

Black Workers in American Society

Rutgers University 37:575:303:9A — Asynchronous Online

Fall 2026 (Sep 1 – Dec 10) · Fully Asynchronous — No Scheduled Meeting Time

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Office hours: By appointment (video call)

Note on Course Format

This course has been converted from its in-person format to a fully asynchronous online course. There is no scheduled meeting time and no synchronous components anywhere in the course — no live lectures, review sessions, or group meetings are required. Each week's content is organized into a Canvas module that opens on Monday. Only the delivery format and the mode of discussion and participation have changed — from in-class seminar discussion to structured online discussion boards, videos and readings linked on Canvas, and individual project work.

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.

Course Structure: Three Thematic Parts

The semester is organized into three five-week parts, each building on the last. The schedule below marks where each part begins.

Part I — Racial Capitalism: Roots and Origins (Weeks 1–5). Foundational theory (racial capitalism, intersectionality) and the earliest historical case studies — Reconstruction, the racial income gap, and domestic labor and organizing.

Part II — Stratification Economics: Structures of Work and Survival (Weeks 6–10). How structural forces sort and constrain Black labor over time — civil rights and workplace culture, occupational respectability, the Great Migration, and education as a stratifying mechanism — with the Workplace Assessment marking the close of this part.

Part III — Economic Justice and Collective Power (Weeks 11–15). Collective responses to the structures examined in Parts I and II — unions and cooperatives, Black women's labor organizing, and your Data Story Project as a culminating application of the semester's frameworks.

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. Also available on Audible for students who would like the option to listen to the book. Required readings other than Black Folk will be posted directly in the weekly Canvas modules, not listed here or in the schedule below.

How the Weekly Module Works

Each weekly module opens Monday morning and follows a consistent rhythm designed to replace in-class seminar discussion:

- Monday: Module opens. Read your instructor's brief note introducing the week on the Canvas Pages section. See Canvas for links to videos and additional readings for the week, along with any film/media components, and complete the assigned readings.
- Wednesday, 11:59pm: Post your initial discussion response to the week's prompt on the Discussion Board (weeks with a discussion post — see the schedule for which weeks).
- Friday, 11:59pm: Reply substantively to at least one classmate's post — see the discussion prompt on Canvas for what counts as a strong reply.

Discussion Participation is worth 15 points total: Reading Quiz weeks (3, 5, 6, 7) are worth 3 points each; regular graded discussion weeks (8, 9, 11) are worth 1 point each. Weeks 2 and 12 are ungraded

(optional, with extra credit available — see below). Week 4 has no separate discussion credit — that week's video-reaction task is part of your 10-point Personal Mixtape grade instead. See the schedule below for exactly which format applies each week.

Extra Credit: Optional Discussion Weeks

Weeks 2 and 12 are ungraded, but you can earn extra credit for participating anyway: 1 point per week for a discussion post plus a substantive response on that same thread. Up to 2 extra credit points total — one for each of the two optional weeks. This is added on top of the 101-point total, not funded from it.

Reading Quizzes

Weeks 3, 5, 6, and 7 use a short, auto-graded comprehension quiz instead of a discussion post — a quick check that the material actually landed, not an analytical exercise. Expect 5–8 questions (multiple choice/short answer), roughly 15–20 minutes, one attempt, due Wednesday 11:59pm. Worth 3 points each. See the schedule below for which weeks.

Clint Smith Video Quizzes

Any week with a Clint Smith Crash Course Black American History clip (see the schedule below) includes a short, separate quiz on that video content — a handful of questions, auto-graded, due the same day as that week's other work. This is intentionally separate from the discussion board: discussion is where you engage with classmates about the readings, while the video quiz makes sure the video content itself is retained, not just watched. Worth a flat 2 points per week, whether that week has one clip or two. There are 9 video-quiz weeks total (18 points possible); your lowest score is dropped automatically, so 16 points count toward your final grade.

How to Succeed in This Course

Self-directed doesn't mean unsupported — it means the structure lives in the module and this section, rather than in a weekly room. A few things that make the difference between coasting and actually getting something out of this course:

- Budget about 3 hours per week: ~1 hour for readings/media, 15–20 minutes for the week's videos, and the rest for writing and engaging in the discussion board.
- Log in at least twice a week — once early (Monday/Tuesday) to take in the new content, and again later (Wednesday–Friday) for the discussion exchange. Logging in once a week almost always means missing the peer-reply window.
- Treat the discussion board as the seminar room. Your posts and replies are what replace in-class participation — half-effort posts are the async equivalent of skipping class.
- If you start falling behind, reach out before you're several weeks deep. One late assignment is easy to recover from; three is not. Use your one-time 24-hour extension deliberately, not on the first assignment you're tempted to put off.

Rules of Engagement (Online Discussion Norms)

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 in discussion boards, group chats, or any other course space. If at any time you feel uncomfortable due to what has been assigned, something that you read, or the behavior of the instructor or another student — online or otherwise — please let me know.

