

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

Rutgers University 37:575:202:02 *Tentative – Subject to Change*

Fall 2025



Course schedule: Wednesdays, 10:20 am – 1:20 pm, September 3 – December 10, 2025. In-person classes held in Frelinghuysen Hall B2, 611 George St, New Brunswick NJ 08901. Discussion forums, paper assignments, exams, and other course activities on Canvas.

Instructor:

Prof. William Brucher, PhD

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Virtual office hours by appointment

Course Description: This course introduces the important development 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 labor movement, 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. The course has additional writing instructors who will read and comment on drafts, meet with students for one-on-one conferences, and assess final papers. At 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 assignments by their due dates and be prepared for in-class exercises and assignments (see participation requirements below). Check your email regularly for class announcements.
3. **Participation.** For most weeks of this course, we will have in-person class meetings (or have synchronous class meetings on Zoom should we have to go remote). Students are expected to be on time and fully participate in every class meeting. This involves lectures, reading texts, watching films, participating in discussions, and completing in-class assignments. Use of laptops, phones, and tablets is not permitted in the classroom. Attendance and participation are graded.
4. **Absences.** If you are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 or any other transmissible disease (flu, etc.), or have been told to quarantine, remain at home and not attend in-person class meetings. Please report absences in writing in advance or as soon as possible using the University absence reporting website <https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/>. Documentation is required for absences and will only be granted for legitimate reasons. Students with excused absences will be able to make up missed course work. Students with four or more unexcused absences will automatically fail the course.
5. **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 "generative artificial intelligence" (AI). Students may not use chatbots and other forms of AI, including ChatGPT, Google Gemini, Microsoft Copilot, Grammarly, and others. 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/>

6. **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>

7. **Disability Statement:** Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all 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, visit <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/common-forms>
8. **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.
9. **Quizzes and Final Exam:** All students are expected to take the quizzes and final exams when they are scheduled.
10. **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.
11. **Writing assignments:** Students must complete writing assignments for full credit. Students are expected to complete the writing assignments when they are scheduled.
12. **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.
13. **Open Access and Affordable Textbooks Program:** This course has received an Open and Affordable Textbooks Program award from the Rutgers University Libraries. The OAT Program supports textbook affordability at Rutgers by encouraging courses to adopt educational materials that are freely available, available at a low cost (compared to similar courses), or part of the Rutgers University Libraries' electronic collections, and thereby free of charge to Rutgers University students. As a student in this course, you will be asked to provide feedback on this initiative at the end of the semester. 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 films have been licensed for streaming by the Rutgers University Libraries. All these course materials are available to Rutgers students free of charge.
14. **Assignment Points:** Assignments are assigned points (up to 1,000 total points for all course assignments)

Attendance and participation: 200 points (100 points for mid-semester grade and 100 points for end of semester grade)

Writing Assignment 1: 200 points (60 points for initial response essay and 140 points for second essay with primary source analysis)

Writing Assignment 2: 200 points (60 points for initial response essay and 140 points for second essay with primary source analysis)

Quizzes: 200 points (four quizzes worth 50 points each)

Final Exam: 200 points

Weekly Class Schedule:

Week 1: Course Introduction – Sept 3

Welcome, course overview, syllabus, and Canvas site

Readings:

Who Built America Vol. II Prologue and Chapter 1

Week 2: From the Grand Army of Starvation to the Knights of Labor – Sept 10

Readings:

Who Built America Vol. II Chapter 2

Alex Gourevitch, “Our Forgotten Labor Revolution,” *Jacobin*, August 25, 2015

Film and in-class writing and discussion assignment:

1877: The Grand Army of Starvation

Week 3: The American Federation of Labor, Homestead Role Play, and Writing Assignment 1: Response Essay – Sept 17

Readings:

Who Built America Vol. II Chapter 3

Samuel Gompers, excerpt from “What Does Labor Want?”

Andrew Carnegie, excerpt from *The Gospel of Wealth*

“Statement of the Pullman Strikers,” June 15, 1894

Assignment:

Response Essay

Week 4: Quiz 1 and Mother Jones – Sept 24

Reading:

Who Built America Vol. II Chapter 5

Film and in-class writing and discussion assignment:

Fight Like Hell: The Testimony of Mother Jones

Assignment:

Quiz 1

Week 5: Conferences – Oct 1

Assignment:

Attend a one-one-one conference with your writing instructor to discuss your Writing Assignment 1: Response Essay, Quiz 1, and preparation for Second Essay with Primary Source Analysis

Week 6: Writing Assignment 1: Second Essay with Primary Source Analysis -- Oct 8

Assignment:

Writing Assignment 1: Second Essay with Primary Source Analysis

Week 7: Race, Immigration, and Exclusion – Oct 15

Readings:

Who Built America Vol. II Chapter 3

Ida B. Wells, “Lynch Law in America”

Wong Hau-Hon, “Reminiscences of an Old Chinese Railroad Worker”

Film clips:

“When White Supremacists Overthrew a Government,” Vox Media

“Between Two Worlds: The Chinese Exclusion Act” from *Becoming American: The Chinese Experience*

Week 8: Quiz 2, World War I, and Race Riot Investigation – Oct 22

Readings:

Who Built America Vol. II Chapter 6

“A Little Patriotic Affair: New Brunswick during World War I”

Assignment:

Quiz 2

Week 9: A Job At Ford’s – Oct 29

Readings:

Who Built America Vol. II Chapters 4 and 7

Film and discussion:

A Job at Ford’s

Week 10: The Great Depression, The Big Strike Role Play, and Writing Assignment 2: Response Essay – Nov 5

Reading:

Who Built America Vol. II Chapter 8

Video:

New Deal, New York

Assignment:

Writing Assignment 2: Response Essay

Week 11: Quiz 3, The CIO, and the Marine Cooks and Stewards Union – Nov 12

Readings:

Who Built America Vol. II Chapter 9

Film:

With Babies and Banners: The Story of the Women's Emergency Brigade

Film and discussion:

No Red-Baiting! No Race-Baiting! No Queen-Baiting!: The Marine Cooks and Stewards Union from the Depression to the Cold War

Assignment:

Quiz 3

Week 12: Conferences – Nov 19

Assignment:

Attend a one-one-one conference with your writing instructor to discuss your Writing Assignment 2: Response Essay, Quiz 1, and preparation for Second Essay with Primary Source Analysis

Week 13: Writing Assignment 2: Second Essay with Primary Source Analysis – Dec 3

Assignment:

Writing Assignment 2: Second Essay with Primary Source Analysis

Week 14: Quiz 4, World War II, and Paul Robeson – Dec 10

Final Exam overview and study guide

Readings:

Who Built America Vol. II Chapter 10

A. Philip Randolph, "Why Should We March," *Survey Graphic*, 1942

Franklin D. Roosevelt, Executive Order 8802, 1941

Excerpts from *Paul Robeson Speaks*

Film excerpts:

Show Boat

The Proud Valley

Paul Robeson: Here I Stand

Assignment:

Quiz 4

Final Exam: Friday, Dec. 20, 8:00 to 11:00 am, Frelinghuysen B2 (unless classroom is moved by the registrar).

Additional Help With Writing

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

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 Fall 2022 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](#) or call 833-OIT-HELP

Visit the [Getting Started in Canvas page](#)