

37:575:201:03 U.S. Labor and Work Before the End of Reconstruction
Fall 2026

Professor: John Lavin, Ed.D.
Class meetings: Mondays 5:45 to 8:45 pm
B115 Lucy Stone Hall
Office hours: By Zoom Tuesdays from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m.
(also by appointment)
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(*Liberator*, Harriet Tubman, wearing a coat, haversack slung over her right shoulder. Tubman points her right hand skyward, symbolic of the “North Star.” Sculptor, James L. Gafgen, 2005. Delaware Riverbank, Bristol, PA.)

INTRODUCTION

Labor, Democracy, and Social Justice

Our course exists to examine the relationship between labor and democracy in the United States from the colonial period to the Civil War and Reconstruction. To fully appreciate the history of human rights in that setting, we study how slavery and servitude as well as eviction of indigenous peoples have impacted human rights. Our timeline highlights activism and rebellions that brought communities together seeking freedom from exploitive labor practices and policies. Abolition demanding slavery be ended and suffragism demanding equal treatment for women respectively are movements for justice whose implications for democracy our course investigates in a series of readings and case studies.

Democracy in the Classroom

In this syllabus, students’ work is recognized as labor that is best empowered by democracy in the classroom. Working in groups, students assume a voice developing our midterm and final examinations, as we interrogate the history of work. Students’ engagement is, therefore, our course’s framework for a democracy *in-micro* that gives power to students’ abilities to learn skills crucial to law, commerce, and social justice. Ultimately, our course exists to instill students with confidence in the value of their own intellectual and cultural work as learners. Ours is a curriculum that elicits what students want from their work lives and from their careers in the context of the labor history that we study and interpret. Students’ collaboration is, consequently, crucial and

premised upon conversations and reasoning as well as writing that anticipate what students want for the world that they and future generations will inherit.

A Writing Intensive Course

Our course is a writing intensive curriculum that requires students to deliberate and to compose their opinions on critical controversies enunciated in the historical documents that we study in their social and cultural context. This writing process permits students to reflect upon what they have learned from history and to formulate, extend, and fully express what they believe regarding history's meaning in the present. To promote this reflective encounter, the assignments for our class will require students to develop a series of essays framed by students' questions and interests on matters of ethical importance as we consider what history means today.

It is important to note "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 (Rutgers University Code of Conduct). Thus, the use of Chat GPT and similar technologies is not permitted in composing essays for our class. Our Canvas site's policy on use of artificial intelligence will be reviewed and confirmed by our learning community during Week Two of our course.

COURSE READINGS:

Our materials can be found in the Modules Section of our Canvas site, including:

1. ***Who Built America?: Working People and the Nation's History***, 3rd ed., Bedford / St. Martin's Press, 2008. (Referred to as WBA? in the following pages of the syllabus.) This is the textbook for the course. All assigned readings from the textbook are available on **Canvas**.

2. **Other Required Readings:** In addition to the textbook, the material posted in the Modules section of the Canvas site comprises our topics, including primary and secondary sources that are vital to understanding each period covered by the course. Our schedule herein is aligned to the assignments and topics framed in our Canvas site according to required readings for each week of the Academic Calendar.

COURSE STRUCTURE

The modality of this course is in-person, and all meetings will take place at the assigned location. Our weekly meetings on Monday evenings from 5:40 to 8:40 p.m. are compulsory and will be crucial to conveying the essential activities of the course. Typically, classes begin with students working in discussion groups; followed by the entire class sharing critical questions and viewing films, sharing readings, and/or responding to issues relevant to our writing assignments. Class ends with a summation of topics addressed and practical matters of deadlines, research, and writing responsibilities that are necessary and impending. Attention is imperative during these activities.

COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This course fulfills the learning objectives required by Rutgers University core curriculum as well as goals and objectives articulated in School of Management & Labor Relations programming. To learn more about these objectives, please click [here](#).

ASSIGNMENTS

Mid-Term and Final Examinations

Examination Essay Questions:

As a feature of students' participation in class discussions and activities, a weekly question that students wish to be asked on the Midterm and Final Examinations will be due on Sundays and will figure as 33% of the Participation Grade. These questions will be the basis of our examinations. Please see rubric for Examination Essay Questions at the end of the syllabus.

The examinations (Midterm and Final) will each ask students to write short essays responding to questions of opinion that have emerged in our reading and discussion of the history of issues such as the human rights of workers, their families, and communities. Attention will be paid to a series of themes related to concepts of accuracy, truth, and justice in the course of our deliberations each week. Students will play a defining role in selecting questions that they wish to be asked on our midterm and final exams.

Essay #1

Bryan Stevenson's film, *Slavery to Mass Incarceration*, contends that reparations should be paid to individuals, families, and communities who were traumatized and exploited by the labor codes and practices established in the period after 1492. Georgetown University as well as corporations that have profited from slavery provide examples of reparations initiatives.

