Outline

1. Cache coherence – the hardware view
2. Synchronization and memory consistency review
3. C11 Atomics
4. Avoiding locks
Important memory system properties

• Coherence – concerns accesses to a single memory location
  - There is a total order on all updates
  - Must obey program order if access from only one CPU
  - There is bounded latency before everyone sees a write

• Consistency – concerns ordering across memory locations
  - Even with coherence, different CPUs can see the same write happen at different times
  - Sequential consistency is what matches our intuition (As if operations from all CPUs interleaved on one CPU)
  - Many architectures offer weaker consistency
  - Yet well-defined weaker consistency can still be sufficient to implement thread API contract from concurrency lecture
Multicore cache coherence

- **Performance requires caches**
  - Divided into chunks of bytes called lines (e.g., 64 bytes)
  - Caches create an opportunity for cores to disagree about memory

- **Bus-based approaches**
  - “Snoopy” protocols, each CPU listens to memory bus
  - Use write-through and invalidate when you see a write bits
  - Bus-based schemes limit scalability

- **Modern CPUs use networks (e.g., hypertransport, infinity fabric, QPI, UPI)**
  - CPUs pass each other messages about cache lines
MESI coherence protocol

- **Modified**
  - Exactly one cache has a valid copy
  - That copy is dirty (needs to be written back to memory)
  - Must invalidate all copies in other caches before entering this state

- **Exclusive**
  - Same as Modified except the cache copy is clean

- **Shared**
  - One or more caches and memory have a valid copy

- **Invalid**
  - Doesn’t contain any data

- **Owned (for enhanced “MOESI” protocol)**
  - Memory may contain stale value of data (like Modified state)
  - But have to broadcast modifications (sort of like Shared state)
  - Can have one owned + multiple shared copies of cache line
Core and Bus Actions

- **Actions performed by CPU core**
  - Read
  - Write
  - Evict (modified? must write back)

- **Transactions on bus (or interconnect)**
  - Read: without intent to modify, data can come from memory or another cache
  - Read-exclusive: with intent to modify, must invalidate all other cache copies
  - Writeback: contents put on bus and memory is updated
cc-NUMA

- Old machines used *dance hall* architectures
  - Any CPU can “dance with” any memory equally

- An alternative: Non-Uniform Memory Access (NUMA)
  - Each CPU has fast access to some “close” memory
  - Slower to access memory that is farther away
  - Use a directory to keep track of who is caching what

- Originally for esoteric machines with many CPUs
  - But AMD and then Intel integrated memory controller into CPU
  - Faster to access memory controlled by the local socket
    (or even local die in a multi-chip module)

- cc-NUMA = cache-coherent NUMA
  - Rarely see non-cache-coherent NUMA (BBN Butterfly 1, Cray T3D)
Real World Coherence Costs

- See [David] for a great reference. Xeon results:
  - 3 cycle L1, 11 cycle L2, 44 cycle LLC, 355 cycle local RAM
- If another core in same socket holds line in modified state:
  - load: 109 cycles (LLC + 65)
  - store: 115 cycles (LLC + 71)
  - atomic CAS: 120 cycles (LLC + 76)
- If a core in a different socket holds line in modified state:
  - NUMA load: 289 cycles
  - NUMA store: 320 cycles
  - NUMA atomic CAS: 324 cycles
- But only a partial picture
  - Could be faster because of out-of-order execution
  - Could be slower if interconnect contention or multiple hops
NUMA and spinlocks

• Test-and-set spinlock has several advantages
  - Simple to implement and understand
  - One memory location for arbitrarily many CPUs

• But also has disadvantages
  - Lots of traffic over memory interconnect (especially w. > 1 spinner)
  - Not necessarily fair (lacks bounded waiting)
  - Even less fair on a NUMA machine

• Idea 1: Avoid spinlocks altogether (today)

• Idea 2: Reduce interconnect traffic with better spinlocks (next lecture)
  - Design lock that spins only on local memory
  - Also gives better fairness
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Amdahl’s law

\[ T(n) = T(1) \left( B + \frac{1}{n}(1 - B) \right) \]

- Expected speedup limited when only part of a task is sped up
  - \( T(n) \): the time it takes \( n \) CPU cores to complete the task
  - \( B \): the fraction of the job that must be serial

