

**RUTGERS UNIVERSITY– SYLLABUS SPRING 2026**

**UNITED STATES WORK & LABOR – THE GILDED AGE TO WORLD WAR II**

**PEOPLE AND POWER**

**LSER 202:07**



*LEFT: A sign at the Women's Rights National Historic Park in Seneca Falls, New York requests that visitors report exhibits that might present the United States in a "negative light."*

*RIGHT: National Park Employees remove signage related to slavery from the President's House in Philadelphia's Independence Historical Park on Thursday 1/22/2026. (Mijuel K. Johnson)*

**Instructor: Howard Swerdloff**  
**howard.swerdloff@rutgers.edu**

**LSER 202:07 meets on Tuesdays and Thursdays, from 2:00 PM to 3:20 PM**  
(Eastern Standard Time). Attendance is required.

**The course runs from January 20, 2026, through April 30, 2026.**

**Where: in-person in Scott Hall, Rm 203 (on the College Avenue Campus)**

**Office hours by appointment on [Zoom](#)**  
**Passcode 923742**

Your classmates/teams (I will link to our team chart on Week 2.)

**Welcome to "U.S. Work and Labor from the Gilded Age to World War II: People and Power."**

**Course Description**

This course is designed to introduce you to both a) the field of history as a discipline, including specific critical thinking skills, and b) the content of labor studies: the people,

events, and ideas that produced our world today. This class will also help you hone your writing and research skills. (See the Rutgers Core WCR and WCD goals below.)

History has often been presented as the story of "great men." This course will turn the standard approach on its head and instead look at America and the changes it has undergone through the eyes of working people.

What was life like for machine operators, office workers, sharecroppers, housewives, coal miners, immigrants, teachers, and retail workers during the period of American industrial dominance, and how did their actions affect the course of history? This course will tackle these questions, examining the development of the labor movement and other movements of "ordinary" people, and the enormous changes they have wrought in American history. We will not ignore the important roles of the powerful, but we will examine them together with the actions and ideologies of working-class people and their organizations. We will also look at the world surrounding the labor movement and the social and cultural changes in each period.

We will need to work together to keep everyone engaged. I will try to limit my time "talking at you." Instead, we will work in groups to encourage social interaction. Participation 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 more enjoyable and richer your learning experience will be.

To succeed in this class, you must arrive having read the material and be ready to discuss it. There is a substantial reading load! The readings are the basis for weekly discussion posts on Canvas, in-class group work, and two essays; the latter comprise more than half the final course grade

## **Goals**

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

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 revisions.

- 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 Objectives**

- 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 your learning and our collective learning environment
- To be respectful of others' views, even if different from your own

## Essays

There will be two short essays this term. *You are required to complete both of them to pass the course.* Each essay will ask you to craft a unique argument using assigned readings and assigned films. Rough drafts, peer reviews, and substantial revisions between drafts are required. Academic integrity requires you to do your own work, but composing an essay is not a solitary endeavor; it is a collaborative process. Writing, revising/rethinking, and editing can and should involve colleagues and teachers.

## Plagiarism, AI, and Academic Integrity

The process of learning is hard, students are under pressure, and sometimes they are tempted to take shortcuts in the form of plagiarism. Talk to me before you succumb to that urge! This includes using AI-generated content. AI may be helpful for some tasks, but it cannot replace reading, thinking, and the expression of your ideas in the process of writing. Any student who violates the standards of academic integrity will be given a failing grade and reported for further action in line with the University's policies. We will talk more about AI, and what constitutes plagiarism -- and how to avoid it.

## Late Assignments

Late assignments will be downgraded one letter grade (e.g., A to B) and will not be accepted more than one week after the due date. Contact me immediately if you experience or anticipate any problems, and we will make arrangements as necessary.

## Assignments and Grading Policies

- 10% Attendance (I will deduct 1 point for every absence)
- 10% Participation in class (I will grade in-class group work 2, 1, 0)
- 25% Online discussion forums (See Rubric for criteria)
- 25% Essay 1 (See Rubric for criteria)
- 30% Essay 2 (See Rubric for criteria)

Letter Grade	Range
A	100%to90%
B+	< 90%to86 %

<b>Letter Grade</b>	<b>Range</b>
B	< 86%to80%
C+	< 80%to75%
C	< 75%to70%
D	< 70%to60%
F	< 60%to0%

### **Attendance and Lateness Policies**

- Attendance is expected. After six (6) absences, you risk failing the class. The only excused absences are: religious observances; attendance at required University-sanctioned events that cannot be rescheduled, such as athletic events, out-of-town games, dance or symphony recitals, or a required University-sponsored conference. You should provide a list of dates you will be out of class beforehand and documentation, such as a note from your dean, advisor, or department stating that you are required to attend the event. You are still required to complete all assignments.
- If you transfer into the class late, you have one excused absence. If, for example, you miss the first three classes of the semester, only one will be excused, and you will have two absences.
- We will be engaging in group work in every class, so out of respect for your teammates, please make every effort to arrive on time. After missing 20 minutes of a class, I will mark you as late. After missing 40 minutes, I will mark you as absent. Lateness accrues.

