

Labor and Employment History
Rutgers University - 38:578:612:90
Fall 2025 Tentative – Subject to Change



Instructor: Prof. William Brucher, PhD, Assistant Teaching Professor, Labor Studies and Employment Relations Department, School of Management and Labor Relations

To contact: Send a message via Canvas Inbox messaging tool

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Course Description

Labor and Employment History is a fully online asynchronous course taught through the Canvas LMS.

The course will cover topics in labor and employment history, including the changing nature of work, worker movements, and employment relations in the United States.

The course will begin with the industrial revolution and changing market economy of the late 18th and early 19th century, followed by the history of slavery and freedom in the time period surrounding the Civil War and Reconstruction. We will then turn our attention to the “labor question” of how the promises of democracy and independence in America have measured against realities of wage labor in the changing workplaces and economic arrangements of the late 19th century to the present.

We will explore the attitudes, ideologies, cultures, and politics of workers, labor leaders, and employers. This course will also examine how workers of different national, ethnic, racial, and gender backgrounds have experienced work and contributed to the development of unions and worker movements.

Other important themes include the rights and responsibilities of employers and workers, the role of the state in the economy and the workplace, the rise and decline of collective bargaining and the New Deal order, globalization and neoliberalism, and the current problems facing workers and the emergence of new worker movements.

SMLR Learning Objectives

V. Understanding Context: Evaluate the context of workplace issues, public policies, and management decisions.

- Labor and employment history informs debates about the present and future of labor relations, workers' rights, labor and employment laws, public policy, and labor and social movements.

Course Objectives

This course aims to enable students to:

- Understand how the past shapes the present and apply historical insights to contemporary labor problems
- Understand how and why labor and employment has changed over time
- Understand how social, cultural, political, and economic forces have shaped labor and employment history
- Identify and evaluate the main arguments and supporting evidence in a text
- Enhance writing, communication, and leadership skills
- Expand their sense of personal and political possibility

Course Resources

Course Readings and Audio/Visual Material: Course readings include scholarly and popular book excerpts, articles, and primary source documents. Videos include documentary films, historical clips, and fictional movies based on labor history. The instructor will also provide narrated slideshows about certain historical events, topics, and themes. All media is available through the course Canvas site.

Course Assignments (percentage of final grade - points)

1. Forums (35% - 350)
2. Response Papers (15% - 150)
3. Final Paper Proposal (5% - 50)
4. Final Paper First Draft and Peer Review (5% -50)
5. Final Paper (20% - 200)
6. Exams (20% - 200)

Assignments

1. Discussion Forums (35% - 350 points)

Six discussion forums, each worth 50 points

Forums will be held on weeks 1, 2, 4, 6, 9, 12, and 14.

Students will introduce themselves to the class in the week 1 forum. In the forums for weeks 2, 4, 6, and 9, students will raise and discuss questions related to the themes of course readings. A minimum of three postings per forum are required. An original comment must be made by the first comment deadline on Friday. Forums close the last day of the course week on Monday. Directions and expectations for engaging in forums are available on each of the forum discussion areas. Students will share their insights from their final papers in the week 14 forum.

2. Response Papers (15% - 150 points)

Four papers, each worth 50 points.

Due weeks 3, 5, and 10

Students will submit responses to questions posted by the professor on required readings. Papers are two pages, double-spaced, and require the use of appropriate citations. Instructions will be included with each assignment. Citation guides will be posted in the Course Home area in the course.

3. Final Paper Proposal (5% - 50 points)

Proposal due week 8

Students will submit a 1-page draft proposal for their final papers. Directions for developing the paper proposal will be available on the Paper Proposal page.

4. Final Paper First Draft and Peer Review (5% - 50 points)

First draft due week 11, peer review completed on week 12.

Students will complete a first draft of their final paper and then provide detailed feedback on another student's final paper draft. See below for information about the final paper.

5. Final Paper Final Draft (20% - 200 points)

Paper due week 13, discussion of papers week 14

Students will write a final paper based on a topic of their own choosing. Students are encouraged to use one or more of the open-access books from the Labor Studies and Work series from the Temple University Libraries and Press. Sponsored by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the TU Libraries and Press has made 30 previously out-of-print labor studies books freely available online with updated prefaces. Rutgers Labor Studies scholars Dorothy Sue Cobble and Sheri Davis-Faulkner are among the authors of the new prefaces. In support of the grant, this course is among the first in the nation to use the Labor Studies and Work series as a core component of its curriculum. To learn about the series and access the books, visit: <http://tupress.temple.edu/open-access/labor-studies/>

Final papers are 8 to 10 pages in length, double-spaced and require the use of appropriate citations.