- Even with massive multiprocessors, \( \lim_{n \to \infty} = B \cdot T(1) \)
  - Places an ultimate limit on parallel speedup

- Problem: synchronization increases serial section size
mutex_t m;

lock(&m);
cnt = cnt + 1; /* critical section */
unlock(&m);

• Only one thread can hold a mutex at a time
  - Makes critical section atomic

• Recall thread API contract
  - All access to global data must be protected by a mutex
  - Global = two or more threads touch data and at least one writes

• Means must map each piece of global data to one mutex
  - Never touch the data unless you locked that mutex

• But many ways to map data to mutexes
Locking granularity

• Consider two lookup implementations for global hash table:

```c
struct list *hash_tbl[1021];
```

**coarse-grained locking**

```c
mutex_t m;

:  
mutex_lock(&m);
struct list_elem *pos = list_begin (hash_tbl[hash(key)]);
/* ... walk list and find entry ... */
mutex_unlock(&m);
```

**fine-grained locking**

```c
mutex_t bucket_lock[1021];

:  
int index = hash(key);
mutex_lock(&bucket_lock[index]);
struct list_elem *pos = list_begin (hash_tbl[index]);
/* ... walk list and find entry ... */
mutex_unlock(&bucket_lock[index]);
```

• Which implementation is better?
• Fine-grained locking admits more parallelism
  - E.g., imagine network server looking up values in hash table
  - Parallel requests will usually map to different hash buckets
  - So fine-grained locking should allow better speedup

• When might coarse-grained locking be better?
• Fine-grained locking admits more parallelism
  - E.g., imagine network server looking up values in hash table
  - Parallel requests will usually map to different hash buckets
  - So fine-grained locking should allow better speedup

• When might coarse-grained locking be better?
  - Suppose you have global data that applies to whole hash table
    
    ```
    struct hash_table {
        size_t num_elements; /* num items in hash table */
        size_t num_buckets; /* size of buckets array */
        struct list *buckets; /* array of buckets */
    }
    ```
    
    - Read `num_buckets` each time you insert
    - Check `num_elements` on insert, possibly expand buckets & rehash
    - Single global mutex would protect these fields

• Can you avoid serializing lookups to growable hash table?
Readers-writers problem

• **Recall** a **mutex** allows access in only one thread

• But a data race occurs only if
  - Multiple threads access the same data, **and**
  - At least one of the accesses is a write

• **How to allow multiple readers or one single writer?**
  - Need lock that can be *shared* amongst concurrent readers

• **Can implement using other primitives (next slides)**
  - Keep integer $i$ – # of readers or -1 if held by writer
  - Protect $i$ with mutex
  - Sleep on condition variable when can’t get lock
Implementing shared locks

```c
struct sharedlk {
    int i;    /* # shared lockers, or -1 if exclusively locked */
    mutex_t m;
    cond_t c;
};

void AcquireExclusive (sharedlk *sl) {
    lock (&sl->m);
    while (sl->i) { wait (&sl->m, &sl->c); }
    sl->i = -1;
    unlock (&sl->m);
}

void AcquireShared (sharedlk *sl) {
    lock (&sl->m);
    while (&sl->i < 0) { wait (&sl->m, &sl->c); }
    sl->i++;
    unlock (&sl->m);
}
```
void ReleaseShared (sharedlk *sl) {
    lock (&sl->m);
    if (!--sl->i)
        signal (&sl->c);
    unlock (&sl->m);
}

void ReleaseExclusive (sharedlk *sl) {
    lock (&sl->m);
    sl->i = 0;
    broadcast (&sl->c);
    unlock (&sl->m);
}

• Any issues with this implementation?
void ReleaseShared (sharedlk *sl) {
    lock (&sl->m);
    if (!--sl->i)
        signal (&sl->c);
    unlock (&sl->m);
}

void ReleaseExclusive (sharedlk *sl) {
    lock (&sl->m);
    sl->i = 0;
    broadcast (&sl->c);
    unlock (&sl->m);
}

• Any issues with this implementation?
  - Prone to starvation of writer (no bounded waiting)
  - How might you fix?
struct var {
    int lock;
    int val;
};

void atomic_inc (var *v) {
    while (test_and_set (&v->lock))
        ;
    v->val++;
    v->lock = 0;
}

void atomic_dec (var *v) {
    while (test_and_set (&v->lock))
        ;
    v->val--;  
    v->lock = 0;
}