### **Textbooks**

The American Social History Project/Center for Media and Learning at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York [digitized the textbook](#) for this course and has made it available for free online this summer, with a whole range of additional resources. There are only a few differences with the 2008 version. For example, the online version uses updated language like capitalized "B" Black instead of lower-case

"b" black and the proper Native American names. The website also formats nicely to phones and tablets. We will be using Volume 2 as our foundational text. You can print PDFs of the chapters from the [ASHP website](#) if you prefer to work from hard copies.

All other readings listed below will be available on Canvas or via the Web. In order for you to participate actively in class discussions, you must complete the readings by the day they are due. Be sure to read the additional readings as well as the textbook -- they give additional in-depth insights that may be missing in the textbook, and content from both the textbook and supplemental readings will be required to be used in your essays.

### **Academic Freedom**

Faculty and students alike are free to express their viewpoints at appropriate times in class, including perspectives that differ from most in the Rutgers University community. Students may be exposed to views they find challenging, uncomfortable, or distressing. But, since Rutgers is a public institution, First Amendment speech protections apply. Legally, feelings of discomfort are not sufficient to restrict speech. Pedagogically, exposing people to different ideas—even challenging their most deeply held beliefs—is a feature, not a flaw, of academic life. Free inquiry is essential to a robust learning environment. Students and professors are at their best—and best able to contribute to society—when we are exposed to a wide range of challenging ideas.

### **Diversity and Equality**

I am firmly committed to diversity and equality in all areas of campus life, including for members of the LGBTQ community. In this class, I will work to promote an environment where everyone feels safe and welcome, one that affirms people of all gender expressions and gender identities.

### **Weekly Class Schedule**

NOTE: Reading assignments are spelled out class by class in the class agendas (see Modules)

Week 1: Introduction to the Course

Week 2: Historical Background

Week 3: Republicanism, Producerism, and The Knights of Labor

Week 4: Industrial Capitalism and Conflict in the Gilded Age

Week 5: Race, Immigration, and Exclusion

Week 6: Writing Workshops/Paper 1 Rough Draft 1

Week 7: Writing Workshops/Paper 1 Rough Draft 2

Week 8: The IWW, The UMWA, and Mother Jones

Week 9: World War I and The Red Scare

Week 10: Work in the Roaring Twenties

Week 11: The Great Depression and the First New Deal

Week 12: The Rise of the CIO and the Second New Deal

Week 13: Writing Workshops/Paper 2 Rough Draft 1

Week 14: Writing Workshops/Paper 2 Rough Draft 2

Week 15: Writing Workshops/Paper 2 Final Draft

\*\*\*\*\*

### **Finding Support At Rutgers:**

#### **Rutgers Health Services**

- **Medical** <http://health.rutgers.edu>
- **Counseling, Alcohol & Other Drug Assistance Program & Psychiatric Services (CAPS)** <http://rhscaps.rutgers.edu>
- **Health Outreach, Promotion & Education (H.O.P.E.)** <http://rhshope.rutgers.edu>

#### **Academic Deans and the Office of Academic Services**

- <http://sasundergrad.rutgers.edu>
- <https://sebs.rutgers.edu/academics>
- <http://www.business.rutgers.edu/>
- <http://www.masongross.rutgers.edu/content/undergraduate-academic-advisors>
- <http://soe.rutgers.edu/oas/advising>

#### **Dean of Students**

- <http://deanofstudents.rutgers.edu>
- <https://undergraduate.rutgers.edu/for-students/student-resources/campus-deans>

#### **LGBTQ Resources**

- [Scarlet Hub Name Change Page](#)
- [Trans@RU \(New Brunswick Student Affairs page\)](#)
- <http://socialjustice.rutgers.edu/>

### **Rutgers Learning Centers -- (All Courses)**

- <https://rlc.rutgers.edu>

### **Office of Violence Prevention & Victim Assistance**

- <http://vpva.rutgers.edu>

### **Public Safety**

- RUPD <http://publicsafety.rutgers.edu/rupd>
- Department of Transportation Services <http://rudots.rutgers.edu/>

### **Comprehensive Student Success**

- <https://success.rutgers.edu/>