



Diego Rivera, *Man at the Crossroads*, 1933

RUTGERS UNIVERSITY– SYLLABUS FALL 2023
UNITED STATES WORK & LABOR – THE GILDED AGE TO WORLD WAR II
PEOPLE AND POWER

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Course Description: Welcome to U.S. Work and Labor from the Gilded Age to World War II at Rutgers University. This course is designed to introduce you to both field of history as a discipline including specific critical thinking skills, and the content of labor studies; the people, events, and ideas that produced our world today.

The content of the course will trace labor history between the 1880s and the Second World War. This is a big expanse, and we will not be able to cover everything. Instead, we are going to focus on particular moments, themes, and ideas. As such, we will look at cultural and material factors in history, the ideological, social, cultural, political, environmental, and economic forces that shape that history. Through this we will work on developing arguments of historical causation. And above all we will be in a constant process of reading, writing, and asking questions.

Among the key questions this course asks are, why does work and labor in the United States look the way that it does? Why did the U.S. fail to create racial equality during Reconstruction? How

should we understand capitalism in relation to human labor? How did the process of industrialization and urbanization impact labor in America? How have workers related to US war and empire? What role has race and gender played in shaping U.S. labor? Why is U.S. labor history so violent?

With these questions, learning the methodology of history is important. Interrogating sources, developing analysis, and crafting your ideas are skills that take practice. They are the building blocks of critical thinking. They will undoubtedly help you in your future course work as a university student, but more than this, the process of history helps us develop essential life skills. Ultimately, the process of historical discovery is also a process of self-discovery. It is a process of discovering your own ideas about our world, about how we got here, and what we can do to make it a better place. Therefore my hope is that as better historical and critical thinkers, you'll be happier, stronger, and more engaged social and historical agents.

In addition to a substantial reading load, you will be writing essays based on primary source materials. Participation and engagement in class discussion is vitally important; the expectation is that every one of you has something to contribute, and the more you engage in the work of the class, the richer the class discussions will be. To that end there will be weekly reading responses, in class discussion sessions, two argumentative essay assignments, and one final exam.

Finally, if we are to succeed in our goals for this course we must work together to create a collaborative, inclusive and respectful learning culture. I look forward to getting to know you and working together this year.

Goals

This course covers several School of Arts and Sciences (SAS), School of Management and Labor Relations (SMLR), and Labor Studies and Employment Relations (LSER) Department learning objectives.

Rutgers Core - you will be able to:

- HST-1: Explain the development of some aspect of a society or culture over time.
- SCL-1: Understand different theories about human culture, social identity, economic entities, political systems, and other forms of social organization.
- WCR: Communicate complex ideas effectively, in standard written English, to a general audience, and respond effectively to editorial feedback from peers, instructors, and/or supervisors through successive drafts and revision.
- WCD: Communicate effectively in modes appropriate to a discipline or area of inquiry; evaluate and critically assess sources and use the conventions of attribution and citation correctly; and analyze and synthesize information and ideas from multiple sources to generate new insights.

School of Management and Labor Relations - you will be able to:

- I: Communicate effectively at a level and in modes appropriate to an entry-level professional.
- IV: Demonstrate an understanding of relevant theories and apply them given the background context of a particular work situation.

Labor Studies and Employment Relations Department - you will be able to:

- 1: Demonstrate an understanding of the perspectives, theories and concepts in the field of labor and employment relations.
- 4: Make an argument using contemporary or historical evidence.

Course Goals:

- To develop strong writing and critical thinking skills
- To develop the practice of asking productive, conceptual questions
- To learn how to participate effectively and contribute meaningfully to class discussion
- To understand the work of historical scholarship
- To understand labor history as diverse, contested, and nonlinear
- To be able to discuss and debate the structures of class in American society
- To have an introductory knowledge of class as historically contingent and a social construction

Expectations

- To come to class each day prepared and ready to engage in the work
- To turn in all work complete and on time
- To provide fellow students with helpful feedback and constructive criticism
- To take responsibility for one's own learning, and our collective learning environment
- To be respectful of others' views even if different from your own

Life Under Covid

This school year as in past years, we face the additional challenge of life under the coronavirus. I want to make special allowances for you all if you're struggling with mental health, dealing with life outside of the classroom, or just need a break given the pace and severity of events unfolding around us. You must contact me *in advance* and get an agreement in writing for these allowances, and they will be made on a case-by-case basis. Additionally, if you need help or want advice, I'm here for you. Please reach out to talk anytime.