Students will present the main findings of their papers and discuss them with their classmates in Forum 6 during week 14. Directions for the final paper will be available on the Final Paper page. Citation guides will be posted in the Course Home area in the course.

5. Exams (20% - 200 points)

Midterm week 7, final exam during final exam period.

Students will complete a midterm and a final exam, worth 100 points each. Each exam will consist of three short essay response questions (30 points each) on themes and topics from reading assignments, videos, and other course content. The final exam is non-cumulative.

Grading

This is a points-based course. The final grade is based on a 1000-point system.

As highlighted in the previous section, each assignment/assessment is worth a specific number of points. Total points accumulated determines final course grade. See the [Grading Rubrics page](#) under the First things first tab in Modules for more information. The rubrics will also be posted with each assignment.

Outstanding Course Grade Points	Good Course Grade Points	Satisfactory Course Grade Points	Unsatisfactory Course Grade Points
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	599 or fewer points = F

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

Weekly Class Schedule

Week 1: Introductions, Course Requirements, and Telling Your Story – Sept. 2-8

Assignments:

- Read the syllabus to learn about the course description, learning objectives, and assignments. Please send a message to Prof. Brucher using the inbox tool if you have any questions.
- Make sure you [attend to your account information](#).
- Watch the Welcome Presentation Video below:
- Participate in the Introductory Forum: Forum 1: Personal Labor and Employment History

Week 2: The Industrial Revolution and the Social Structures of Capitalism – Sep 9-15

Videos and Readings:

- Week 2 Mapping Social Structures Video
- Jonathan Prude, “The Social System of Early New England Textile Mills: A Case Study, 1812-40,” *Working Class America*
- Bruce Laurie, “We Are All Day Laborers,” *Working People of Philadelphia*, Chapter 5

Assignment:

- Forum 2: Mapping Social Structures Past and Present

Week 3: Slavery and Freedom – Sep 16- 22

Videos and Readings:

- Week 3 Slavery and Reconstruction Video
- W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Black Worker” and “The White Worker,” *Black Reconstruction in America*
- Deborah Gray White, “Introduction: Scarlet and Black – A Reconciliation,” *Scarlet and Black: Slavery and Dispossession in Rutgers History*
- Kendra Boyd, Miya Carey, and Christopher Blakley, “Old Money: Rutgers and the Political Economy of Slavery in New Jersey,” *Scarlet and Black: Slavery and Dispossession in Rutgers History*
- Jesse Banker, Christopher Blakley, and Kendra Boyd, “His Name Was Will: Remembering Enslaved Individuals in Rutgers History,” *Scarlet and Black: Slavery and Dispossession in Rutgers History*

Assignment:

- Response Paper 1

Week 4: Immigration and Exclusion – Sep 23-29

Videos and Readings:

- Week 4 Immigration and Exclusion Video
- “Gold Mountain Dreams” and “The 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act,” *Becoming American: The Chinese Experience*
- Suping Lu, “Chinese Exclusion Acts: A Brief History of United States Legislation Aimed at Chinese Immigrants,” *The Readex Report* Vol. 3
- “Our Misery and Despair: Denis Kearney Blas Chinese Immigration,” *History Matters*
- Wong Hau-Hon, “Reminiscences of an Old Chinese Railroad Worker”

Assignment:

- Forum 3: Immigration and Labor

Week 5: Corporate Capitalism and Labor Wars – Sep 30- Oct 6

Videos and Readings:

- Week 5 Corporate Capitalism and Labor Wars Video
- Excerpt from *The Wobblies*, dir. Stewart Bird and Deborah Shaffer, 1979
- Andrew Carnegie, *The Gospel of Wealth*, Chapter 2
- Samuel Gompers, “What Does Labor Want?,” *The Samuel Gompers Papers* vol. 3, 1891-94
- Dorothy Sue Cobble, “Pure and Simple Radicalism: Putting the Progressive Era AFL in its Time,” *Labor*, Vol. 10, 2013.
- “Manifesto and Preamble of The Industrial Workers of the World,” 1905/1908

Assignment:

- Response Paper 2

Week 6: Scientific Management, Welfare Capitalism, and the Open Shop – Oct 7-13

Videos and Readings:

- “A Job at Ford’s,” *The Great Depression episode 1*, dir. Jon Else, 1993
- Frederick Taylor, *The Principles of Scientific Management*, 1911, pp. 5-22 and 43-48
- Walter Gordon Merritt, “The Open Shop and Industrial Liberty,” 1922
- Samuel Gompers, “The Union Shop and Its Antithesis,” 1920
- David Brody, “The Rise and Decline of Welfare Capitalism,” *Workers in Industrial America*

