

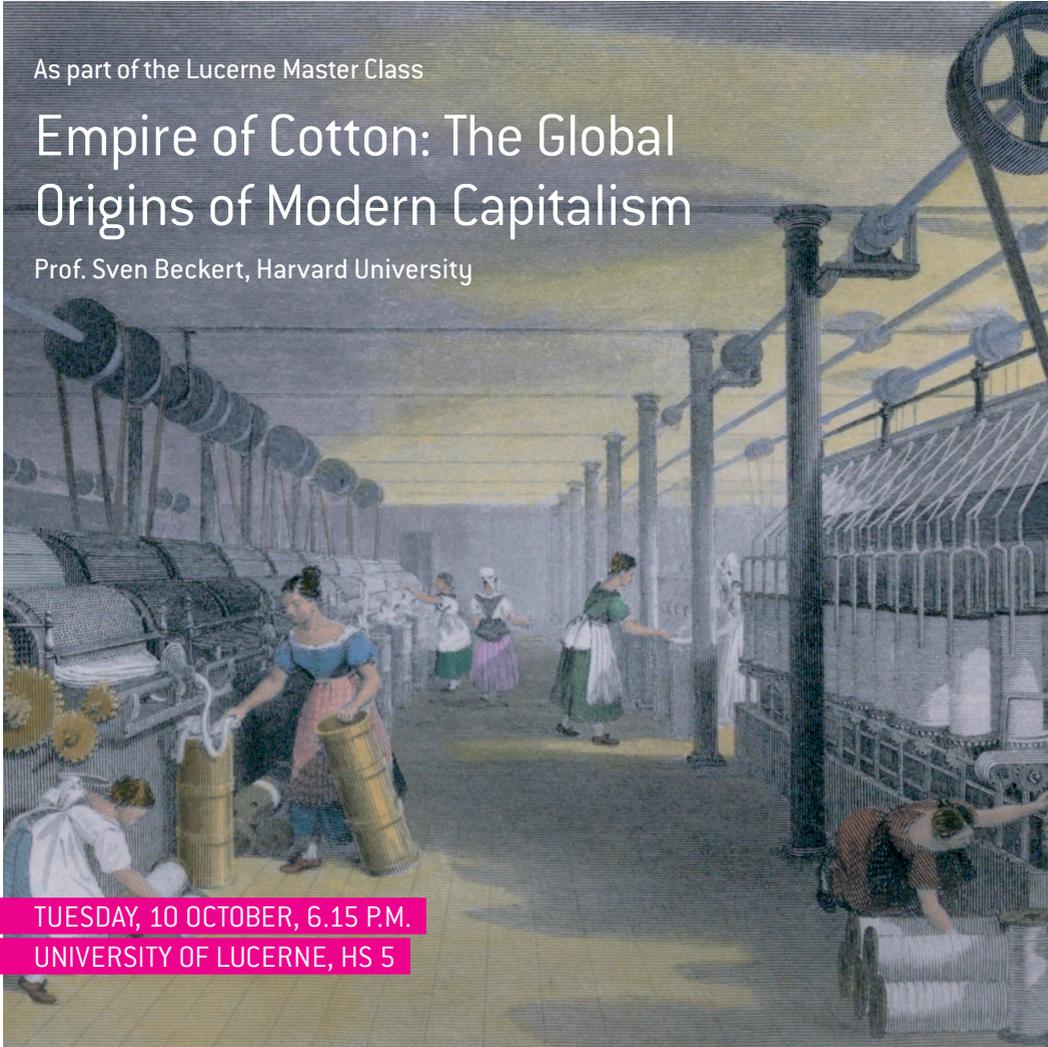
Graduate School of Humanities  
and Social Sciences

PUBLIC LECTURE

As part of the Lucerne Master Class

# Empire of Cotton: The Global Origins of Modern Capitalism

Prof. Sven Beckert, Harvard University



TUESDAY, 10 OCTOBER, 6.15 P.M.

UNIVERSITY OF LUCERNE, HS 5

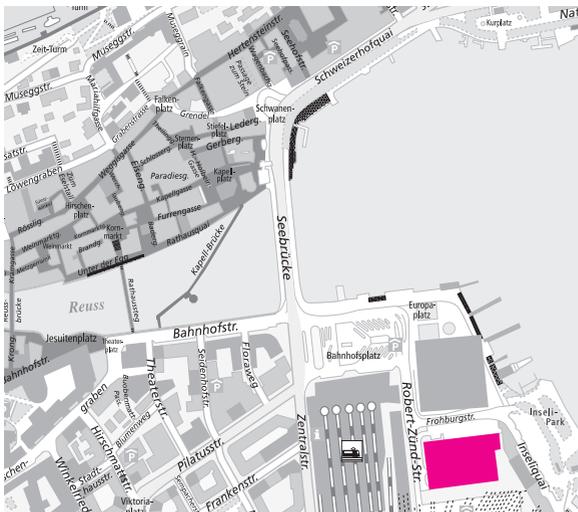
# About



Sven Beckert is Laird Bell Professor of History in the Department of History as well as co-chair of the Program on the Study of Capitalism at Harvard University. His main focus lies on the history of the United States in the nineteenth Century, with a particular emphasis on the history of capitalism, including its economic, social, political and transnational dimensions. The combined examination of these dimensions is also at the heart of the monograph he is best known for: *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (2014). Other pertinent publications include *Slavery's Capitalism: A New History of American Economic Development* (2016), and *The American Bourgeoisie: Distinction and Identity in the Nineteenth Century* (2010).

# Lecture

Cotton is so ubiquitous as to be almost invisible, yet understanding its history is key to understanding the origins of modern capitalism. In his talk, Sven Beckert gives insights into the story of how, in a remarkably brief period, European entrepreneurs and powerful statesmen recast the world's most significant manufacturing industry, combining imperial expansion and slave labor with new machines and wage workers to change the world. Beginning well before the advent of machine production in the 1780s, these men captured ancient trades and skills in Asia, and combined them with the expropriation of lands in the Americas and the enslavement of African workers to crucially reshape the disparate realms of cotton that had existed for millennia. Thus, the empire of cotton was, from the beginning, a fulcrum of constant global struggle between slaves and planters, merchants and statesmen, workers and factory owners. Beckert makes clear how these forces ushered in the world of modern capitalism, including the vast wealth and disturbing inequalities that are with us today.



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## Venue:

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