Write a five-page paper that addresses the question of whether reparations will, finally, serve justice. Be specific about the particular losses that must be compensated in a particular situation and the form those reparations should take. Include references to specific events in the past and deadlines for reconciliation in the present and future. In your response, be sure to base your claims on materials from our assigned readings. You are not required to read additional sources for this assignment; however, you are permitted to research incidents not addressed by our course and to include that research in your essay.

All papers should follow standard grammar, punctuation and citation methods in conformance with APA Guidelines.

ASSIGNMENTS (Continued)

Essay #2

“My Life Is My Message.” –Mahatma Gandhi

Biography is the account of a person’s life. As a narrative, it assumes the responsibility of explaining the period when a person lived as well as the places, the cultures, the organizations and the ideas that shaped an individual’s life. Furthermore, it examines how a person influenced family and community and, by contrast, how personal relationships influenced her or him or them. That person’s accomplishments as an actor or as a witness are important features of a biography.

The assignment for Essay #2 is that you write a short biography of a person who lived and worked in the United States between 1618 and 1865, explaining how and why the message of the person’s life that you have selected provides testimony witnessing the injustices confronting workers of his or her or their historical period.

You may not select a famous leader but must describe a person who was a worker in a particular occupation, industry or social movement that gave meaning to work and workers’ destiny in history.

Biographical Essay Requirements: The Five-Page Biographical Essay on the Life of a person who lived in the period from 1618 to 1865 or another period that the student suggests:

- Statement of the Message of the subject’s Life & Reason Why You Chose the person.
- Movements or Persons that Influenced your Subject.
- Labor Issue(s) that affected your subject.
- Events that the subject witnessed.
- Decisions or actions or ideas that best express the subject’s Message.
- Conclusion stating why your subject is relevant today.
- At least three different sources grounding your subject in the history of their time.
- Works Cited.

Step One:

Identify Subject for Biography

Write a paragraph explaining your Choice. Explain the person that you have chosen for the biographical essay. “What dilemma does your chosen figure present to your mind?” This step asks the student to: (1) Identify someone; (2) identify a person in a difficult position in history, and (3) say what the student thinks the predicament is. Then, how does the student think the selected person could be good for us to study, so we may think about workers in such a position?

ASSIGNMENTS (Continued)

Step Two

List of Biographical sources:

Select and list three-to-five sources that you think speak to your figure's predicament. Each source selected should clarify, or offer a new way of thinking about, your figure's struggle. Don't just use a source to confirm what you already think. For each source you choose, write a statement of exactly 35 words saying how this source stands to help you understand the chosen figure's struggle.

Primary sources are journals, letters or speeches, or actual artifacts such as period clothing, tools or medical records.

Secondary sources are full-length biographies, critical commentaries, films and other works of art such as films or sculptures. Secondary sources usually appear after the appearance of primary sources.

Step Three

Develop an Outline of a life: This will be a chart or timeline showing the events, labor issues, movements and/or personalities that influenced the subject of your biography.

Step Four

Submit the Rough Draft of your Biographical Essay.

Step Five

Submit the Final Draft of Biographical Essay.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

This is an inclusive learning environment that is welcoming of all people and perspectives, including those of diverse races, religions, ethnicities, ages, gender identities and sexual orientations. If you go by a name or gender that is different from the one on official Rutgers documents, please let me know so that I can use the proper name and pronouns.

Cheating/Plagiarism

Students in this class and in all courses at Rutgers University are expected to uphold the highest standards of academic integrity. Cheating, plagiarism in written work, receiving and providing unauthorized assistance, and sabotaging the work of others are among the behaviors that constitute violations of the Academic Integrity Policy. You are expected to be familiar with this policy. If you have questions about specific assignments, be sure to check with the instructor. The Academic Integrity Policy defines all forms of cheating and the procedures for dealing with violations. You should be familiar with this policy. The trust between the instructor and the class depends on your acceptance of this essential principle of behavior in the University. Do your own

work and do not provide unauthorized assistance to others and you will find this course more rewarding.

STATEMENT ON DISABILITIES

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>.

EVALUATION

You will write two essays this semester, on topics to be announced. Each essay accounts for 20% of your final grade. You will write several drafts of each. All are mandatory, as is participation in peer review. There will also be two essay-based exams (a Midterm and a Final); each of these exams will be worth 20% of your grade (see rubric on page 15 of this syllabus). Please see the descriptions of your Essay Assignments and Examinations at the end of this syllabus. In addition, your participation in our class counts for 20% of your grade, which will include your involvement in class discussions and activities such as your developing and posting weekly essay questions for our Midterm and Final Exams.