• Is this code correct without sequential consistency?
Memory reordering danger

- Suppose no sequential consistency (& don’t compensate)
- Hardware could violate program order

Program order on CPU #1
v->lock = 1;
register = v->val;
v->val = register + 1;
v->lock = 0;

View on CPU #2
v->lock = 1;

/* danger */

v->lock = 0;
/* danger */;
v->val = register + 1;

- If atomic_inc called at /* danger */, bad val ensues!
void atomic_inc (var *v) {
    while (test_and_set (&v->lock))
        ;
v->val++;
/* danger */
v->lock = 0;
}

• Must ensure all CPUs see the following:
  1. v->lock = 1 ran before v->val was read and written
  2. v->lock = 0 ran after v->val was written

• How does #1 get assured on x86?
  - Recall test_and_set uses xchgl %eax,(%edx)

• How to ensure #2 on x86?
void atomic_inc (var *v) {
    while (test_and_set (&v->lock))
    {
        v->val++;
        /* danger */
        v->lock = 0;
    }
}

• Must ensure all CPUs see the following:
  1. v->lock = 1 ran before v->val was read and written
  2. v->lock = 0 ran after v->val was written

• How does #1 get assured on x86?
  - Recall test_and_set uses xchg %eax,(%edx)
  - xchg instruction always “locked,” ensuring barrier

• How to ensure #2 on x86?
```c
void atomic_inc (var *v) {
    while (test_and_set (&v->lock))
        ;
    v->val++;
    asm volatile ("sfence" ::: "memory");
    v->lock = 0;
}
```

- **Must ensure all CPUs see the following:**
  1. `v->lock = 1` ran *before* `v->val` was read and written
  2. `v->lock = 0` ran *after* `v->val` was written

- **How does #1 get assured on x86?**
  - Recall `test_and_set` uses `xchgl %eax,(%edx)`
  - `xchgl` instruction always “locked,” ensuring barrier

- **How to ensure #2 on x86?**
  - Might need fence instruction after, e.g., non-temporal stores
  - Definitely need compiler barrier
Gcc extended asm syntax [gnu]

\[
\text{asm volatile (template-string : outputs : inputs : clobbers);}
\]

- **Puts** *template-string* in assembly language compiler output
  - Expands \%0, \%1, … (a bit like printf conversion specifiers)
  - Use “\%%” for a literal % (e.g., “\%\%cr3” to specify \%cr3 register)

- **inputs/outputs** specify parameters as "*constraint*" (value)

  ```
  int outvar, invar = 3;
  asm ("movl %1, %0" : "=r" (outvar) : "r" (invar));
  /* now outvar == 3 */
  ```

- **clobbers** lists other state that get used/overwritten
  - Special value "memory" prevents reordering with loads & stores
  - Serves as compiler barrier, as important as hardware barrier

- **volatile** indicates side effects other than result
  - Otherwise, gcc might optimize away if you don’t use result
Correct spinlock on alpha

- Recall implementation of `test_and_set` on alpha (with much weaker memory consistency than x86):

  ```
  _test_and_set:
  ldq_l v0, 0(a0)         # v0 = *lockp (LOCKED)
  bne v0, 1f              # if (v0) return
  addq zero, 1, v0        # v0 = 1
  stq_c v0, 0(a0)         # *lockp = v0 (CONDITIONAL)
  beq v0, _test_and_set  # if (failed) try again
  mb
  addq zero, zero, v0    # return 0
  1: ret zero, (ra), 1
  ```

- Memory barrier instruction `mb` (like `mfence`)
  - All processors will see that everything before `mb` in program order happened before everything after `mb` in program order

- Need barrier before releasing spinlock as well:

  ```
  asm volatile ("mb" ::: "memory");
  v->lock = 0;
  ```
Memory barriers/fences

• Fortunately, consistency need not overly complicate code
  - If you do locking right, only need a few fences within locking code
  - Code will be easily portable to new CPUs

• Most programmers should stick to mutexes

• But advanced techniques may require lower-level code
  - Later this lecture will see some wait-free algorithms
  - Also important for optimizing special-case locks
    (E.g., linux kernel rw_semaphore, ...)

