

**Black Workers in American Society**  
**Rutgers University 37:575:303:01**  
**Spring 2026**  
**Tuesday 10:20-1:20 – FH-B3**

Prof Adriane J. Clomax, PhD  
Office hours: By appointment

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**Course Description:** This course will focus on the connection between Black workers and the development of the American Economy. The course materials will examine the evolving position of Black workers in the U.S. economy and demonstrate understanding of the perspectives, theories, and concepts in the field of labor and employment relations. The class will focus on race, racial capitalism, policy, and community economics.

**Learning Objectives:**

***Core Curriculum: 21C and SCL***

- Analyze the degree to which forms of human difference shape a person's experiences of and perspectives on the world (a).
- Analyze a contemporary global issue from a multidisciplinary perspective (b).
- Analyze issues of social justice across local and global contexts (d).
- Understand the bases and development of human and societal endeavors across time and place (h).
- Understand different theories about human culture, social identity, economic entities, political systems, and other forms of social organization. (Goal m).
- Apply concepts about human and social behavior to particular questions or situations. (Goal n).

***Labor Studies and Employment Relations Department:***

- Demonstrate an understanding of the perspectives, theories, and concepts in the field of labor and employment relations. (Goal 1).
- Apply those concepts, and substantive institutional knowledge, to understanding contemporary developments related to work. (Goal 2).
- Analyze the degree to which forms of human difference shape a person's experience of work. (Goal 6)

***School of Management and Labor Relations:***

- Demonstrate an understanding of relevant theories and apply them given the background context of a particular work situation. (Goal IV)
- Evaluate the context of workplace issues, public policies, and management decisions (Goal V).
- Demonstrate an understanding of how to apply knowledge necessary for effective work performance (Goal VI)

**Required Readings:** *Black Folk: The Roots of the Black Working Class* by Blair LM Kelley (ISBN: 978-1-324-09557-6) and electronic materials available on Canvas. *Black Folk: The Roots of the Black Working Class* is also available on Audible for students who would like the option to listen to the book.

**Rules of Engagement:**

Everyone is responsible for creating a safe learning environment. Everyone is allowed to have their own thoughts and opinions, but harassment and verbal abuse will not be accepted. If at any time you feel uncomfortable due to what has been assigned, something that you read, or the behaviors of faculty or another student, please let me know.

**Course Format and Requirements:** This course is a discussion-based seminar on Black workers' experiences in the world of work in the U.S. Throughout history and in the present day, Black Americans have shared their stories through all forms of media, including but not limited to: film, music, television, and the written word. These modalities will be used as learning tools throughout the semester. There will be short lectures, reading circles, and film viewings as imperative components of the learning experience. Students will also be expected to work in teams to analyze the readings as well as complete a group assignment.

Students who take this course must also be prepared to deepen their writing, thinking, and reading of written and media source materials, while demonstrating effective writing skills. Everyone must approach the course with an openness to new ideas and a willingness to learn.

**Media Policy**

The recording and transmission of classroom activities and discussions by students or faculty is ***prohibited without written permission from the class instructor and all students in the class.*** Class participants must have been informed that audio/video recording or reposting of forum contributions may occur. Recording lectures or class presentations is solely authorized for individual or group study with other students enrolled in the same class. Permission to allow the recording is not a transfer of any copyrights in the recording or rights to ownership of content. The recording may not be reproduced or uploaded to publicly accessible web environments without written permission. You may not share any part of any recording without express written permission from all parties potentially affected by the recording.

Recordings, course materials, forum content, and lecture notes may not be exchanged or distributed for commercial purposes, for compensation, or for any other purpose other than study by students enrolled in the class. Public distribution of such materials may constitute copyright infringement in violation of federal or state law, or University policy. Violation of this policy may subject a student to disciplinary action under the University's Standards of Conduct.

***Exception:*** It is not a violation of this policy for a student determined by the Learning Needs and Evaluation Center ("LNEC") to be entitled to educational accommodations, to exercise any rights protected under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, including needed recording or adaptations of classroom lectures or materials for personal research and study. Such recordings of lectures or class presentations are solely authorized for the purposes of individual or group study with other students enrolled in the same class. Permission to allow the recording is not a transfer of any copyrights in the recording or rights to ownership of content. The restrictions on third party web and commercial distribution apply in such cases.

**Basic Needs Security:** Any student who has difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or who lacks a safe and stable place to live and believes this may affect their performance in the course, is urged to contact the [Dean of Students](#) for support. Furthermore, please notify me if you are comfortable in doing so. I will help you find resources. Other family/close relation emergencies may occur. Mental health is a key component to a sustainable life. It is sometimes necessary to miss class for physical or mental health reasons. Let me know in advance or as soon as possible if you are missing assignments for any health or quality of life reasons. If you need assistance, please communicate early and often.

