Course Syllabus

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

Rutgers University 37:575:202:95 *Tentative – Subject to Change*

Spring 2026

Course schedule: Thursday, 5:40pm-8:40pm, January 22 - April 30, 2026. Class meetings held remotely on Zoom. Discussion forums, paper assignments, exams, and other course activities on Canvas.

Instructor: Prof. Derek Seidman, PhD

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Virtual office hours by appointment

Course Description: This course surveys major developments and themes in labor and working-class history from 1880 through World War II. We will examine how U.S. 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. We will approach our study of U.S. labor and working-class history between 1880 and 1945 both from the "bottom-up," focused on the diverse experiences, identities, and worldviews of ordinary people, and from the "top-down," looking at the major structures, institutions, leaders, and larger forces that shaped U.S. labor history and the history of the nation more broadly. By combining these "top-down" and "bottom-up" approaches, and through close secondary and primary source readings, we will gain a deeper understanding of the rise of the modern U.S. and the working people - and their movements and organizations - that shaped this history.

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. At the conclusion of the course, students will demonstrate an increase in their knowledge and skills in writing and revising academic essays.

It is my hope that by the end of this course, students will be able to:

- develop and demonstrate their critical thinking and analytical skills as readers, listeners, writers, and communicators.
- be able to organize a paper from thesis, to topic sentence, to conclusion and write meaningful, clear, and organized papers.
- be able to generate *your own* arguments, backed by evidence, on the questions raised by the history we study.
- be able to recall the key features and basic arcs of the aspects of U.S. labor history we study, and understand how the different parts of that history relate to a larger whole.
- develop a basic understanding of how to interpret primary and secondary sources.
- perhaps most of all, I hope that the study of U.S. labor and working-class history strengthens your own capacity for tolerance, empathy, and understanding and helps you to further develop your own personal sense of morality and larger mission in life.

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:

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 Requirements:

1. **Read the entire syllabus** and make sure you understand it! You will be responsible for following the rules, guidelines and expectations here.
2. **Be prepared for class**. Always complete any reading, discussion, and writing assignments by their due dates. *Also, check your email and Canvas notifications regularly for class announcements!*
3. **Participation**. For most weeks of this course, we will have synchronous (live) class meetings on Zoom that students are expected to attend. These will also be recorded and posted on the course Canvas site. In addition, we will have asynchronous discussion forums or other assignments that you will complete over the course of most weeks. You should participate fully in these forums and assignments. The participation grade will be based on the completion of eight asynchronous discussion forums on assigned readings and videos throughout the semester.
4. **Absences due to illness.** 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), report it *in writing* in advance or as soon as possible using the University absence reporting website **https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/** ⤷ **(https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/)** . Not all absences will be excused. Students with excused absences will be able to make up missed course work.
4. **Academic Integrity:** Academic integrity requires that all academic assignments you submit must be the product of your own work. This means that you must generate and write your own work that you submit. For example, you cannot submit work that was produced by another person but that you present as your own work, and you cannot submit work as your own that was created or assisted by a computer application, **including artificial intelligence (AI) programs such as ChatGPT, etc**. Doing so would constitute plagiarism and/or academic dishonesy and violate class policy and Rutgers University Academic Integrity Policy. 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. For more information on the Rutgers University Academic Integrity Policy, see **http://nbacademicintegrity.rutgers.edu/home/academic-integrity-policy/** **(http://nbacademicintegrity.rutgers.edu/home/academic-integrity-policy/)** and **https://nbprovost.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-students** **(https://nbprovost.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-students)**

5. **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** ⏩ **(http://policies.rutgers.edu/sites/policies/files/50.3.7-current.pdf)** 🔊 **(https://docreader.readspeaker.com/docreader/? cid=8909&lang=en_us&url=http%3A%2F%2Fpolicies.rutgers.edu%2Fsites%2Fpolicies%2Ffiles%2F50.3.7-current.pdf)**

6. **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** ⏩ **(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://webapps.rutgers.edu/student-ods/forms/registration.** ⏩ **(https://webapps.rutgers.edu/student-ods/forms/registration)**

7. **Statement on 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 our best–and best able to contribute to society–when we are exposed to a wide range of challenging ideas.

8. **Missed Exams:** All students are expected to take the scheduled midterm and final exams at the designated times.

9. **Canvas:** This course uses the Rutgers Canvas course management system, accessible at **https://canvas.rutgers.edu** ⏩ **(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.

10. **Paper Assignments:** All paper drafts and peer reviews must be completed for full credit. You will submit all drafts of your papers electronically on Canvas and they will be checked using Turnitin.

11. **Lateness Policy:** All late assignments (major paper assignments and exams) will be marked down 10 points for every 24-hour period they are late. All drafts and peer reviews have point values. If you

have a severe personal emergency that makes it impossible for you to meet the deadlines, please contact your instructor.

