These three are seen as constituting a lineage of "moral economists" who grappled with finding an alternative to utilitarianism as an underpinning for understanding society. R. H. Tawney is identified as having been most successful in this endeavor, but, it is argued, his Christianity-based arguments have lost their purchase in our secular world; so what we need today is a nonreligious grounding for our anti-utilitarianism. For author Tim Rogan, this is best looked for in the social choice work of Kenneth Arrow and, building on Arrow's foundations, the work of Amartya Sen.

The book is, above all, an exceptionally rich intellectual history, where the work of the three "moral economists" is located in its historical context, but where what is most distinctive is a story of the interconnections between their work. For Tawney, the key text is seen as *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (1922), in which he sought to establish the key moments in the decline of moral constraints on self-seeking economic action in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Central to his story is the growth of a sharp divide between religious concerns and