**Academic Integrity:** 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. For more information see the Rutgers University [Academic Integrity Policy](#).

Lectures and materials utilized in this course, including but not limited to videocasts, podcasts, visual presentations, assessments, and assignments, are protected by United States copyright laws as well as [Rutgers University policy](#). As the instructor of this course, I possess sole copyright ownership. You are permitted to take notes for personal use or to provide to a classmate also currently enrolled in this course. Under no other circumstances is distribution of recorded or written materials associated with this course permitted to any internet site or similar information-sharing platform without my express written consent. Doing so is a violation of the university's [Academic Integrity Policy](#).

Similarly, these copyright protections extend to original papers you produce for this course. If I seek to share your work further, I will first obtain your written consent to do so. Finally, as the instructor for this course, I have the responsibility to protect students' right to privacy. Classroom recordings of students will therefore be treated as educational records under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), the U.S. federal law that governs access to educational information and records. Instructors and students must provide notification if any part of online sessions are to be recorded, and such recordings cannot be circulated outside the course.

**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, please complete the Registration form on the ODS web site at: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/registration-form>. This course is open to all students who

meet the academic requirements for participation. Any student who has a need for accommodation based on the impact of disability should refer to the [Rutgers Office of Disability Services](#) and then contact me privately to discuss the specific situation as soon as possible.

**Turnitin** Students agree that by taking this course all required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to Turnitin.com for the detection of plagiarism. All submitted papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. Use of the Turnitin.com service is subject to the Usage Policy posted on the Turnitin.com site. Students who do not agree should contact me immediately.

**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. Any student who is concerned with anything taught or assigned for class is invited to email me to discuss their concerns.

**Communication/Email/Electronic Devices:** Feel free to email me with questions, concerns, ideas, and/or issues that may arise during the semester. Remember to check the syllabus or Canvas resources for general questions before contacting me. I will reply to most emails within 24 hours. Students are responsible for looking for announcements or updates on Canvas.

**Utilizing the James B. Carey Library:** The James B. Carey Library is a great resource when researching your assignments, learning how to cite your sources, and generally using information to achieve your goals. Feel free to reach out to Library Director Julie Peters (jpeters@smlr.rutgers.edu) with any questions you may have!

**Class Assignments:**

Students will complete two individual assignments, a midterm, and one group project for this class. All writing assignments are due on Tuesday at 11:59 p.m. More detailed instructions for each assignment will be posted on Canvas.

**Course Assignments and Class Points**

Personal Mixtape: 20 points

Midterm: 25 points

Final paper: 20 points

Group Project: 25 points

Exit tickets: 1 pt each/ 10 points

Total: 100 points

Points	Letter Grade
90-100	A
85-89.9	B+
80-84.9	B
75- 79.9	C+
70-74.9	C
60-69.9	D

### Individual Assignments:

**Personal Mixtape (Due Feb 10, 2026):** Create a three-song playlist that tells your own “labor story.” Each song should connect to a personal experience, a family or community narrative, or a feeling that relates to work in a broad sense — survival, care, creativity, resistance, or rest.

**Midterm (Due March 10, 2026):** See Canvas for instructions

**Final Paper (Due April 7, 2026):** Art critique and critical analysis

Take a piece of artwork by a Black artist and critique how it depicts or describes any of the main topics discussed in class

### Late Assignments

All writing assignments are due on Tuesday at 11:59 p.m. Assignments will be considered late at midnight. Assignments will lose two points for every day that they are late.

**One-time 24-hour extension:** Each student can use **ONE 24-hour extension** on any **individual assignment** that is due during the semester, no questions asked. Students may use this extension for any assignment except the group assignments. Each assignment is due on Tuesday at 11:59. *If you would like to use your extension, you must submit a Word document with the statement, “I would like to use my one-time 24-hour extension”.* Each extension starts at midnight and ends at 11:59 on Wednesday.

### Assignments that are eligible for this extension:

Personal Mixtape

Midterm

Final Paper

### Group Project (Various Due Dates):

Data Stories of Black Work and Community  
Students will pick a dataset to use to tell a story about a specific issue in the history of Black labor, policy, and community. Students will use data to tell a story about Black labor, policy, and community.

Note: Schedule is Subject to change with notice

Below is a Tentative Course Schedule. The content of the course will be covered in the following sequence. Some topics may change.

