

575:201:95 Labor and Work in the US before 1877 – Fall 2026

Professor: Dr. James Robinson
Class meetings: Fridays, 5:40PM-8:40PM (roughly)
Location: Online
Office hours: By Appointment
Zoom: <https://rutgers.zoom.us/my/jr1589?pwd=MDRYMkhCaGNIRkVQdE9EUDV1OXRWQT09>
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INTRODUCTION

History has often been presented as the story of how powerful people have changed human societies over the course of time, with presidents, generals, and the wealthy playing central roles. This course will turn the standard approach on its head and instead look at America and the changes it has undergone through the eyes of working people.

This class will introduce the important developments and themes in the history of work in the Americas from the period of initial contact between European, African and Native American cultures to the period up until end of Reconstruction. The approach will center on the historical shifts that influenced the decisions that shaped early American concepts of work, including slavery, indentured servitude, free labor and the rise and impact of industrialization and the early labor movement.

This course is aimed primarily at students who have little or no experience with college-level history and assumes no prior knowledge of the historical developments we will cover.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES: Learning Objectives: Core Curriculum: SCL, HST, WCr and WCd

Explain the development of some aspect of a society or culture over time. (HST-1)

Understand different theories about human culture, social identity, economic entities, political systems, and other forms of social organization. (SCL-1)

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. (WCr)

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. (WCd)

REQUIRED TEXT

Clark, Hewitt, Brown, Jaffee, *Who Built America? Vol. 1* (Third Edition, ISBN 9780312446918)

The textbook will be provided to you as a PDF on Canvas, but used copies are quite inexpensive online, if you desire a tangible version.

YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES

Read the syllabus

Do the readings

Turn in your assignments on time

Make sure your assignments are submitted

Attend the meetings (**on a computer. Cellphones aren't going to be enough.**)

EVALUATION

Attendance and Class Discussion

You are expected to come to class on time. I will have a sign-in spreadsheet link which you will mark. Class starts at 5:40, so sign in before then. If you arrive late, you'll need to mark an "L" next to your name. If you forget to do it, I won't know if you were actually in class or not, and you will be marked absent.

If I call on you, and you don't respond, I will assume you have just left your computer open and are not actually in attendance in the class. I will remove you from the class and mark you as absent. If you need to leave for an emergency, send me an email and I'll read it later.

We will often discuss readings in the course. It is on you to come prepared to discuss issues related to the materials. Discussions will engage with the material, so class participation is required. If you don't keep up with the readings, you will not do well on this part of the course. Come ready to ask questions and answer questions as best as you can.

Discussion forums

For most classes, you will have discussion posts due on Canvas. I will post primary sources and several questions for you to answer about each. You are also required to respond to at least one of your discussion group members, for each discussion topic, which helps to make what you are doing actual discussions, one day later. All posts will be due on Wednesdays 11:59PM and response to a classmate's post on Thursdays 11:59PM. If we go to grade it and it isn't there, it will be marked Incomplete. There are no make-ups.

For example: your first discussion posts will be due at 11:59 PM on Wednesday September 9th. Your response to at least one of your peers, in each discussion topic, will be due by 11:59 PM on Thursday, September 10th. See syllabus for specific dates.

Please indicate which questions you are answering, and separate each into its own paragraph.

Your initial answers and responses should both be substantive contributions, every time. A single-sentence answer and "I agree!" as a response will not earn credit. Please put some time into these, as they are not box-checking exercises to take up your time. I don't expect multiple-paragraph answers (though if you are really feeling it, go for it!), but these discussions are a prime method of learning, and the more work you put into them, the better off we all are. You must give at least one paragraph of 5 sentences per question answer, as well as the response to a classmate (also a 5 sentence paragraph minimum), or it will be marked incomplete. All weeks each topic will require you to answer two questions, and 1 response to a classmate per topic.

All discussions are mandatory, and any that you do not complete will result in a lower grade.