The covid challenge also means that we are going to have to work extra hard to create a fun, friendly, and harmonious class. This will take work from me, but also extra work from you, to be friendly and respectful, to get to know your fellow classmates and instructors, to be bold and to share together in our class sessions. We are all getting through this together, let's talk about it and support one another as we work towards our own learning development.

Essays

There will be two short essays over the course of the term. Each essay will ask you to craft a unique argument using class readings. All work must be typed, double-spaced, with standard margins. Please use Chicago Style Format for your essays; there is a tutorial on the Chicago Style on the class Canvas site. For the essays, rough drafts and peer reviews are possible. An essay is not a solitary endeavor. The process of editing, revising, and rethinking can and should involve colleagues and teachers. More information about the essays will be provided during the term.

Weekly Reading and Participation Assignments

A central component of this course is discussion, and you will be graded on participation. It is important that our conversations revolve around your own questions and not just mine. As you are reading the material, not only should you be sorting through the ideas in the text, the way in which those ideas are expressed, and in general coming to an understanding of the text, but you should also be asking questions: what is the central argument or idea from a text? How does this writer's ideas compare with another's? What does the author's argument reveal about the values and attitudes of the time? What is confusing about this text, what is problematic, what is beautiful? How does this text inform our understanding of the historical period we are studying? Bringing one or two of those questions to the table in class discussion is your responsibility as a member of our community of scholars. To help facilitate this process, you will have weekly reading and discussion assignments. These assignments will be on the Canvas site, and you will be expected come prepared to share your question in each class session.

For all of our in class time, I will grade your in class participation based on quality of comments contributed to discussion and lecture. I will also take attendance daily. Finally, in all of our class time the use of all electronic devices is not allowed, this includes laptops, tablets, and cellphones. The only exception to this policy is documented medical or learning needs.

Exams

The final exam will be 50 minutes in length. You will be given study questions one week before the exam to help you organize your review; there will also be an in-class exam review. The exam will be short answers and an essay question, with some choice. This is an in-class exam and you will need a blue book. These are sold in many cafes and kiosks on campus. Let me know if you have documented test-taking anxiety or any other impairment that might affect your ability to take in-class tests, and we will work together for alternate testing accommodations.

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity

The process of learning is hard, and sometimes students are tempted to take shortcuts in the form of plagiarism. However, any student who uses words, ideas, or sources without proper citation will be given a failing grade and reported for further action in line with the University's policies. This includes using the work of AI generated essay content. We will talk more about what constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid it.

Use of the Canvas site

We will be making use of Canvas, an on-line system that allows for easy transmission and organization of assignments and other materials. You will be sent an invitation to join the site, and thereafter will have access to the History Canvas. You will turn in work and check the site for information. However, most of our communication will be via email or in person. I do not accept late work of any type without prior written approval from me.

Assignments and Grading Policies

- 10% Participation
- 15% Reading Responses
- 20% Essay 1
- 30% Essay 2
- 25% Final Exam

Textbooks

Course Packet available as pdf on the Canvas site

Class Schedule and Assignments

Week 1

Course Introduction: From Labor to Class in the Industrial Era

Central Question: What is history? What is labor, work, and class?

Readings: E.P. Thompson, excerpts from *The Making of the English Working Class*; Active Reading and Notation Handouts

Assignment: Due Thursday, Weekly Reading Response

Week 2

Industrial Capitalism in the Gilded Age

Central Question: What explains the degree of violence in American society during the Gilded Age?

Readings: Melvin Dubofsky, excerpts from *Time of Chaos*; Lucy Parsons, "I am an anarchist,"; William Graham Sumner on Social Darwinism,

Assignment: Due Sunday. – Weekly Reading Response Paper

Week 3

Race, Immigration, and Industrialization

Central Question: What is race? What is the relationship between industrialization and racial formation?