Grades	
Participation	20%
Essay #1 (on Reparations)	20%
Essay #2 (Biography)	20%
Midterm Exam	20%
Final Exam	20%

COURSE PARTICIPATION.

Students are required to attend weekly meetings and to participate in discussions of films, readings, and other materials posted on the Course Canvas site and identified by the Syllabus as "required reading."

Each week every student will be required to post an "Exam Question" that distills our discussions of the topics during the week. The purpose of the Exam Questions is to promote reflection that prompts short essays on both the Midterm and Final Exams (see

the rubric for exam question in our course syllabus). Both Midterm and Final Exams will be made up of questions posted by students.

COURSE PARTICIPATION (*Continued*)

Thus, students' participation grade (20%) will be based upon the important weekly submission of Exam Question that emerge from class deliberations and considerations and discussions of issues crucial to understanding the history of work. The questions will be developed and shared on our Canvas Module page. Every student must submit an Exam Question to our Canvas site by Saturday of each week (see deadline dates on Assignments page) and will respond to another student's questions within two days.

Participation Grade Will Be Based Upon:

Attendance and Contribution to Class Meetings (33%)

Exam Questions (33%)

Final Meeting/Correspondence with Instructor (34%)

At the conclusion of course (November/December), instructor may review class documents and assess students' participation by interviewing students about their experience composing questions for our Midterm & Final Exams and writing short essays to answer the Exam Questions as well as the longer Essays (***on Reparations*** and ***Biography***) that are required for our course.

Lateness Policy

All late assignments will be marked down. One grade will be deducted for every 24-hour period (or portion thereof) your paper is late. That is, a B paper will turn into a C paper if it is up to 24 hours late, and into a D paper if it is up to 48 hours late, etc. While the drafts are not assigned a final letter grade, failing to submit them or turning them in late will lower the grade for the essay.

You must complete all written assignments in order to receive credit for this course.

We will turn back all assignments in a timely manner. If we do not turn back your assignment, it is your job to bring this to our attention. If you believe we have not recorded a grade for an assignment you have turned in, you must clear this up during the semester. After the semester is over, we will not be able to consider claims that you turned in an assignment if we have no record of it.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

(Week One) September 8th <i>Introduction</i> <i>Child Labor, Human Rights, The Process of Questioning Authority.</i>	Required Activities: Review of Syllabus, Assignments, Grading Process. Discussion of Films, Readings, and Topics in Labor History. <i>Undermined: Bolivia's Child Workers</i> <i>(Film Viewed & Discussed in Class)</i>	<u>Due September 13th</u> Student Questionnaire Not Graded: Emailed to Instructor JL2600@rutgers.edu
(Week Two) September 14th Slavery, Profit, Ethical & Moral Reasoning In History	Required Activities: Required Readings/Viewing (see Canvas Modules: Zong Massacre); Discussion of Midterm Exam. <i>Slavery to Mass Incarceration</i> <i>(Viewed & Discussed in Class)</i>	<u>Due September 20th</u> Exam Question: Child Miners in Potosi, Bolivia; The History of Slavery
(Week Three) September 21st Slavery, Profit & Ethical Reasoning In History	Required: Required Readings/Viewing (see Canvas Modules); • <i>Modesty's Story – She Came to Slay (Harriet Tubman text by Erica Dunbar)</i> • <i>aTunde Adjuah – “Ancestral Recall”</i> <i>(Musical Composition Viewed & Discussed in Class)</i>	<u>Due September 27th</u> Exam Question: Zong Massacre & Complicity in Courts/Insurance Industry. Reparations
(Week Four) September 28th Understanding Rebellion	Required: Required Readings/Viewing (see Canvas Modules): Hamilton & Reparations Case for Slavery at Georgetown University. <i>Reparations</i> <i>(Viewed & Discussed in Class)</i>	<u>Due October 4th</u> Exam Question: Reparations or Stono River Rebellion

(Week Five) October 5th Union Rights	Required: Required Readings/Viewing (see Canvas Modules): Revolt at Stono River. Indigenous Communities & Lithium Mining. Revolt at Stono River (Viewed & Discussed in Class)	Due October 11th Exam Question: Indigenous Rights
(Week Six) October 12th Hunt V. Mass Lemuel Shaw & Workers' Rights (1842)	Required: Required Readings/Viewing (see Canvas Modules): Cordwainers' Union or Criminal Conspiracy. Lemuel Shaw & Workers' Rights (Discussion)	Due October 18th Exam Question: Hunt V. Mass Lemuel Shaw & Workers' Rights (1842) Rough Draft of Essay #1 Due.
(Week Seven) October 19th Performance The Grave of the Slave Strange Fruit	Required: Abolitionist Literature, Advocacy, and Opposition to Slavery.	Due October 25th Final Draft Essay #1 Exam Question: Jazz History/Labor Rights
(Week Eight) October 26th Seneca Falls Equal Pay & Women's Right to Vote	Required: Required Readings/Viewing (see Canvas Modules); DECLARATION OF SENTIMENTS/SENECA FALLS Luria Freeman on Susan B. Anthony (Viewed & Discussed in Class)	Due November 1st Exam Question: Declaration of Sentiments Select Subject for Biography

