



Listening Guide

Episode 3: Ships, Swords, and Fences

From the voyages of Columbus and Vasco da Gama to colonial conquest and the Atlantic Slave Trade, to the privatization of land in western Europe: humanity's turn from feudalism toward the capitalist world we live in now, from the late 1300s through 1800.

Features of Capitalism

Private Ownership

Accumulation and Investment of Capital

Wage Labor

SCENE **•ON** RADIO
Season 7: Capitalism

Episode by John Biewen, with co-host Ellen McGirt.
Interviews with Jayati Ghosh, Jason Hickel, Jessica Moody, Charisse Burden-Stelly, Silvia Federici, and Eleanor Janega.

Visit sceneonradio.org/capitalism-educator-resources to access transcripts, the Features of Capitalism explainer, and other resources.

Before You Listen

- Think back to what you've learned about European exploration, colonialism, and the Atlantic slave trade. What questions or possible connections come to mind when you consider the rise of capitalism?
- Private ownership of land is a familiar part of life today, but it has a history. What do you know or wonder about how land became private property in places like Britain? What do you know or think land use was like before?

While You Listen

This listening guide divides the podcast into sections. All sections of this episode are recommended for listening.

Section	Questions to Consider
Section 1 Christopher Columbus and Capitalism 0:00-7:43 Recommended	• This episode focuses on the emergence of capitalism. How might Columbus be connected to the beginnings of this economic system?
Section 2 Introduction: Life After Feudalism, 1350-1500 7:44-12:45 Recommended	• How and why did the Black Death (also known as the Bubonic Plague) change life for feudal peasants? • In what ways were the 1400s a "better time for ordinary, working people in England" than what came before?

Section 3

Slavery, Conquest, and Capitalism

12:46-21:37

Recommended

- Describe or draw England's involvement in Triangular Trade:
 - What did the British transport to Africa, and what did they exchange these goods for?
 - What exchange did the British make in the American colonies (which, remember, England controlled)?
 - What goods did the British transport *back* to England?
- John says, "Some historians make a powerful argument that large-scale projects of enslavement and colonization didn't just happen to get rolling around the time that capitalism was taking root in western Europe. The claim is, instead...that those ventures were capitalism announcing its arrival."
 - Explain this in your own words. How do some historians connect capitalism, colonialism, and enslavement?
 - According to these historians, how did colonialism and enslavement help drive the accumulation of capital?

Section 4

British Mercantilism in India

21:38-29:05

Recommended

- What is mercantilism, and what is its relationship with colonialism?
- How did the British East India Company gain control in India?
- John mentions two terms coined by two of the world's major economic thinkers: previous accumulation (Adam Smith) and primitive accumulation (Karl Marx).
 - Define these terms in your own words.
 - According to the scholarship cited by economist Jayati Ghosh, how did the previous accumulation Britain acquired through colonization contribute to its rise as a capitalist power?
- How did Britain's colonization of India affect India's manufacturing, economy, and people?

Section 5

Back in England:
Enclosure and the Birth of Private Land Ownership, 1500-1800s

29:06-39:30

Recommended

- What is enclosure? How did it change life for British peasants, and how did it change life for new landowners?
- How did and why did people fight against enclosure from the 1500s to the 1800s? What stands out to you about their efforts?

Section 6

Unpacking the Episode

39:31-52:13

Recommended

- Why does Ghosh grow "impatient" when John asks her whether capitalism could have emerged without enslavement and a racial hierarchy?
- An increase in living standards is often described as a positive consequence of capitalism. At the end of the episode, John and Ellen point out that capitalism got its start in the 1500s – but it wasn't until the 1850s that a "large swath of humanity started to live with comfort and abundance."
 - Why do you think they included this information?
 - How does this information complicate the idea that rising living standards were a consequence of capitalism?

After You Listen

- What is one moment or quote from the episode that stands out to you? It might be something that surprised you, challenged or confirmed your thinking, or prompted a new understanding.
- What similarities and differences do you see among the projects of colonialism, enslavement, and enclosure? Consider how land, labor, and resources were controlled – and how each affected capital accumulation.
- In this episode, John says the following: “A lot of us non-historians, if we’re asked to picture the early days of capitalism, will probably think of the Industrial Revolution – those Dickensian mills and factories. But we’re not quite there yet.”

Read or review the following entries in the **Features of Capitalism explainer**: **Private Ownership**, **Accumulation and Investment of Capital**, and **Wage Labor**.

- How do these connect to colonialism, enslavement, and enclosure?
- How do they help explain why John suggests that capitalism got its start before the Industrial Revolution?