

**37:575:201:08 U.S. Labor and Work Before the End of Reconstruction**  
**Fall 2025**

Professor:	Mary Obrien Sobol
Class meetings:	Friday; 12:10-3:10PM
Office hours:	By Zoom Mondays from (also, by appointment)
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**INTRODUCTION**

**Labor, Democracy, and Social Justice**

**This course explores key developments and themes in the history of work in the Americas, beginning with the first encounters among European, African, and Native American civilizations and continuing through Reconstruction after the Civil War. We will study the major transformations that shaped early concepts of work, including slavery, indentured servitude, free labor, industrialization, and the rise of the labor movement.**

**Throughout the semester, we will examine the relationship between labor and democracy, with particular attention to the limits placed on freedom and economic opportunity. Our focus will include slavery, servitude, the displacement of Indigenous peoples, and the struggles of the poor and working class, especially young women and men. The course highlights form of resistance and activism—such as rebellions, abolition, and the fight for women’s suffrage—that challenged exploitation and expanded the meaning of justice and democracy.**

**Readings, case studies, and videos will ground our discussions of how these struggles reshaped work, rights, and society.**

**Democracy in the Classroom**

**In this syllabus, students’ work is recognized as labor that is best empowered by democracy in the classroom. Working in groups, students assume a voice developing our midterm and final examinations, as we interrogate the history of work. Students’ engagement is, therefore, our course’s framework for a democracy *in-micro* that gives power to students’ abilities to learn skills crucial to law, commerce, and social justice. Ultimately, our course exists to instill students with confidence in the value of their own intellectual and cultural work as learners. Ours is a curriculum that elicits what students want from their work lives and from their careers in the context of the labor history that we study and interpret. Students’ collaboration is, consequently, crucial and premised upon conversations and reasoning as well as writing that anticipate what students want for the world that they and future generations will inherit.**

**A Writing Intensive Course**

**Our course is a writing intensive curriculum that requires students to deliberate and to compose their opinions on critical controversies enunciated in **the historical documents** that we study in their social and cultural context. This writing process permits students to reflect upon what they have learned from history and to formulate, extend, and fully**

express what they believe regarding history's meaning in the present. To promote this reflective encounter, the assignments for our class will require students to develop a series of essays framed by students' questions and interests on matters of ethical importance as we consider what history means today.

*It is important to note "that all work submitted in a course, academic research, or other activity is the student's own and created without the aid of impermissible technologies, materials, or collaborations (Rutgers University Code of Conduct). Thus, the use of Chat GPT and similar technologies is not permitted in composing essays for our class.*

### **COURSE READINGS:**

Our materials can be found in the Modules Section of our Canvas site, including:

1. ***Who Built America? Working People and the Nation's History***, 3rd ed., Bedford / St. Martin's Press, 2008. (Referred to as WBA? in the following pages of the syllabus.) This is the textbook for the course. All assigned readings from the textbook are available on Canvas.
2. **Freedom on My Mind A history of African American with documents Third Edition; 2013; Mia Bay, Deborah Grey White, Waldo E Martin Jr.** all assignment readings from the textbook are available on Canvas.

**3. Other Required Readings:** In addition to the textbook, the material posted in the Modules section of the Canvas site comprises our topics, including primary and secondary sources that are vital to understanding each period covered by the course. Our schedule herein is aligned to the assignments and topics framed in our Canvas site according to required readings for each week of the Academic Calendar.

### **COURSE STRUCTURE**

This course is conducted in-person, and all meetings will take place at the assigned location. Weekly attendance is mandatory, as class sessions are central to engaging with the course's essential activities. Typically, each class begins with a lecture in which I discuss historical accounts of labor during the period under study. Midway through, students work in discussion groups, followed by a full-class session to share critical questions, view films, discuss readings, and address topics relevant to writing assignments. Classes conclude with a summary of key topics and reminders about upcoming deadlines, research, and writing responsibilities. Active attention and participation are essential throughout these activities.

### **COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

This course fulfills the learning objectives required by Rutgers University core curriculum as well as goals and objectives articulated in School of Management & Labor Relations programming. To learn more about these objectives, please click [here](#).

## **ASSIGNMENTS**

## Mid-Term and Final Examinations

### Examination Essay Questions:

As a feature of students' participation in class discussions and activities, and a weekly question and questions from the readings and videos; Students wish to be asked on the Midterm and Final Examinations will be due on Sundays and will figure as **30% of the Participation and Attendance Grade**. These questions will be the basis of our examinations. Please see rubric for Examination Essay Questions at the end of the syllabus.

The examinations (Midterm and Final) will each ask students **to write short essays** responding to questions of opinion that have emerged in our reading and discussion of the history of issues such as the human rights of workers, their families, and communities. Attention will be paid to a series of themes related to concepts of accuracy, truth, and justice in the course of our deliberations each week. Students will play a defining role in selecting questions that they wish to be asked on our midterm and final exams.