• Algorithms often explained assuming sequential consistency
  - Must know how to use memory fences to implement correctly
  - E.g., see [Howells] for how Linux deals with memory consistency
  - And another plug for Why Memory Barriers

• Next: How C11 allows portable low-level code
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Atomics and portability

- Lots of variation in atomic instructions, consistency models, compiler behavior
  - Changing the compiler or optimization level can invalidate code

- Different CPUs today: Your (non-M1) laptop is x86, while your cell phone uses ARM
  - x86: Total Store Order Consistency Model, CISC
  - arm: Relaxed Consistency Model, RISC

- Could make it impossible to write portable kernels and applications

- Fortunately, the C11 standard has built-in support for atomics
  - If not on by default, use `gcc -std=gnu11` or `-std=gnu17`

- Also available in C++11, but won't discuss today
• Within a thread, many evaluations are *sequenced*
  - E.g., in “f1(); f2();”, evaluation of f1 is sequenced before f2
• Across threads, some operations *synchronize* with others
  - E.g., releasing mutex m synchronizes with a subsequent acquire m
• Evaluation A *happens before* B, which we’ll write A → B, when:
  - A is sequenced before B (in the same thread),
  - A synchronizes with B,
  - A is dependency-ordered before B (ignore for now—means A has release semantics and B consume semantics for same value), or
  - There is another operation X such that A → X → B.¹

¹Except chain of “→” cannot end: ..., dependency-ordered, sequenced before
C11 says a data race produces undefined behavior (UB)
- A write conflicts with a read or write of same memory location
- Two conflicting operations race if not ordered by happens before
- Undefined can be anything (e.g., delete all your files, …)
- Think UB okay in practice? See [Wang], [Lattner]

Spinlocks (and hence mutexes that internally use spinlocks) synchronize across threads
- Synchronization adds happens before arrows, avoiding data races

Yet hardware supports other means of synchronization

C11 atomics provide direct access to synchronized lower-level operations
- E.g., can get compiler to issue lock prefix in some cases
C11 Atomics: Basics

- Include new `<stdatomic.h>` header
- New `_Atomic` type qualifier: e.g., `_Atomic` int `foo`;
  - Convenient aliases: `atomic_bool`, `atomic_int`, `atomic_ulong`, ...
  - Must initialize specially:
    ```
    #include <stdatomic.h>
    Atomic_int global_int = ATOMIC_VAR_INIT(140);
    Atomic_int *dyn = malloc(sizeof(*dyn));
    atomic_init(dyn, 140);
    ```
- Compiler emits read-modify-write instructions for atomics
  - E.g., `+=`, `-=`, `|=`, `&=`, `^=`, `++`, `--` do what you would hope
  - Act atomically and synchronize with one another
- Also functions including `atomic_fetch_add`,
  `atomic_compare_exchange_strong`, ...
Implementations might use spinlocks internally for most atomics
- Could interact badly with interrupt/signal handlers
- Can check if ATOMIC_INT_LOCK_FREE, etc., macros defined
- Fortunately modern CPUs don’t require this

atomic_flag is a special type guaranteed lock-free
- Boolean value without support for loads and stores
- Initialize with: atomic_flag mylock = ATOMIC_FLAG_INIT;
- Only two kinds of operation possible:
  - _Bool atomic_flag_test_and_set(volatile atomic_flag *obj);
  - void atomic_flag_clear(volatile atomic_flag *obj);
- Above functions guarantee sequential consistency (atomic operation serves as memory fence, too)
enum memory_order { /*...*/
};

_Bool atomic_flag_test_and_set_explicit( volatile atomic_flag *obj, memory_order order);
void atomic_flag_clear_explicit( volatile atomic_flag *obj, memory_order order);

C atomic_load_explicit( const volatile A *obj, memory_order order);
void atomic_store_explicit( volatile A *obj, C desired, memory_order order);

bool atomic_compare_exchange_weak_explicit( A *obj, C *expected, C desired,
memory_order_order succ, memory_order_order fail);

• **Atomic functions have _explicit variants**
  - These guarantee coherence but *not* sequential consistency
  - May allow compiler to generate faster code
Memory ordering

- **Six possible** `memory_order` **values:**
  1. `memory_order_relaxed`: no memory ordering
  2. `memory_order_consume`: super tricky, see [Preshing] for discussion
  3. `memory_order_acquire`: for start of critical section
  4. `memory_order_release`: for end of critical section
  5. `memory_order_acq_rel`: combines previous two
  6. `memory_order_seq_cst`: full sequential consistency