12. **Required Readings:** Many of the reading assignments will be chapters from the following textbook, which is **available free online** ⬀ **(https://www.whobuiltamerica.org/reader/table-of-contents)** :

Who Built America? Open Educational Resource ⬀

(https://www.whobuiltamerica.org/reader/table-of-contents) (known in its most recent print edition as: Clark, Christopher and Nancy Hewitt, eds. Who Built America?: Working People and the Nation's History Volume One: To 1877, Third Edition. Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin Press, 2008).

In addition to the textbook, there are other required readings and videos that will either be assigned to for class meetings and discussion forums. These will be posted as PDF files, Word documents, video files, or web links in the modules on the weekly modules on the course Canvas site. Some of the additional readings are primary source documents written in the past that provide perspectives and insight on historical developments and events. Other additional readings are secondary source commentaries and historical analyses written after the events have taken place.

13. **Assignment Points:** Assignments are assigned points (up to 1,000 total points for all course assignments)

Discussion forums: 200 points (8 discussion forums worth 25 points each)

Paper 1: 200 points (50 points for the first draft and peer review; 150 points for the final draft)

Midterm Exam: 200 points

Paper 2: 200 points (50 points for the first draft and peer review; 150 points for the final draft)

Final Exam: 200 points

14. **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

Weekly Class Schedule (NOTE: The syllabus, schedule, and assignments are subject to change as the course evolves)

Week 1 (Jan 22): Course Introduction

Week 2 (Jan 29): 1877 and the "Labor Question"

Week 3 (Feb 5): The Knights of Labor and the Producerist Revolt

Week 4 (Feb 12): Industrial Capitalism and Workers in the Gilded Age

Week 5 (Feb 19): Labor Militancy from the IWW to Mother Jones

Week 6 (Feb 26): Writing Conferences for Paper 1

Week 7 (Mar 5): The Boundaries of Citizenship: Race, Immigration, and Exclusion

Week 8 (Mar 12): Radicalism and Reform in the Progressive Era + Midterm

Week 9 (Mar 19): NO CLASS (Spring Break)

[(https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/393231/modules/1984947)](https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/393231/modules/1984947) Week 10 (Mar 26): World War I: "Industrial Democracy" and the Red Scare [(https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/393231/modules/1984949)](https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/393231/modules/1984949)

Week 11 (Apr 2): The Roaring (and not-so-Roaring) 1920s

Week 12 (Apr 9): The Great Depression and the First New Deal

Week 13 (Apr 16): The Rise of the CIO and the Second New Deal

Week 14 (Apr 23): Writing Conferences for Paper 2

Week 15 (April 30): Labor and World War II + Course Conclusion

Final Exam period schedule to be announced

Rutgers COVID-19 Information

For up-to-date information about Rutgers and COVID-19, visit **https://coronavirus.rutgers.edu.** ⬑ **[(https://coronavirus.rutgers.edu)](https://coronavirus.rutgers.edu)**

Additional Help With Writing

[The Rutgers Learning Centers (https://rlc.rutgers.edu/)](https://rlc.rutgers.edu/) offers remote writing coaching services to students enrolled in this course. Visit **https://learningcenters.rutgers.edu/student-services/academic-coaching** ⬑ **(https://learningcenters.rutgers.edu/student-services/academic-coaching)** for more information.

Student Affairs

[The Office of the Dean of Students (https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/16096/pages/student-affairs)](https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/16096/pages/student-affairs) 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 (http://shp.rutgers.edu/current_students/shrp_oss_mhc.html)](http://shp.rutgers.edu/current_students/shrp_oss_mhc.html) provides health services to students on its various campuses through Student Health Centers.

Resources for Student Success

The faculty and staff at Rutgers are committed to your success. Students who are successful tend to seek out resources that enable them to excel academically, maintain their health and wellness, prepare for future careers, navigate college life and finances, and connect with the RU community. Resources that can help you succeed and connect with the Rutgers community can be found at **success.rutgers.edu** ⤷ **(http://success.rutgers.edu/)** , and nearly all services and resources that are typically provided in-person are now available remotely.

Technical Support [(https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/16096/pages/student-affairs)](https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/16096/pages/student-affairs)

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

- Visit the **Canvas Video Guide [(https://community.canvaslms.com/community/answers/guides/video-guide)](https://community.canvaslms.com/community/answers/guides/video-guide)**
- Contact **Rutgers IT Help Desk [(https://rutgersonline.desk.com/)](https://rutgersonline.desk.com/)** (1-877-361-1134, accessible 24 hours a day, 7 days a week)
- Visit the **Getting Started in Canvas page [(https://tlt.rutgers.edu/getting-started-canvas-students)](https://tlt.rutgers.edu/getting-started-canvas-students)**

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