Assignment:

- Forum 4: Management Theories and Practices

Week 7: The New Deal, the CIO, and the Rise of Collective Bargaining – Oct 14-20

Videos and Readings:

- Week 7 The New Deal, the CIO, and the Rise of Collective Bargaining Video
- *With Babies and Banners: The Story of the Women’s Emergency Brigade* dir. Lorain Gray, 1979
- Bruce Nelson, “Radical Years: Working-Class Consciousness on the Waterfront in the 1930s”
- John L. Lewis, “Labor in the Nation,” September 7, 1937

Assignment:

- Midterm Exam

Week 8: The Arsenal of Democracy and the Postwar Expansion – Oct 21-27

Videos and Readings:

- Week 8 Work During and After World War II Video
- “March on Washington Movement: Organizing for Equality,” New-York Historical Society, YouTube, 2012
- *The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter*, dir., Connie Field, 1980
- A. Philip Randolph, “Why Should We March?,” *Survey Graphic*, 1942
- Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Executive Order 8802,” June 25, 1941
- Jack Metzgar, *Striking Steel*, Chapter 2
- Ellen Schrecker, “McCarthyism and Organized Labor,” *Working USA*, 2000

Assignment

- Final Paper Proposal

Week 9: From Economic Rights to Civil Rights – Oct 28-Nov 3

Videos and Readings:

- Week 9 From Economic Rights to Civil Rights Video
- “The Promised Land,” *Eyes on the Prize* episode 10, dir. Jacqueline Shearer and Paul Stekler, 1990
- Michael Honey, “Martin Luther King and the Memphis Sanitation Strike,” *Major Problems in the History of American Workers*
- Martin Luther King, Jr., “The Other America,” March 14, 1968
- William Barber, “A New Poor People’s Campaign,” *The Atlantic*, 2018

Assignment:

- Forum 5: From Economic Rights to Civil Rights

Week 10: Gender, Sexuality, and Work – Nov. 4-10

Videos and Readings:

- Allan Bérubé, “No Red Baiting! No Race Baiting! No Queen Baiting!: The Story of the Marine Cooks and Stewards Union,” prod. Estelle Freedman and John D’Emilio, 2016
- Dorothy Sue Cobble, “When Feminism Had Class,” *What’s Class Got to Do With It?*
- Jean Ruth Schroedel, ed., *Alone in a Crowd: Women in the Trades Tell Their Stories*. Read the new foreword by Jane LaTour, the preface by Jean Ruth Schroedel, and one story from each of the other sections (Feminism, Occupational Safety and Health, and Family).

Assignment:

- Response Paper 3

Week 11: Public Sector Unionism – Nov. 11-17

Videos and Readings:

- Week 11 Public Sector Unionism Video
- Francis Ryan, *AFSCME's Philadelphia Story*, chapter 1 and 6
- Heather Gies, "A Blow But Not Fatal: 9 Months After Janus, AFSCME Reports 94% Retention," *In These Times*, March 27, 2019
- Rebecca Burns, "What's At Stake in Chicago's Teachers' Strikes," *In These Times*, October 14, 2019
- Rebecca Burns, "Chicago's Teachers Didn't Win Everything, But They've Transformed the City—And the Labor Movement," *In These Times*, November 1, 2019

Assignment:

- Final Paper First Draft

Week 12: The Challenges of the 1970s, 80, and 90s – Nov 18-24

Videos and Readings:

- Week 12 The Challenges of the 1970s, 80s, and 90s Video
- *Nightline* report on the Decline of Unions in the 1980s, ABC News
- Kim Moody, *An Injury to All*, chapter 6
- Derek Seidman, "Looking Back at the Labor Party: An Interview with Mark Dudzic," *New Labor Forum*, Vol. 23, 2014

Assignments:

- Peer review of Paper 1 Draft 1
- Forum 6: The Challenges of the 1970s, 80, and 90s

Week 13: New Economy, New Movements, and the Future of Labor, Dec 2-8.

Videos and Readings:

- Janice Fine, "Worker Centers: Organizing Communities at the Edge of the Dream," Economic Policy Institute, 2005
- David Bensman, "Port Truck Drivers on Strike!," *Dissent*, 2014
- J. Mijin Cha, Dimitris Stevis, Todd E. Vachon, Vivian Price, Maria Bescia-Weiler, "A Green New Deal for All," *Political Geography*, Vol. 95, 2022

Assignment:

- Final Paper

Week 14: Final Paper Presentations and Discussions – Dec 9-12

Assignment:

- Forum 7: Final Paper Discussion