Written assignments

You will write two papers this semester, on topics to be announced. Each accounts for 20% of your final grade. You will write 2-3 drafts of each. All are mandatory, as is participation in peer review. If you miss a peer review, it is your responsibility to make it up, or you will receive no credit for it. Missing your writing conference, or coming unprepared, will earn you a significant reduction on your final paper grade. Each part of the process counts toward your final assignment grade. I expect an honest attempt at a full paper for all drafts. Doing otherwise will negatively impact your grade.

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It is your responsibility to make sure you turn in each draft and your peer editing form. If you do not have a submission receipt from Canvas, then you have not submitted your essay, and you will be graded accordingly. Failing to do the Peer Review, any of the drafts, or Writing Conference will result in reduction of grade. Declining to make substantial changes to your drafts (unless otherwise advised) will result in a failing grade. Turning in no final paper, or turning in only a final paper, or turning in the same paper multiple times, will result in a failing grade.

Using AI to write your paper will result in an automatic 0 for the assignment.

Exams

There will be a first exam due April 3rd, and a second exam due May 8th. They will be written long answer essays that are take-home exams (not in class, to be distributed the week prior, meaning you will have a week to do them.)

Using AI to write your exam will result in an automatic 0 for the assignment.

Lateness Policy

All late major assignments will be marked down. One grade will be deducted for every 24-hour period (or portion thereof) your paper is late. Turning in the wrong version will also result in loss of points. 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. While the drafts are not assigned letter grades, failing to turn them or turning them in late will have the same effect on the final draft you hand in for a grade.

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.

Cheating/plagiarism

There are serious consequences, including expulsion, for both cheating and taking someone else's work without attribution. The university has clear, strict policies on these matters. I will report all violations. If you have not done so already, please familiarize yourself with the university's academic integrity policy by visiting academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/ The relevant parts are brief and straightforward. If you have any questions, please ask me.

Use of AI such as ChatGPT is not permitted in any stages of the writing process on any assignment, from gathering initial ideas through the final product. Using any type of "paraphrasing" tool to "improve" your work is a violation of the academic integrity policy, as you are submitting work that is no longer your own. Something else has rewritten your work for you, and it may include plagiarized text without your knowledge. I expect that all ideas and work will be your own. Any use of AI at any point will result in a 0.

All major assignments are run through TurnItIn. This means it is extremely easy to catch cheating. Remember, if you copy something word for word, and try to present the work as your own without any citations, that counts as cheating, whether it was "intentional" or not.

Your final grade will be calculated as follows:

Class Attendance	10%
Discussion Posts	10%
Paper I	20%
Paper II	20%
First exam	20%

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Second exam

20%

I grade according to the following grade breakdown:

A	89.5-100
B+	84.5-89.49
B	79.5-84.49
C+	74.5-79.49
C	69.5-74.49
D	59.5-69.49
F	0-59.49

Use of Class Materials

The materials used in this class, including, but not limited to, the syllabus, exams, lecture materials, and assignments are copyright protected works. Any unauthorized copying of the class materials is a violation of federal law and may result in disciplinary actions being taken against the student. Additionally, the sharing of class materials without the specific, express approval of the instructor may be a violation of the University's Code of Student Conduct and an act of academic dishonesty, which could result in further disciplinary action. This includes, among other things, uploading class materials to websites for the purpose of sharing those materials with other current or future students. You may not make audio or video recordings of any part of this class without my consent.

Statement on Abilities and Accommodations

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: ods.rutgers.edu/students/registration-form.

For extra support around mental health services, academics, and financial assistance:

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

Extra Credit Opportunities (completion of any of the four will result in adding 5 points to the lowest of your 4 major assignments. You may do more than one extra credit assignment. Due December 11th.)

1. Student Evaluations (Email me a copy of the completed course evaluations at the end of the course)
2. Read the Frederick Douglass autobiography (any version will do) and write a 800 word review.