Readings: Excerpts from Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans*, (Little, Brown and Company, 1998); Harper's Weekly on Chinese Exclusion

Assignment: Due Sunday – Weekly Reading Response Paper

Week 4

Women and Work in the 1890s

Central Questions: What explains the conditions working class women faced in the 1890s?

Readings: Excerpts from Elizabeth G. Flynn, *The Rebel Girl: An Autobiography, My First Life*, (New York: Intl Pub Co Inc, 1973); Documents from Eileen Boris and Nelson Lichtenstein, eds., *Major Problems in the History of American Workers* (Wadsworth, Paperback, 2002).

Assignment: First Essay Rough Draft Due; Due Sunday. – Weekly Reading Response Paper

Week 5

Black Labor in the early 20th Century

Central Question: What explains the oppression of black people in the early 20th century?

Readings: Excerpts from Michael K. Honey, *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights: Organizing Memphis Workers*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993); Race and the Southern Worker documents from Manning Marable and Leith Mullings eds., *Let Nobody Turn Us Around: An African American Anthology*, (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009).

Assignment: Due Sunday – Weekly Reading Response Paper; First Essay Peer Review

Week 6

Individual Writing Conferences

Week 7

Labor, Violence and the Law

Central Question: What explains the role of the state in working class lives in this period?

Readings: Nate Holdren, “Incentivizing Safety and Discrimination: Employment Risks under Workmen’s Compensation in the Early Twentieth Century United States,” *Enterprise & Society* 15, no. 1 (March 2014): 31–67; Documents from Boris and Lichtenstein, eds., *Major Problems*.

Assignment: Due Sunday – Weekly Reading Response Paper; First Paper Assignment Due

Week 8

Radicalism and the IWW

Central Question: What explains the popularity and variety of left radicalism in the US?

Readings: “Thunder on the Left,” excerpt from Melvyn Dubofsky, *Labor in America: A History*, (UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017); Documents from Joyce Kornbluh, ed., *Rebel Voices: An IWW Anthology*, (Chicago, Ill: Charles H Kerr, 1988) and “If we must die,” and the “African Blood Brotherhood,” in Marable and Mullings, *Let Nobody Turn Us Around*

Assignment: Due Sunday – Weekly Reading Response Paper

Week 9

WWI and the Red Scare

Central Question: What role does war and empire play in relation to worker’s movements? Why?

Readings: Excerpts from Ahmed White, *Under the Iron Heel: The Wobblies and the Capitalist War on Radical Workers*, (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2022); Documents from “Protesting the First War,” in Howard Zinn and Anthony Arnove, *Voices of a People’s History of the United States* (Seven Stories Press, 2011).

Assignment: Due Sunday – Weekly Reading Response Paper

Week 10

Progressivism in the 1920s

Central Question: Was Progressivism progressive? What explains the rise, and failures of the Progressive Movement?

Readings: Shelton Stromquist, excerpts from *Re-Inventing "The People,"*; Jane Addams, from *Twelve Years at Hull House*; Crystal Eastman, "Now We Can Begin," *Liberator*

Assignment: Due Sunday – Weekly Reading Response Paper

Week 11

The Great Depression and Making a New Deal

Central Question: What explains the advent of the New Deal?

Readings: Excerpts from Irving Bernstein, *The Turbulent Years: A History of the American Worker, 1933-1940*, (Chicago, Ill. : Minneapolis, Minn.: Haymarket Books, 2010); *With Babies and Banners: Story of the Women's Emergency Brigade*, Documentary, 1979; Preamble to the Wagner Act

Assignment: Due Sunday – Weekly Reading Response; Second Essay Rough Draft

Week 12 (THANKSGIVING WEEK)

World War II

Central Question: Why did divisions in the American working class persist during the war?

Readings: excerpts from Katherine Archibald, *Wartime Shipyard: A STUDY IN SOCIAL DISUNITY*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

Assignment: Due Sunday – Weekly Reading Response; Second Essay Peer Review

Week 13

Individual Writing Conferences

Week 14

Final Paper Due and Final Exam Review

Week 15

Final Exam