

Investigation

“Officially and Legally Mine”: Enclosure, Wage Labor, and Capitalism

Note-Taking Tool

Think about what you’ve already heard about enclosure and its effects. (It may be helpful to listen to [Episode 3, 29:06-39:30](#), or skim the [Episode 3 transcript, pp. 23-31](#), to refresh your memory. You can find these resources under “Listening Guides” at <https://sceneonradio.org/capitalism-educator-resources/>.)

Then, read or listen to an excerpt from “Cura’s Gift,” a 2023 lecture by filmmaker, writer, and political organizer Astra Taylor.

Reading/Listening Notes

How does Taylor argue that enclosure contributed to the development of capitalism?

What rights did commoners have? How did common lands provide “a baseline of material security and independence”?

What happened during the enclosure movement? Which details stand out to you, and why?

How did enclosure create insecurity for commoners? (How did it affect commoners' ability to meet their everyday needs? How did it affect community life? How did it affect commoners' independence?)

How did landowners benefit from this new system?

How does Taylor argue that enclosure contributed to the development of capitalism? Consider the following **Features of Capitalism** (<https://sceneonradio.org/explainer/>): **Private Ownership, Accumulation and Investment of Capital, Wage Labor**, and **Legal Framework**.

To what extent do you find Taylor's argument convincing?

Reflection Notes

According to Taylor, how does the legacy of enclosure continue to shape our lives today?

Near the end of the excerpt, Taylor says:

Today we take for granted that we must work a proper job to earn a wage in order to provide for our basic needs, and we structure our entire lives around this fact. The history of enclosure reminds us that this arrangement is anything but natural.

In what ways do we “structure our entire lives” around working a job to “provide for our basic needs”? Think about:

- **Education:** How do people’s choices of what to study in high school or post-secondary school connect to employment and earnings?
- **Housing:** How does having (or losing) a job affect where and how people live? How does the history of enclosure affect people’s relationship to land?
- **Healthcare:** How is healthcare connected to employment?
- **Daily schedules:** How are people’s routines organized around working for wages?

According to Taylor, why is organizing society around private ownership of property and wage labor "anything but natural"? To what extent are you compelled by this interpretation? Why or why not?

In Episode 1, Ellen says that capitalism is "so pervasive, so much the water we swim in now, that we can have trouble seeing where it begins and ends, in our world and in our lives." After reading Taylor, what features, parts, or aspects of capitalism feel more visible to you than they did before?

What questions does Taylor raise for you about the relationship between capitalism's origins and the economic system we live in today?