



Listening Guide

Episode 5: A New Thing in Human History

An age of invention and mass production, propelled by a new mechanism – the corporate research lab – leads to a surge in material wealth like the world has never seen. How does a new nation, the United States, overtake its parent as the leader of the capitalist order by the mid-to-late 1800s? And what does it all mean in the lives of ordinary people?

Features of Capitalism

Private Ownership

Accumulation and Investment of Capital

Profit Motive

Wage Labor

Legal Framework

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

Episode by John Biewen, with co-host Ellen McGirt.

Interviews with Woody Holton, Robin Alario, Edward Baptist, and Brad DeLong.

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

Before You Listen

- What do you already know about the First and Second Industrial Revolutions in the United States?
 - How did they affect life for different groups of people?
 - How might they have contributed to capitalism's development?
- In addition to industry, what developments might have helped accelerate capitalism in the early American republic?
- Review the **Legal Framework** entry in the **Features of Capitalism explainer**. As you listen, consider how laws and government actions helped shape capitalism's development in the United States.

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 A New Nation? 0:00-5:00 Recommended	- John notes that, "when Americans talk about our country's founding, we usually put all the emphasis on that <i>break</i> with the British Crown – the political separation." - According to John and Ellen, what did America's founders strive to <i>maintain</i> or <i>continue</i> in the new nation?
Section 2 America's Founding: Follow the Money 5:01-15:45 Recommended	- What was the Proclamation of 1763? According to historian Woody Holton, how and why did it create tension between Britain and wealthy colonists like George Washington and Thomas Jefferson? - John and historian Woody Holton point out that many of the debates at the Constitutional Convention had "economic ramifications." - What key issues did the founders debate? - What do these debates show about their economic goals for the new nation?

Section 3

King Cotton and the
First Industrial Revolution
15:46-23:10

Recommended

- When we talk about the motivations for the American Revolution, we often talk about ideals like freedom, liberty, and democracy. Based on this section and what you already know, how compelling do you find the following claims? Explain your reasoning.
 - The founders' motivation to declare independence was connected to Britain's "meddling" in the economic affairs of wealthy colonists.
 - A major goal of the Constitution's framers was to institute a government that "attracted and facilitated the movement of capital."
- What technologies launched the First Industrial Revolution in the United States, and how did they transform the cotton industry?
- Historian Edward Baptist notes that by the 1850s, a few southern states produced up to 95% of cotton sold in Liverpool, England.
 - According to Baptist, what practices beyond new technology gave the United States a competitive advantage?
 - How do these practices continue (rather than break from) British practices?
- At the beginning of the episode, Ellen reminds listeners that "capitalism relies on government and an architecture of laws." Think back to the framers' debates at the Constitutional Convention. How might the Constitution have helped pave the way for the United States' explosive economic growth?

Section 4

The Men Who Built
America? The Second
Industrial Revolution
and the Gilded Age
23:11-36:45

Recommended

- According to mainstream historical accounts described in this section, what role did capitalist giants like Vanderbilt and Carnegie play in America's post-Civil War economic growth?
- What "ruthless" motivations and tactics are they remembered for?
- John contrasts the "Great Man theory of history" with a theory that emphasizes how a "convergence of forces" accelerated industrial and economic growth – and increased living standards for many Americans.
 - According to economic historian Brad DeLong, what drove the rise in working class wages and living standards for many Americans in the late 1800s?
 - How does DeLong's explanation differ from mainstream historical accounts?

Section 5

Who Built the Second
Industrial Revolution?
36:46-50:06

Recommended

- Ellen also challenges the "Great Man theory of history" and the idea that capitalist figures like Vanderbilt and Carnegie "built" America's wealth. According to Ellen:
 - Who and what drove the nation's economic growth during the Second Industrial Revolution?
 - How did various actions of and policies by the American government enable "the men who built America" to accumulate massive personal wealth?
- What do the accounts of strikes and protests near the end of the episode add to the story of America's economic growth during this period?

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.
- John and Ellen suggest that a number of developments helped America overtake Britain as a capitalist power. Think about the episode as a whole:
 - What forces do John and Ellen identify as helping the United States overtake Britain as the leader of the capitalist order?
 - Why is it difficult to explain capitalism's acceleration in the United States by pointing to a single cause? Use examples from the episode to support your thinking.