CLASS SCHEDULE

September 4 Introduction

September 11 Rise of the Atlantic World

Reading *Who Built America* Chapter One, King Alfonso Letter, Spanish New World Scene

Handing Out First paper prompt

Due Discussion Posts Wed Sep 9th 11:59PM, Response to classmate Thu Sep 10th 11:59PM

September 18 The Evolution of Slavery

Reading *Who Built America* Chapter Two, Barbot, South Carolina Slave Codes

Due Discussion Posts Wed Sep 16th 11:59PM, Response to classmate Thu Sep 17th 11:59PM

September 25 Family Labor and the Growth of Northern Colonies

Reading *Who Built America* Chapter Three, Justifying Slavery (for paper, not for discussion posts), Indentured Contract, Byrd

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Due Outline of first paper (bring to class, for activity), Discussion Posts Wed Sep 23rd 11:59PM, Response to classmate Thu Sep 24th 11:59PM

October 2 Securing Independence

Reading *Who Built America* Chapter Four, Slaveholders Argue Against Abolition, The Right of Free Suffrage

Due Discussion Posts Wed Sep 30th 11:59PM, Response to classmate Thu Oct 1st 11:59PM, **First draft of first paper by classtime** (Peer Reviews assigned after class)

October 9 Launching the New Republic

Reading *Who Built America* Chapter Five, Shays, Jefferson

Due Discussion Posts Wed Oct 7th 11:59PM, Response to classmate Thu Oct 8th 11:59PM
Peer Review due Mon Oct 5th, Second draft of first paper by classtime

October 16 The Transformation of American Society

Reading *Who Built America* Chapter Six, Walker, Grimke

Due Discussion Posts Wed Oct 14th 11:59PM, Response to classmate Thu Oct 15th 11:59PM

October 23 Writing Conferences

October 30 Northern Society and the Growth of Wage Labor

Reading *Who Built America* Chapter Seven, Johnson, Mechanics' Preamble

Handing Out First exam prompt

Due Discussion Posts Wed Oct 28th 11:59PM, Response to classmate Thu Oct 29th 11:59PM
Final draft of first paper due by classtime

November 6 The Spread of Slavery and the Crisis of Southern Society

Reading *Who Built America* Chapter Nine, Harriet A Jacobs, "Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself," (1861), Rules of Highland Plantation,

Handing Out 2nd Paper Prompt

Due Discussion Posts Wed Nov 4th 11:59PM, Response to classmate Thu Nov 5th 11:59PM,
First exam due by classtime

November 13 Immigration, The Age of Reform, and Expansion

Reading *Who Built America* Chapter Eight, A Reporters Account of Lynn Women's Mass Meeting During the Great Strike. (1860), Shackles and Dollars (Parry on Baptist), Immigration Documents (for paper)

Due Discussion Posts Wed Nov 11th 11:59PM, Response to classmate Thu Nov 12th 11:59PM

November 20 The Spiral: From Compromise to Kansas and Harpers Ferry

Reading *Who Built America* Chapter Ten, Douglass on 4th of July, 15 Minute History podcast: Episode 105- Manisha Sinha, *Slavery and Abolition*

Due Discussion Posts Wed Nov 18th 11:59PM, Response to classmate Thu Nov 19th 11:59PM
First draft of second paper due by classtime

November 25 The Civil War

Reading *Who Built America* Chapter Eleven, Cornerstone Speech, John Brown's Last Speech

Due Discussion Posts Mon Nov 23rd 11:59PM, Response to classmate Tue Nov 24th 11:59PM

Note: Due to the Thanksgiving holiday, class will be on Wed Nov 25th this week and the discussion posts are due on Monday while the responses to classmates are due on Tuesday.

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December 4 Reconstruction

Reading *Who Built America* Chapter Twelve, MLK Jr., Black Codes

Handout **Second exam prompt**

Due Discussion Posts due Wed Dec 2nd 11:59PM, Response to classmate Thur Dec 3rd 11:59PM

Final draft of second paper due by classtime

December 11 Second exam due (by 11:59PM, no class)