

History of Labor and Work in the United States, 1880 to 1945

Rutgers University 37:575:202:92

Fall 2026

Course schedule: Asynchronous online content on Zoom will be available each week on Monday following our Tuesday, September 2nd start date.

Instructor: Prof. Daniel Richter

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Virtual office hours by appointment on Wednesday or Friday mornings.

Course Description: This course introduces important developments and themes in the U.S. labor movement from 1880 through World War II. We will take a close look at how American workers built labor unions, civil rights organizations, and social movements to defend their interests during wars, depressions, and periods of conflict with those who controlled wealth and capital. By focusing on these struggles, we will learn about some of the people, ideas, and institutions that shaped the history of labor, while also exploring the workplace and the economy in political, social, and cultural terms.

Skills development: This course meets the writing distribution requirement for the School of Arts and Sciences. In addition to developing writing skills through writing successive drafts, students will learn to provide constructive feedback to their peers. By the conclusion of the course, students will demonstrate an increase in their knowledge and skills in writing and revising academic essays. Specifically, students should be able to:

- Enter into a dialogue with specialists in a particular field of study,
- Read essays and extract and explain key points and terms,
- Organize a paper from thesis, to topic sentence, to conclusion,
- Interact with texts by using meaningful citations in their papers,
- Use a range of sentence structures, and
- Write meaningful, clear, and organized papers.

Learning Objectives: 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.

School of Arts and Sciences:

Students will learn 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:

Students will learn 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:

Students will learn to:

I: 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 Requirements:

1. **Read the entire syllabus** and make sure you understand it. This is your contract with your instructors.
2. **Be prepared for class.** Always complete any reading, discussion, and writing assignments by their due dates. Check your email regularly for class announcements.
3. **Participation.** For most weeks of this course, we will have asynchronous lectures available in the weekly modules. In addition, we will have discussion forums or other assignments that you will complete over a course week. You should participate fully in these forums and assignments. Please note that I will ask you to respond to your the posts of your classmates during three to four weeks of the semester. If you have a legitimate reason for not being able to participate in course activities (due to COVID-19, serious illness, or another major reason), please report it in writing to me in advance or as soon as possible using the University absence reporting website <https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra>. Not all absences will be excused. The participation grade will be based on the completion of ten discussion forums on assigned readings and videos throughout the semester, but points will be deducted for unexcused absences from the writing conferences.

4. **Absences due to illness.** Please report absences in writing in advance or as soon as possible using the University absence reporting website <https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra>. Medical documentation is not required for reporting absences. Students with excused absences will be able to make up missed course work.

All Rutgers students, faculty, and staff are required to be fully vaccinated against Covid-19, obtain a booster when eligible, and upload records to the university vaccine portal.

As of October 2022, face masks are not required in most in-door settings on campus, including classrooms. For more information, see: <https://coronavirus.rutgers.edu/health-and-safety/community-safety-practices/>

1. **Academic Integrity and use of Chatbots and AI:** Academic integrity requires that all academic work be the product of an identified individual or individuals. Joint efforts are legitimate only when the assistance of others is explicitly acknowledged and permitted by the assignment. Ethical conduct is the obligation of every member of the university community, and breaches of academic integrity constitute serious offenses. Students must assume responsibility for maintaining honesty in all work submitted for credit and in any other work designated by the instructor of this course. Students are also expected to report incidents of academic dishonesty to the instructor or dean of the instructional unit.

In concert with Rutgers' code of conduct, which mandates "[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](#)," this course has been designed to promote student learning, critical thinking, skills, and intellectual development without reliance on unauthorized technology including chatbots and other forms of "artificial intelligence" (AI). Although students may use spell-check and simple grammar-check in crafting assignments, they may not use chatbots and other forms of AI. Students will also be asked to complete an academic integrity checklist before submitting papers and exams. Please consult with the instructor to ask questions about permissible and non-permissible use of technology in this course.

For more information on the Rutgers University Academic Integrity Policy, see <https://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/>

1. **Copyright:** The instructor for this course holds the copyright to the course teaching materials, including lecture slides, discussion questions, exams, and assignments. The copyrights to the readings and films belong to their rights holders (authors, producers, publishers, etc.). Students may not copy or distribute this material without the permission of the instructor. Unauthorized distributions of course materials are serious offenses. For more information on the Rutgers University Copyright Policy, see <http://policies.rutgers.edu/sites/policies/files/50.3.7-current.pdf>
2. **Disability Statement:** 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, To begin this process, visit <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/common-forms>