Students will receive the Exam Questions for the Mid-Term Exam on October 20<sup>th</sup>  
And will Submit Examination Essay Answers on October 24<sup>th</sup>

Students will receive the Exam Questions for the Final Exam on December 19<sup>th</sup>  
And will Submit Examination Essay Answers on December 23<sup>th</sup>

### Essay #1— (*Rough Draft/ Oct 3<sup>rd</sup> Due, Final Draft/ Oct 31<sup>st</sup> Due*)

**An extensive demand for labor marked the beginning of European settlement of the Americas in 1492. That need was met over the first two hundred years of colonialism by:**

- **Imprisoning, transporting, and subjugating African peoples to a system of slavery that imposed torture and confinement on them while guaranteeing white land-owners free labor;**
- **Evicting Native Americans from their ancestral lands and extracting resources from them, including unpaid labor;**
- **Indenturing poverty-stricken European immigrants to their employers in a form of servitude that indebted poor whites to the wealthy and expected their loyalty to Europe's aristocracy.**

**In the late 1600s, the class structures of the Americas became more restrictive and formalized. According to a racist hierarchy that violated human rights in pursuit of profits for Plantation owners, merchants, and traders;**

1. **How and why did this transformation occur? For instance, the Zane Massacre and other historical examples highlight the argument that reparations should be paid to individuals, families, and communities who were traumatized and**

**exploited by labor systems such as indentured servitude, the slave practices established after 1492, and the slave labor codes of the mid-1600s.**

**Write a four and half; five-page paper (approximately 1,300 words) that addresses the question of whether reparations will, finally, serve justice. Be specific about the losses that must be compensated and the form those reparations should take. Include references to particular events in the past and deadlines for reconciliation in the present and future. In your response, be sure to base your claims on materials read in the assigned readings (you do not need to read additional sources for this assignment).**

All papers should follow standard grammar, punctuation and citation methods in conformance with APA or MLA Guidelines.

## **SECOND ASSIGNMENTS *(Continued)* will follow**

### **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**

This is an inclusive learning environment that is welcoming of all people and perspectives, including those of diverse races, religions, ethnicities, ages, gender identities and sexual orientations. If you go by a name or gender that is different from the one on official Rutgers documents, please let me know so that I can use the proper name and pronouns.

### **Cheating/Plagiarism**

Students in this class and in all courses at Rutgers University are expected to uphold the highest standards of academic integrity. Cheating, plagiarism in written work, receiving and providing unauthorized assistance, and sabotaging the work of others are among the behaviors that constitute violations of the Academic Integrity Policy. You are expected to be familiar with this policy. If you have questions about specific assignments, be sure to check with the instructor. The Academic Integrity Policy defines all forms of cheating and the procedures for dealing with violations. You should be familiar with this policy. The trust between the instructor and the class depends on your acceptance of this essential principle of behavior in the University. Do your own work and do not provide unauthorized assistance to others and you will find this course more rewarding.

### **STATEMENT ON DISABILITIES**

Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation:

<https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines>. If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus's disability services office will provide you with a Letter of Accommodations. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. To begin this process, please complete the Registration form on the ODS web site at:

<https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/registration-form>.

### EVALUATION

You will write two essays this semester, on topics to be announced. Each essay accounts for 20% of your final grade. You will write several drafts of each. All are mandatory, as is participation in peer review. There will also be two essay-based exams (a Midterm and a Final); each of these exams will be worth 15% of your grade (see rubric of this syllabus). Please see the descriptions of your Essay Assignments and Examinations at the end of this syllabus. In addition, your participation in our class counts for 30% of your grade, which will include your involvement in class discussions and activities such as your developing and posting weekly essay questions for our Midterm and Final Exams.

Grades	
Participation	30%
Essay #1 First	20%
Essay #2 second essay	20%
Midterm Exam	15%
Final Exam	15%

### COURSE PARTICIPATION.

Students are required to attend weekly meetings and to participate in discussions of films, readings, and other materials posted on the Course Canvas site and identified by the Syllabus as “required reading.”

Each week every student will be required to post an “Exam Question” that distills our discussions of the topics during the week. The purpose of the Exam Questions is to promote reflection that prompts short essays on both the Midterm and Final Exams (see the rubric for exam question in our course syllabus). Both Midterm and Final Exams will be made up of questions posted by students.

Thus, students' participation grade (30%) will be based upon the important weekly submission of Exam Question that emerge from class deliberations and considerations

and discussions of issues crucial to understanding the history of work. The questions will be developed and shared on our Canvas Module page. Every student must submit an Exam Question to our Canvas site by Saturday of each week (see deadline dates on Assignments page) and will respond to another student's questions within two days. First Exam Question is due: September 14<sup>th</sup>.