Week	Date	Theme	Readings Due	Assignments Due
1	Jan 20	Introduction		
2	Jan 27	Race, Racial Capitalism and Intersectionality	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Lavalley, R., &amp; Johnson, K. R. (2022). Occupation, injustice, and anti-Black racism in the United States of America. <i>Journal of Occupational Science</i>, 29(4), 487-499.</li> <li>2. Biscontini, Tyler (2024) Racial Capitalism. EBSCO Knowledge Advantage. <a href="https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/history/racial-capitalism#full-article">https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/history/racial-capitalism#full-article</a></li> <li>3. Hankivsky, O. (2014). Intersectionality 101. The Institute for Intersectionality Research &amp; Policy, Simon Fraser University. <a href="https://doi.org/10.14288/1.0077923">https://doi.org/10.14288/1.0077923</a></li> </ol>	
3	Feb 3	Black Workers in the Labor Market	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Derenoncourt, E., Montialoux, C., &amp; Bahn, K. (2020, October). Why minimum wages are a critical tool for achieving racial justice in the U.S. labor market. The Washington Center for Equitable Growth. Retrieved from <a href="https://equitablegrowth.org">https://equitablegrowth.org</a></li> <li>2. Wilson, V., &amp; Darity, W. Jr. (2022, March 25). Understanding black-white disparities in labor market outcomes requires models that account for persistent discrimination and unequal bargaining power. Economic Policy Institute. <a href="https://www.epi.org/215219">https://www.epi.org/215219</a></li> </ol>	
4	Feb 10	Reconstruction and The Racial Income Gap	Introduction: Solicitor pp 1-20 Kelley Ch. 1 – Henry, a Blacksmith	Playlist Assignment

5	Feb 17	Domestic Work and Resistance	Kelley: Ch. 2- Sarah at Home Kelley: Ch. 3- Resistant Washerwoman	
6	Feb 24	Pullman Porters & Respectability	Kelley: Ch. 4- The Jeremiad of the Porter Kelley: Ch. 5- Minnie and Bruce	Group Project: The Data Inquiry and Research Proposal (Research & Analysis)
7	Mar 3	Sinners	Kelley: Ch.6 The Maids if the Migration Kelley: Ch. 7 Everything Sufficient for a Good Life Kelley: Conclusion Brunell	
8	Mar 10	Black Americans and the Gilded Age	No readings. Just complete the Midterm	Midterm Due
9	Mar 17	SPRING BREAK	No readings. Enjoy Your break.	
10	Mar 24	The Role of Education and Class Mobility	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Zhou, X., &amp; Pan, G. (2023). Higher education and the black-white earnings gap. <i>American Sociological Review</i>, 88(1), 154-188.</li> <li>2. Clayton, A. B., McClay, L. P., Davis, R. D., &amp; Tevis, T. L. (2023). Considering both HBCU and PWI options: Exploring the college choice process of first-year Black students. <i>The Journal of Higher Education</i>, 94(1), 34-59.</li> <li>3. Johnson, J. M., &amp; Jackson, E. (2024). The HBCU advantage: Reimagining social capital among students attending Black colleges. <i>Frontiers in Education</i>, 9, Article 1344073. <a href="https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2024.1344073">https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2024.1344073</a></li> </ol>	
11	Mar 31	Unions and Cooperatives in the Black Community	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Wilkerson, T. M. (2022). "A Question of Freedom": Black Workers, Union Membership, and Political Participation. <i>Labor Studies Journal</i>, 47(4), 408-432.</li> <li>2. Nembhard, J. G. (2023). African American cooperatives: from economic survival to economic justice. In <i>Handbook of Research</i></li> </ol>	

			<i>on Cooperatives and Mutuals</i> (pp. 354-369). Edward Elgar Publishing.	
12	Apr 7	Black Women Workers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Holder, Michelle. "How Gender and Racial Discrimination Lead to a Double Wage Gap for African American Women," Policy Report, Roosevelt Institute, May 2020.</li> <li>2. Bozarth, Kendra, Grace Western and Janelle Jones "Black Women Best: The Framework We Need For An Equitable Economy," Roosevelt Institute Issue Brief, September 2020.</li> </ol>	Final Paper: Art Analysis
13	Apr 14	Black Youth and Employment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Davis, J. M., &amp; Heller, S. B. (2020). Rethinking the benefits of youth employment programs: The heterogeneous effects of summer jobs. <i>Review of economics and statistics</i>, 102(4), 664-677.</li> </ol>	
14	Apr 21	Final Group Project Prep	None	Group Project: Reflective Statement Due
15	Apr 28	Last Day of Class. Final Presentations		Group Project: <b>The Data Story (Creative Interpretation)</b>