Because this course runs entirely through written and recorded exchange, tone matters. Read posts fully before responding, disagree with ideas rather than people, and give classmates the same good faith you'd want extended to you.

Course Materials and Recording Policy

Videos and readings linked on Canvas, film discussion guides, and other instructor-created materials are provided solely for use by students enrolled in this section and may not be downloaded, reproduced, or redistributed outside of Canvas without written permission from the instructor. Discussion board posts and other student contributions may not be screenshotted, recorded, or reposted outside the course without permission from the student who authored them and the instructor.

Course materials, discussion board content, and video materials may not be exchanged or distributed for commercial purposes, for compensation, or for any 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 adaptations of course materials for personal research and study.

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 a module deadline 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. Any recorded student contributions will 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, and 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 — including

in written discussion posts and asynchronous exchanges. 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 logging into Canvas regularly to review module content, announcements, and updates, since there is no in-person class to relay this information.

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. The library offers virtual research consultations for online students. 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 a personal reflection assignment, a workplace assessment, a final paper, and a data project for this class. All writing assignments are due on Tuesday at 11:59 p.m. and submitted via Canvas. More detailed instructions for each assignment will be posted on Canvas.

Course Assignments and Points

- Personal Mixtape: 10 points
- Discussion Participation: 15 points (varies by format — see schedule)
- Workplace Assessment: 20 points
- Art Analysis: 15 points
- Data Story Project: 25 points
- Clint Smith Video Quizzes: 16 points (2 points each, flat rate)

Total: 101 points, plus up to 2 points of extra credit available (Weeks 2, 12 optional discussions — see above). Track your progress on Canvas as items are graded.

Personal Mixtape

Due Sep 22, 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.

Format: Record a video of yourself introducing your three songs and explaining the story behind each one (maximum 5 minutes). If you'd rather not be on camera, an audio-only recording is a fully accepted alternative — no need to ask permission or explain why, just submit audio instead of video.

Boundaries: Just focus on the music and the story — what each song means to you and why. You are never required to discuss anything that feels uncomfortable or too personal; choose songs and stories you're genuinely glad to share.

Week 4 Discussion Task: In place of the usual text discussion post, this week's task is to watch 2 classmates' Mixtape videos (or listen to their audio) and post a short written reaction to each — what stood out, what connected to something in your own story, or what you learned about them. This is part of your 10-point Personal Mixtape grade, not a separate discussion credit.

Workplace Assessment

Due Nov 10, 2026: Posted Monday, Nov 2; due Tuesday, Nov 10 at 11:59pm — one week to complete. Full instructions are in the separate Workplace Assessment document. You'll choose two of five fictional companies, each paired with an accompanying report, and act as a workplace consultant: for each company, you'll identify the discrepancy between what the company's report claims or omits and what its own profile data shows, name the specific course concept that explains it, connect the issue to a historical parallel from class, and propose recommendations targeting the company's organizational structure.

Art Analysis

Due Nov 17, 2026: Art critique and critical analysis. Take a piece of artwork by a Black artist and critique how it engages at least one of the following, named explicitly in your analysis: racial capitalism, intersectionality, or occupational sorting/wage gaps.

Historical parallel requirement: Connect the artwork explicitly to a specific chapter of Black Folk, cited by chapter — what does Kelley's history show us about the dynamic the artwork engages with? A vague gesture toward “history” without a specific, cited chapter will not receive credit for this element.

Museum requirement: The artwork you write about must be one you've seen in person. At some point during the semester — whenever fits your schedule — visit any museum or gallery (local, while traveling, wherever works for you), find a piece of art created by a Black artist, and take a photo of yourself with the piece. Submit this photo along with your Art Analysis.

If a museum visit genuinely isn't feasible for you this semester (cost, distance, mobility, or similar), reach out early so we can work out an alternative together — no need to wait until the deadline is close.

Data Story Project

Due Dec 9, 2026: Investigate one real organization or industry: its workforce representation by race and job level, its organizational culture, and where its employees actually live relative to where they work. Full instructions — data sources, format options, and what your submission needs to include — are in the separate Data Story Project Guide.

Optional historical connection: If your chosen organization or industry echoes a theme from Black Folk (transit/logistics and the Pullman Porter chapters, domestic/care work and the Sarah at Home chapters, a company shaped by the Great Migration, etc.), naming that parallel can strengthen your analysis — but it isn't required.

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. If you would like to use your extension, you must submit a Word document to Canvas with the statement, "I would like to use my one-time 24-hour extension." Each extension starts at midnight and ends at 11:59pm on Wednesday.

Assignments eligible for this extension: Personal Mixtape, Workplace Assessment, Art Analysis, or the Data Story Project submission.

You may not submit work written by someone else, use AI tools to generate or substantially rewrite your response, or copy/paraphrase another student's response.