(Week Nine) November 2nd Climate Change Thoreau's Notebooks	Required: Required Readings/Viewing (see Canvas Modules); "On Walden Pond" <i>Climate Change & Henry David Thoreau</i> <i>(Viewed & Discussed in Class)</i>	<u>Due November 8th</u> Exam Question: Thoreau, Walden and Nature Three-to-Five Sources for Biography
(Week Ten) November 9th Workers' Rights To Strike	Required: Required Readings/Viewing (see Canvas Modules); "Children's Strikes/Parents' Rights" <i>Paterson & Children's Strikes</i> <i>(Discussion in Class)</i>	<u>Due November 15th</u> Exam Question: Right to Strike
(Week Eleven) November 16th Xenophobia & Workers' Rights	Required: Required Readings/Viewing (see Canvas Modules); Henry David Hwang: "The Dance and The Railroad." <i>Chinese Railway Strikers/Henry David Hwang</i> <i>(Viewed & Discussed in Class)</i>	<u>Due November 22nd</u> Exam Question: Timeline for Biography
(Week Twelve) November 23rd Harpers Ferry	Required: Required Readings/Viewing (see Canvas Modules): "The Wound Dresser," Walt Whitman. <i>John Brown's Final Speech</i> <i>(Viewed & Discussed in Class)</i>	<u>Due November 22nd</u> Rough Draft/ Essay #2

(Week Thirteen) November 30th Review of Course	Discussion of Biography of Workers: Focus – Ida B. Wells Required Readings/Viewing (see Canvas Modules): Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s Speech to Labor Unions, December 1961, Looking Back 100 Years.	Thanksgiving
(Week Fourteen) December 4th Review of Course	<u>Discussion of Final Examination</u> <u>Essay #2 Final Draft Due December 12th</u> <u>Final Examination Due: December 15th</u> <i>(Final Exam Posted: November 30th)</i>	

Rubric
Mid-Term and Final Exam: Short Essays

Criteria	Ratings		Pts
Supporting Evidence/Proof Student must provide historical evidence supporting the opinion stated in the essay. Evidence needs to align with or prove the opinion in a manner that reflects an understanding of the history of labor. Referencing and Citing sources is a defining feature of providing accurate proof. (See APA Guidelines.)			5.0 pts
	5.0 pts Full Marks	0.0 pts No Marks	
Statement of Opinion / Thesis Statement Student must express an opinion regarding the essay question. This opinion should be contained in a carefully worded sentence (or possibly two sentences).			5.0 pts
	5.0 pts Full Marks	0.0 pts No Marks	
Writing Writing on the short-essay exam answers should reflect careful reasoning, attention to complexity of questions & essay prompts, and thoughtful word choices that demonstrate essential concepts of our course.			5.0 pts
	5.0 pts Full Marks	0.0 pts No Marks	
Relevance Short essay also must explain how problems of workers of the past are relevant to the struggles of workers in the present.			5.0 pts
	5.0 pts Full Marks	0.0 pts No Marks	
Total Points: 20.0			

Exam Question Rubric			
Criteria	Ratings		Pts
Relevance			5 pts
Question should relate a historical personage, source, or problem to the present in a compelling way that initiates reflection.	5 pts Full Marks	0 pts No Marks	
Vocabulary			5 pts
Question should draw upon vocabulary that inspires students to refer to profound knowledge of history by consulting concepts pertinent to legal reasoning, concepts in the social and physical sciences or the arts.	5 pts Full Marks	0 pts No Marks	
Opinion & Evidence			5 pts
Question should elicit student's opinion and compel supporting evidence that is derived in fact, with an understanding of primary and secondary historical sources, referencing & citing sources accurately.	5 pts Full Marks	0 pts No Marks	
Reasoning			5 pts
Question promotes a brief essay that develops a thesis (usually at the beginning of the essay) and demonstrates complex reasoning appropriate to the problem raised.	5 pts Full Marks	0 pts No Marks	
Total Points: 20			

Student resources for Mental Health, Academic Coaching, and Financial Assistance
<https://smlr.rutgers.edu/about-smlr/fall-2022-information-smlr-students>

Scholarships

To ensure that all students are aware of SMLR's scholarship offerings, we encourage you review this link to our scholarships:

<https://smlr.rutgers.edu/academic-programs/scholarships>