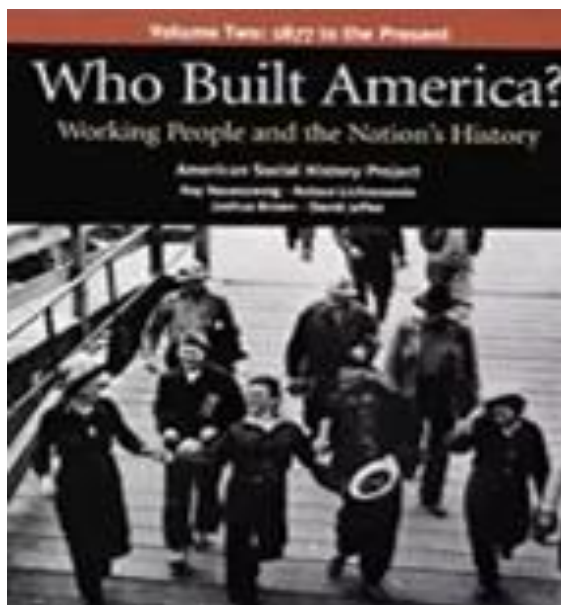
**Participation Grade Will Be Based Upon:**

Attendance and Contribution to Class Meetings Participation (30%)

At the conclusion of course (November/December), instructor may review class documents and assess students' participation by interviewing students about their experience composing questions for our Midterm & Final Exams and writing short essays to answer the Exam Questions as well as the longer Essays that are required for our course.

**You must complete all written assignments in order to receive credit for this course.**

We will turn back all assignments in a timely manner. If we do not turn back your assignment, it is your job to bring this to our attention. If you believe we have not recorded a grade for an assignment you have turned in, you must clear this up during the semester. After the semester is over, we will not be able to consider claims that you turned in an assignment if we have no record of it.



**Textbook Freedom on My Mind 2013 Third Edition**

**Evaluation Breakdown**

Attendance and participation: 30%  
Essay #1: 20%  
Essay #2: 20%  
Midterm Exam: 15%  
Final Exam: 15%

**Grading Criteria**

A 90-100%  
B+ 85-90%  
B 80-85%  
C+ 75-80%  
C 70-75%  
D 60-69%  
F 59% and below

**Class attendance**

You are expected to attend each of our scheduled meetings, and to be on time. Be punctual and plan to stay for the entire class. Students who repeatedly arrive late and/or leave at break will have their grades lowered. If you need to leave early, contact the instructor before class; otherwise, you are expected to remain until the class is over.

**Statement on Academic Freedom**

Freedom to teach and freedom to learn are inseparable facets of academic freedom. This class will introduce an array of sometimes conflicting ideas and interpretations of U.S. history, and all who partake in the course should feel encouraged to express their views in an open, civic forum.

Please note that the syllabus may change during the semester as I deem necessary.

<b>WEEKLY SCHEDULE</b>
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**Familiarize yourself with the syllabus, and review the weekly modules. Be sure to go through the assigned videos and readings listed in each module**

**Rubric**  
**Mid-Term and Final Exam: Short Essays**

Criteria	Ratings		Pts
<b>Supporting Evidence/Proof</b> Student must provide historical evidence supporting the opinion stated in the essay. Evidence needs to align with or prove the opinion in a manner that reflects an understanding of the history of labor. Referencing and Citing sources is a defining feature of providing accurate proof. (See APA Guidelines.)	<b>5.0 pts Full Marks</b>	<b>0.0 pts No Marks</b>	5.0 pts
<b>Statement of Opinion / Thesis Statement</b> Student must express an opinion regarding the essay question. This opinion should be contained in a carefully worded sentence (or possibly two sentences).	<b>5.0 pts Full Marks</b>	<b>0.0 pts No Marks</b>	5.0 pts
<b>Writing</b> Writing on the short-essay exam answers should reflect careful reasoning, attention to complexity of questions & essay prompts, and thoughtful word choices that demonstrate essential concepts of our course.	<b>5.0 pts Full Marks</b>	<b>0.0 pts No Marks</b>	5.0 pts
<b>Relevance</b> Short essay also must explain how problems of workers of the past are relevant to the struggles of workers in the present.	<b>5.0 pts Full Marks</b>	<b>0.0 pts No Marks</b>	5.0 pts



Criteria	Ratings	Pts
Total Points: 20.0		

Exam Question Rubric			
Criteria	Ratings		Pts
Relevance			5 pts
Question should relate a historical personage, source, or problem to the present in a compelling way that initiates reflection.	5 pts Full Marks	0 pts No Marks	
Vocabulary			5 pts
Question should draw upon vocabulary that inspires students to refer to profound knowledge of history by consulting concepts pertinent to legal reasoning, concepts in the social and physical sciences or the arts.	5 pts Full Marks	0 pts No Marks	
Opinion & Evidence			5 pts
Question should elicit student's opinion and compel supporting evidence that is derived in fact, with an understanding of primary and secondary historical sources, referencing & citing sources accurately.	5 pts Full Marks	0 pts No Marks	
Reasoning			5 pts
Question promotes a brief essay that develops a thesis (usually at the beginning of the essay) and demonstrates complex reasoning appropriate to the problem raised.	5 pts Full Marks	0 pts No Marks	
Total Points: 20			

**Student resources for Mental Health, Academic Coaching, and Financial Assistance**  
<https://smlr.rutgers.edu/about-smlr/fall-2022-information-smlr-students>

### **Scholarships**

To ensure that all students are aware of SMLR's scholarship offerings, we encourage you review this link to our scholarships:

<https://smlr.rutgers.edu/academic-programs/scholarships>

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