Grading Scale

Points	Letter Grade
94–100	A
90–93.9	A-
87–89.9	B+
84–86.9	B
80–83.9	B-
77–79.9	C+
74–76.9	C
70–73.9	C-
67–69.9	D+
64–66.9	D
61–63.9	D-
0–60.9	F

Tentative Course Schedule (Async Modules)

Note: Schedule is subject to change with notice. All module content is released the Monday of each week (Tuesday for Week 1, the semester's first day); there is no fixed weekly meeting time. Dates below reflect the Fall 2026 semester. Regular classes end Thursday, Dec 10 — no course activity is scheduled during reading days or the exam period. Labor Day (Mon, Sep 7) is observed — no content is released that day; Week 2's module opens Tuesday, Sep 8 instead, per Rutgers academic calendar. Thanksgiving recess is officially Thu, Nov 26 – Sun, Nov 29; Week 13 runs a shortened Mon–Wed module to account for this.

Discussion / Reading Quiz / CS Quiz columns show what's due that week and its point value — a dash means that format doesn't apply that week.

Wk	Module Opens	Theme	Book Assignments & CS Videos <i>Additional readings and media: see Canvas site</i>	Discussion	Reading Quiz	CS Quiz	Deliverable
PART I — Racial Capitalism: Roots and Origins (Weeks 1–5)							
1	Tue, Sep 1	Introduction	—	Intro post, Wed	—	—	Orientation Quiz, Sun (ungraded, unlocks Week 2)
2	Tue, Sep 8 (Labor Day observed Mon, Sep 7)	Race, Racial Capitalism and Intersectionality	Clint Smith clips: "Slave Codes" (Ep. 4), "Plessy v. Ferguson and Segregation" (Ep. 21)	Ungraded, Wed/Fri (+1 pt EC)	—	2 pts, Wed	—
3	Mon, Sep 14	Reconstruction and The Racial Income Gap	Kelley Ch. 1 – Henry, a Blacksmith; Clint Smith clip: "Reconstruction" (Ep. 19)	—	3 pts, Wed	2 pts, Wed	—
4	Mon, Sep 21	Black Workers in the Labor Market	Clint Smith clip: "Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois" (Ep. 22)	—	—	2 pts, Wed	Personal Mixtape, Tue Sep 22 (10 pts, includes Week 4 video-reaction task)
5	Mon, Sep 28	Domestic Work, Resistance, and Organizing	Kelley Ch. 2 – Sarah at Home; Ch. 3 – Resistant Washerwoman; Clint Smith clip: "The Black Women's Club	—	3 pts, Wed	2 pts, Wed	—

Wk	Module Opens	Theme	Book Assignments & CS Videos <i>Additional readings and media: see Canvas site</i>	Discussion	Reading Quiz	CS Quiz	Deliverable
			Movement" (Ep. 23)				
PART II — Stratification Economics: Structures of Work and Survival (Weeks 6–10)							
6	Mon, Oct 5	Pullman Porters & Respectability	Kelley Ch. 4 – The Jeremiad of the Porter; Ch. 5 – Minnie and Bruce; Clint Smith clip: "Randolph, Rustin, & the Origins of the March on Washington" (Ep. 32)	—	3 pts, Wed	2 pts, Wed	—
7	Mon, Oct 12	Migration and Work in the North	Kelley Ch. 6 – The Maids of the Migration; Ch. 7 – Everything Sufficient for a Good Life; Kelley Conclusion; Clint Smith clips: "The Great Migration" (Ep. 24), "The Red Summer of 1919" (Ep. 25)	—	3 pts, Wed	2 pts, Wed	—
8	Mon, Oct 19	The Role of Education and Class Mobility	Clint Smith clips: "Arts and Letters of the Harlem Renaissance" (Ep. 26), "Political Thought in the Harlem Renaissance" (Ep. 27)	1 pt, Wed/Fri	—	2 pts, Wed	Optional: Data Story dataset idea check-in
9	Mon, Oct 26	Civil Rights and the Modern Workplace Culture	Clint Smith clips: "The Great Depression" (Ep. 28), "World War II" (Ep. 31)	1 pt, Wed/Fri	—	2 pts, Wed	—
10	Mon, Nov 2	Workplace Assessment Week	—	—	—	—	Workplace Assessment, Tue Nov 10 (20 pts)
PART III — Economic Justice and Collective Power (Weeks 11–15)							

Wk	Module Opens	Theme	Book Assignments & CS Videos <i>Additional readings and media: see Canvas site</i>	Discussion	Reading Quiz	CS Quiz	Deliverable
11	Mon, Nov 9	Black Women Workers	—	1 pt, Wed/Fri	—	—	—
12	Mon, Nov 16	Black Workers Matter	Clint Smith clips: "Barack Obama" (Ep. 50), "Black Lives Matter" (Ep. 51)	Ungraded, Wed/Fri (+1 pt EC)	—	2 pts, Wed	Art Analysis, Tue Nov 17 (15 pts)
13	Mon, Nov 23	Thanksgiving Week (Modified Schedule)	—	Optional, ungraded, through Wed	—	—	—
14	Mon, Nov 30	Final Project Prep	—	—	—	—	Independent work time before next week's Data Story deadline
15	Mon, Dec 7	Final Week	—	Optional peer feedback, Thu	—	—	Data Story Project, Wed Dec 9 (25 pts)