3. **Statement on Academic Freedom:** Freedom to teach and freedom to learn are inseparable facets of academic freedom. This course 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.
4. **Missed Exams:** All students are expected to take the scheduled midterm and final exams at the designated times.
5. **Canvas:** This course uses the Rutgers Canvas course management system, accessible at <https://canvas.rutgers.edu>. Click "NetID Login" on the right side of the main Canvas site. Once you log in, you can access the course site by clicking the "Courses" tab. The course site features the syllabus and weekly modules with the reading, viewing, and writing assignments.
6. **Paper Assignments:** All paper drafts, peer reviews, and writing conferences be completed for full credit. You will submit all drafts of your papers electronically on Canvas and they will be checked using Turnitin.
7. **Lateness Policy:** All late paper assignments will be marked down 10 points for every 24-hour period they are late. All drafts, peer reviews, and writing conferences have point values. If you have a severe personal emergency that makes it impossible for you to meet the deadlines, please contact your instructors.
8. **Open Access and Affordable Textbooks Program:** The assigned course readings include the open-access edition of the textbook [*Who Built America?: Working People and the Nation's History*](#) published by the American Social History Project and Center for Media and Learning at the City University of New York, the [Labor Studies and Work open-access book series](#) published by the Temple University Press and Libraries, and other materials. The assigned documentary films have been licensed for streaming by the Rutgers University Libraries. All of these course materials are available to Rutgers students free of charge.
9. **Assignment Points:** Assignments are assigned points (up to 1,000 total points for all course assignments)

Discussion responses: 200 points (You must complete ten discussion responses worth 20 points each; points are deducted for unexcused absences for class meetings where this is a classroom assignment). You should write to three paragraphs for each response. You must complete the first five discussion responses and then you can choose any five responses. Please note that the responses are due each week by Monday at 11:59 pm and the first response is due during Week Two.

Paper 1: 200 points (25 points for the first draft and peer review; 25 points on the second draft; 150 points for the final draft)

Midterm Exam: 200 points

Paper 2: 200 points (25 points for the first draft and peer review; 25 points for the second draft; 150 points for the final draft)

Final Exam: 200 points

1. **Final Grades:** Here is how the 1,000 point grade scale translates into final letter grades:

900 to 1000 points = A 850 to 899 points = B+ 750 to 799 points = C+ 600 to 699 points = D
800 to 849 points = B 700 to 749 points = C 0 to 599 points = F

Rutgers COVID-19 Information

For up-to-date information about Rutgers and COVID-19, visit <https://coronavirus.rutgers.edu>.

Additional Help With Writing

[The Rutgers Learning Centers](#) offers remote writing coaching services to students enrolled in this course.

Student Affairs

The Office of the Dean of Students provides support to students who may be facing exceptional difficulties that could jeopardize their education. Visit their website to learn more about the type of support they offer and/or to schedule an appointment.

Health & Wellness

[Student Health & Wellness Services](#) provides health services to students on its various campuses through Student Health Centers.

Student Resources

[The Information for SMLR students page](#) with links to resources for mental health, academic coaching, and financial assistance.

Scholarships for SMLR Students

[This page](#) contains information about scholarships available for current (and future!) SMLR students enrolled in the [LSER, LER, and HRM undergraduate programs](#) and the [MLER, MHRM, and IR/HR PhD graduate programs](#).

Technical Support

If you need technical assistance at any time during the course or to report a problem with Canvas:

- Visit the [Canvas Video Guide](#)
- Contact [Rutgers IT Help Desk](#) (<https://it.rutgers.edu/help-support>, call 833-OIT-HELP)

The syllabus, schedule, and assignments are subject to change as the course evolves.

Weekly Class Schedule:

Week 1 (9/2): Introduction/From the Grand Army of Starvation to the the Knights of Labor

Readings and Videos:

Review the syllabus and course expectations on the Syllabus page.

This is our textbook (completely open access with no login required): [*Who Built America? Working People and the Nation's History.*](#)

Readings:

[*Who Built America? Volume 2, Prologue.*](#) and [*Who Built America? Volume 2, Chapter 1.*](#) from the beginning through the "Businessmen Look to Politics" section.

[*Who Built America? Vol. 2, Chapter 2.*](#) from the beginning of the chapter through "The Decline of the Knights."

[Alex Gourevitch, "Our Forgotten Labor Revolution," *Jacobin*, August 26, 2015.](#)

Viewing:

1877: The Grand Army of Starvation, <https://vimeo.com/305575472>

Upcoming Assignments:

[Paper 1 Draft 1 and Peer Review.](#)

Week 2 (9/8): Industrial Capitalism and Trade Unionism

Readings:

[*Who Built America? Vol. 2.*](#) from "Labor Politics and Conflict" to the end of the chapter.

[*Who Built America? Vol. 2, Chapter 3.*](#) from the beginning of the chapter through "The Cross of Gold."

In-class discussion documents:

[Andrew Carnegie, Gospel of Wealth excerpts, 1889.](#)

[Samuel Gompers, What Does Labor Want?, 1893](#)

[Statement From the Pullman Strikers, June 15, 1894.](#)

Clip from [American Socialist: The Life and Times of Eugene Victor Debs.](#) (Minute 10:40 to 17:30) (NetID login required to access film on Kanopy).