- **Also have fence operation** not tied to particular atomic:
  ```c
  void atomic_thread_fence(memory_order order);
  ```

- **Suppose thread 1 releases and thread 2 acquires**
  - Thread 1’s preceding accesses can’t move past `release` store
  - Thread 2’s subsequent accesses can’t move before `acquire` load
  - Warning: other threads might see a completely different order
Types of memory fence

- Load-Load
- Load-Store
- Store-Load
- Store-Store

- Seq_cst fence
- Acquire fence
- Acq_rel fence
- Release fence

$X$-$Y$ fence = operations of type $X$ sequenced before the fence happen before operations of type $Y$ sequenced after the fence

---

$^2$Credit to [Preshing] for explaining it this way
Example: Atomic counters

```c
_Atomic(int) packet_count;

void
recv_packet(...)
{
    :
    atomic_fetch_add_explicit(&packet_count, 1,
                                memory_order_relaxed);
    :
}
```

- Need to count packets accurately
- Don’t need to order other memory accesses across threads
- Relaxed memory order can avoid unnecessary overhead
  - Depending on hardware, of course (not x86)
Example: Producer, consumer 1

```c
struct message msg_buf;
_Atomic(_Bool) msg_ready;

void send(struct message *m) {
    msg_buf = *m;
    atomic_thread_fence(memory_order_release);
    /* Prior loads+stores happen before subsequent stores */
    atomic_store_explicit(&msg_ready, 1,
                           memory_order_relaxed);
}

struct message *recv(void) {
    _Bool ready = atomic_load_explicit(&msg_ready,
                                         memory_order_relaxed);
    if (!ready)
        return NULL;
    atomic_thread_fence(memory_order_acquire);
    /* Prior loads happen before subsequent loads+stores */
    return &msg_buf;
}
```
Example: Producer, consumer 2

```c
struct message msg_buf;
_Atomic(_Bool) msg_ready;

void send(struct message *m) {
    msg_buf = *m;
    atomic_store_explicit(&msg_ready, 1,
                          memory_order_release);
}

struct message *recv(void) {
    _Bool ready = atomic_load_explicit(&msg_ready,
                                        memory_order_acquire);
    if (!ready)
        return NULL;
    return &msg_buf;
}
```

- This is potentially faster than previous example
  - E.g., atomic other stores after `send` can be moved before `msg_buf`
Example: Test-and-set spinlock

void spin_lock(atomic_flag *lock)
{
    while(atomic_flag_test_and_set_explicit(lock, memory_order_acquire))
    {
    }
}

void spin_unlock(atomic_flag *lock)
{
    atomic_flag_clear_explicit(lock, memory_order_release);
}
Example: Better test-and-set spinlock

```c
void spin_lock(atomic_bool *lock) {
    while(atomic_exchange_explicit(lock, 1, memory_order_acquire)) {
        while(atomic_load_explicit(lock, memory_order_relaxed))
            __builtin_ia32_pause(); /* x86-specific */
    }
}

void spin_unlock(atomic_bool *lock) {
    atomic_store_explicit(lock, 0, memory_order_release);
}
```

- See [Rigtorp] for a good discussion
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Recall producer/consumer (lecture 3)

/* PRODUCER */
for (;;) {
    item *nextProduced = produce_item();

    mutex_lock (&mutex);
    while (count == BUF_SIZE)
        cond_wait (&nonfull, &mutex);

    buffer[in] = nextProduced;
    in = (in + 1) % BUF_SIZE;
    count++;
    cond_signal (&nonempty);
    mutex_unlock (&mutex);
}

/* CONSUMER */
for (;;) {
    mutex_lock (&mutex);
    while (count == 0)
        cond_wait (&nonempty, &mutex);

    nextConsumed = buffer[out];
    out = (out + 1) % BUF_SIZE;
    count--;
    cond_signal (&nonfull);
    mutex_unlock (&mutex);
    consume_item (nextConsumed);
}
Eliminating locks

- One use of locks is to coordinate multiple updates of single piece of state

- How to remove locks here?
  - Factor state so that each variable only has a single writer

