In this unit, I thought it was really fascinating to dive more deeply into the implications of the economy on our society and the relationship between economy and culture. I was particularly intrigued by Weber’s work, tracing the origins of capitalism back to the Protestants and Calvinists that settled America. It’s interesting to realize that capitalism, which is often portrayed as the most modern, advanced, secular global economic system, actually has deep ties to what many would consider antiquated, puritanical, moralistic religious values. It’s clear to see how capitalism and its religious background shaped American culture. The United States’ reputation as a land of opportunity and the idea of American Dream both prioritize and tout the moral righteousness of hard work. “Hard work” has become a measure of how deserving an individual is considered.

I think the material in this week’s module connects directly to that studied in last week’s module. Last week, we discussed the “culture of poverty” theory, which attributes the disproportionate socioeconomic hardship experienced by minorities and people of color to some kind of culturally inherent inability or unwillingness to work hard. This asserts that if only people of color worked as hard as whites, this inequality of circumstances would not exist. This is proven completely untrue by the disappearing of the middle class and compounding of generational poverty that has been worsening for the last century. Despite the falsehood that America is a meritocracy, the rich continue to get richer while the poor continue to get poorer. The one percent get tax breaks that allow them to keep and accrue their wealth, while lower class people trying to increase their earning potential through higher education rack up untenable amounts of debt. In reality, those working the hardest in America stand the least to gain, and that goes double for minorities and people of color.

In Zygmunt Bauman’s example of “failed consumers” it’s clear that this current form of capitalism not only negatively impacts people financially, but also emotionally. Similarly to the moral failings implied by the “culture of poverty” theory, security cameras in stores also impress some kind of moral failing on individuals without the means to participate in consumerism. Many aspects of pop culture also have this effect on individuals, as described by Jeremy Smith et al. in *Class Dismissed: How TV Frames the Working Class*. Learning about how television has portrayed working class people and families made me think about how television conversely exhibits upper class people. Reality television shows like *Keeping Up the Kardashians* (and its many spin-off shows) glorify material wealth and alienate working class people. This alienation was a focus of Karl Marx’s work *Alienation.* Capitalism breeds toxic competition that encourages displays of wealth more than it incentivizes hard work for honest reward.

I thought this module was interesting, but also somewhat depressing, since capitalism seems to be the root of so many ills, but dismantling this complex, now global system, seems daunting, if not impossible. So many powerful people have too much control and stand to lose too much if capitalism were actually to ever be reformed.