Week 3 (9/15): Race and Exclusion in late 19th Century and Early 20th Century America

Readings and Videos:

[Who Built America? Vol. 2, chapter 3.](#) (from "Racism Institutionalized and Challenged" to end)

[Ida B. Wells-Barnett, "Lynch Law in America," 1900.docx](#)

[Tianna Mobley, "Ida B. Wells-Barnett: Anti-Lynching and the White House," White House History Association.](#)

Video: [When White Supremacists Overthrew a Government.](#)

Week 4 (9/22): Immigration and Exclusion in Late 19th and Early 20th Century America/Paper 1 Drafts 1 and 2 and Peer Review

[Wong Hau-hon Reminiscences of an Old Chinese Railroad Worker.pdf](#)

Video: ["Between Two Worlds: The Chinese Exclusion Act"](#)

Paper One submission is due next Tuesday, September 23 at 5:00 pm. Peer reviews are due the next day at 11:59 pm and the second drafts are due by Friday, September 26th at 5:00 pm.

Week 5 (9/29): Writing Revisions and Conferences

Week 6 (10/6): Fight Like Hell: The Testimony of Mother Jones

Readings and Videos:

[Who Built America, Vol. 2, Chapter 5.](#) from “Radical Challenges to the Status Quo” through “The Ludlow Massacre and the Center Shifting to the Left”

Viewing:

Fight Like Hell: The Testimony of Mother Jones, <https://docuseek2-com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/bf-flh>

Week 7 (10/13): The Uprising of the 20,000, Triangle Shirtwaist Fire, and Bread and Roses

The final version of Paper One is due on 10/13 by 11:59 pm.

Readings, Videos, and Assignments

Readings and Videos:

[*Who Built America*, Vol. 2, Chapter 5L.](#)

Please select a primary source from the following website:

<https://trianglefire.ilr.cornell.edu/primary/index.html>

Ardis Cameron, "Bread and Roses revisited: Women's culture and working-class activism in the Lawrence strike of 1912," in *Women, Work, and Protest*, edited by Ruth Milkman (London: Routledge, 1985), 240-261.

Week 8 (10/20): Midterm

The midterm exam will be available from Wednesday, October 22 and due on Friday, October 24 at 11:59 pm.

Week 9 (10/27): World War One and A Job at Ford's

[*Who Built America?* Vol. 2, Chapter 4.](#) from the beginning through "Welfare Capitalism"

[*Who Built America?* Vol. 2, Chapter 7.](#) from the beginning through "African American Life in the 1920s and the Harlem Renaissance"

Viewing: *A Job at Ford's*

Week 10 (11/3): The Great Depression and the First New Deal

Reading:

[*Who Built America?* Vol. 2, Chapter 8.](#) (entire chapter)

Viewing:

[*The Great Depression: New Deal, New York.*](#) (NetID required for off-campus viewing)

Upcoming Assignment:

[Paper 2 Draft 1 and Peer Review](#)

(Due week 11)

Week 11 (11/10): The Rise of the CIO and the Second New Deal; Paper 2 Drafts 1 and 2 and Peer Review

Reading:

Readings and Videos:

[*Who Built America?* Vol. 2, Chapter 9.](#) (entire chapter)

William Z. Foster, "[Foster Points Out Lessons of Great 1919 Steel Strike,](#)" *Daily Worker*, July 6, 1936.

Viewing:

Video: [*With Babies and Banners.*](#)

Week 12 (11/17): Writing Conferences and Revisions

Week 13 (11/24): 1934 West Coast Waterfront Strike and Comparative Labor Activism in Canada, Cuba, and Argentina

Reading:

Rod Palmquist, "Labor's Great War on the Seattle Waterfront: A History of the 1934 Longshore Strike," in the *Waterfront Workers History Project*, https://depts.washington.edu/dock/34strikehistory_intro.shtml

Adam D.K. King, "Revealing The Buried Truth About The 1937 Oshawa GM Strike," *The Maple*, October 28, 2024, <https://www.readthemaple.com/revealing-the-buried-truth-about-the-1937-oshawa-gm-strike/>

Week 14 (12/1): Working in the Arsenal of Democracy

Reading:

[*Who Built America?* Vol. 2, Chapter 10.](#)

Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality In Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 3-31.

Listening:

WKAR Public Media, "When Detroit made cars ... and tanks", July 25, 2016, <https://www.wkar.org/history/2016-07-25/when-detroit-made-cars-and-tanks>

Final version of Second Paper due by 11:59 pm on Monday, 12/1.

Week 15 (12/8): Civil Rights and Labor Activism in World War Two/Paper 2 Final Draft

Reading:

Beth T. Bates, "Double V for Victory" Mobilizes Black Detroit, 1941–1946," in *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South, 1940–1980*, edited by Jeanne Theoharis and Kamari Woodard (New York: Palgrave, 2003), 17-39.

Viewing:

Film: [A. Philip Randolph: For Jobs and Freedom](#)

Final Exam schedule to be announced