- Producer/consumer example revisited
  - Assume one producer, one consumer
  - Why do we need count variable, written by both?
    - To detect buffer full/empty
  - Have producer write in, consumer write out (both _Atomic)
  - Use in/out to detect buffer state
  - But note next example busy-waits, which is less good
atomic_int in, out;

void producer (void *ignored) {
    for (; ;) {
        item *nextProduced = produce_item ();
        while (((in + 1) % BUF_SIZE) == out) thread_yield ();
        buffer[in] = nextProduced;
        in = (in + 1) % BUF_SIZE;
    }
}

void consumer (void *ignored) {
    for (; ;) {
        while (in == out) thread_yield ();
        nextConsumed = buffer[out];
        out = (out + 1) % BUF_SIZE;
        consume_item (nextConsumed);
    }
}

[Note fences not needed because no relaxed atomics]
void producer (void *ignored) {
    for (;;) {
        item *nextProduced = produce_item ();
        int slot = atomic_load_explicit(&in, memory_order_relaxed);
        int next = (slot + 1) % BUF_SIZE;
        while (atomic_load_explicit(&out, memory_order_acquire) ==
               next) // Could you use relaxed? ^^^^^^^
            thread_yield();
        buffer[slot] = nextProduced;
        atomic_store_explicit(&in, next, memory_order_release);
    }
}

void consumer (void *ignored) {
    // Use memory_order_acquire to load in (for latest buffer[myin])
    // Use memory_order_release to store out
}
Non-blocking synchronization

- Design algorithm to *avoid critical sections*
  - Any threads can make progress if other threads are preempted
  - Which wouldn’t be the case if preempted thread held a lock

- Requires that hardware provide the right kind of atomics
  - Simple test-and-set is insufficient
  - Atomic compare and swap is good: \(\text{CAS} (\text{mem}, \text{old}, \text{new})\)
    - If \(\*\text{mem} == \text{old}\), then swap \(\*\text{mem} \leftrightarrow \text{new}\) and return true, else false

- Can implement many common data structures
  - Stacks, queues, even hash tables

- Can implement any algorithm on right hardware
  - Need operation such as atomic compare and swap (has property called *consensus number* \(= \infty\) [Herlihy])
  - Entire kernels have been written without locks [Greenwald]
Example: non-blocking stack

```c
struct item {
    /* data */
    _Atomic (struct item *) next;
};
typedef _Atomic (struct item *) stack_t;

void atomic_push (stack_t *stack, item *i) {
    do {
        i->next = *stack;
    } while (!CAS (stack, i->next, i));
}

item *atomic_pop (stack_t *stack) {
    item *i;
    do {
        i = *stack;
    } while (!CAS (stack, i, i->next));
    return i;
}
```
Wait-free stack issues

- “ABA” race in pop if other thread pops, re-pushes i
  - Can be solved by **counters** or **hazard pointers** to delay re-use
“Benign” races

- Could also eliminate locks by having race conditions
- Maybe you think you care more about speed than correctness
  
  ```cpp
  ++hits; /* each time someone accesses web site */
  ```
- Maybe you think you can get away with the race (**NOT!, really**)
  ```cpp
  if (!initialized) {
      lock (m);
      if (!initialized) {
          initialize ();
          atomic_thread_fence (memory_order_release); /* why? */
          initialized = 1;
      }
      unlock (m);
  }
  ```
- But don’t do this [Vyukov], [Boehm]! Not benign at all
  - Again, UB really bad! Like user-after free or array overflow bad
  - If needed for efficiency, use relaxed-memory-order atomics
Read-copy update [McKenney]

- Some data is read way more often than written
  - Routing tables consulted for each forwarded packet
  - Data maps in system with 100+ disks (updated on disk failure)

- Optimize for the common case of reading without lock
  - E.g., global variable: `routing_table *rt;`
  - Call `lookup (rt, route);` with no lock

- Update by making copy, swapping pointer
  
  ```
  routing_table *newrt = copy_routing_table (rt);
  update_routing_table (newrt);
  atomic_thread_fence (memory_order_release);
  rt = newrt;
  ```

- Is RCU really safe? Stay tuned next lecture...
Next class

- The exciting conclusion of RCU
  - Spoiler: safe on all architectures except on alpha
- Building a better spinlock
- What interface should kernel provide for sleeping locks?
- Deadlock
- Scalable interface design