

Labor and Employment History  
MLER 38:578:612:90

Course Syllabus – Spring 2022  
Online Asynchronous

Professor: Naomi R Williams [naomi.r.williams@rutgers.edu](mailto:naomi.r.williams@rutgers.edu)

### **Course Description**

This 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 cover the industrial revolution and changing market economy of the late 18th and early 19th century, slavery and freedom, the “labor question” of how the promises of democracy and independence in the U.S. measured against realities of wage labor in the changing workplaces and economic arrangements of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the changing nature of work in the 21st. 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.

### **Course Objectives**

This course aims to enable students to:

- Understand how the past shapes the present
- Understand how and why work and workplaces have changed over time
- Understand how social, cultural, and economic forces have shaped U.S. labor history
- Analyze the strengths and weaknesses of different labor systems
- Assess how the state, employees, and worker organizations affect working conditions and living standards
- Apply insights from the past to contemporary labor problems
- 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

### **Format and Requirements**

This is a reading seminar with an extensive writing component. As we learn about and discuss the history of work and employment in the United States, we will also be honing our critical thinking and writing skills. In class we will discuss theory, history, and policy related to labor and capitalism. There will be online discussions on weekly readings and themes. Students will write two, 2-page reading analysis papers, and weekly discussion forums based on the readings. The class will have one project based on your interest area. This project will include a proposal & annotated bibliography; rough draft; and final draft.

### **Class participation and grading assessment**

Class will take place in the discussion forums. Active, weekly engagement is expected from

## MLER SPRING 2022 SYLLABUS

everyone. Each week students will post one question/thought for discussion by Wednesday. We will spend the rest of the week engaging with these ideas to shape our understanding of labor and work in the U.S. Students should post at least 4 times. Final posts are due on Fridays.

### **How to read for class**

Reading is an active process. You must read critically. This does not mean you must find something to criticize about the material. Instead, you have to read closely, analyze the argument and use of sources, and then decide what you think about the author's point. Are you convinced? Did something challenge your assumptions? Were your ideas confirmed or contradicted?

Start by reading the title, subheading titles (if any), and then the introduction and conclusion.

As you read, ask yourself the following questions and take notes:

- What is the subject?
- What is the author's argument? – restate this in your own words
- Why does it matter (what's the big picture)?
- What sort of evidence is used? Is it used effectively?
- How is the reading organized?
- What assumptions did the author start with? How did that impact the argument?

You will find that reading critically will allow you to construct discussion questions and more easily prepare for the writing assignments.

### **How to develop effective discussion questions**

A crucial part of becoming skilled at critical thinking and analysis is learning to ask good questions. Because of this, I will ask you to develop and share at least one question for each week's readings. The purpose of the questions is to direct the class to delve into the central issues and concerns in the readings. Questions can engage the historical material presented (for example, a question related to the effects of worker political participation in a period) or historiographical concerns (how the authors analyzed sources). Questions can also be about larger themes (how the reading relates to freedom, democracy, and/or U.S. political economy).

Questions that begin with who, what, where, and when can often be answered with specific information. For this reason, they do not make good discussion questions. Do not ask questions that can be answered with a quick internet search. Questions that begin with how or why ask for explanations. They are usually the analytical questions that tend to make for better discussion. If you have identified an issue or idea that interests you but do not have a question, try asking how or why it matters and see what happens.

### **How to write for class**

All writing assignments should be double-spaced in Times New Roman, 12-point font with one-inch margins. Use Chicago Manual of Style guidelines for footnotes. Your name should be in the first page header. Start numbering pages on page 2 (inside the page footer). All essays require a purposeful title. You must cite all your sources. Plagiarism will be penalized with a zero on the assignment, failure in the course, and/or reporting to the academic integrity office.

Themed analysis papers may not exceed 2 pages. These essays should critically engage with the readings/class discussion and how a theme relates to the broader course. You do not need to

## MLER SPRING 2022 SYLLABUS

“cover” every aspect from the readings but should focus on what most interests you and supports YOUR analysis of the material. It is often useful to ask yourself what these readings contribute to our understanding of work and labor in the U.S. and what problems remain. This should be your analysis (defined as your thoughts/opinions plus reasoning/evidence), not a summary.

The final project should be 7-10 pages. Use Chicago style footnotes and bibliography.

### **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. Let me know in advance or as soon as possible if you are not participating 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 on the Rutgers University Academic Integrity Policy, see <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy/>

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 written 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>

### **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>.

**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.

**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. labor and employment history, and all who partake in the course should feel encouraged to express their views in an open, civic forum.

**Rutgers Learning Centers**

Rutgers is committed to your success and offers free academic services to all students. The Learning Centers provide tutoring, study groups, and review sessions for your courses. They also host workshops and provide individual academic coaching to help you further develop your study strategies and self-management skills. To learn more about how the LCs can help you succeed, visit [rlc.rutgers.edu](http://rlc.rutgers.edu). If you need technical support visit [Rutgers OIT](#).

The faculty and staff at Rutgers are committed to your success. Students who are successful tend to seek out resources that enable them to excel academically, maintain their health and wellness, prepare for future careers, navigate college life and finances, and connect with the RU community. Resources that can help you succeed and connect with the Rutgers community can be found at [success.rutgers.edu](http://success.rutgers.edu), and nearly all services and resources that are typically provided in-person are now available remotely.

**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 looking for announcements or updates on Canvas.

**Course evaluation**

Discussion forums	585
Analysis papers	200
Project proposal & annotated bibliography	50
Rough draft (participation points)	50
Final project	<u>100</u>
Total	985

**Course schedule (may be subject to change; changes posted to Canvas)**

**Week 1: Introductions/Race & Nationalism and the History of Capitalism (Monday is a holiday, classes start on the 18<sup>th</sup>)**

Readings:

- Syllabus
- Barbara J. Fields, “Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America” *New Left Review* 181, no. 1 (May/June 1990): 95-118.
- Cedric J. Robinson, “Racial Capitalism: The Nonobjective Character of Capitalist Development” in *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 9-28.
- [Geographies of Racial Capitalism with Ruth Wilson Gilmore](#) – An Antipode Foundation film

Assignments due 28 Jan:

- Discussion forums (introductions and weekly reading)

**Week 2: The Industrial Revolution and the Rise of Market Capitalism**

Readings:

- Michael Merrill, “The Anti-Capitalist Origins of the United States,” *Review* 13, no. 4 (Fall 1990): 465-497.
- Joe William Trotter, Jr., “Genesis of the Black Working Class,” in *Workers on Arrival: Black Labor in the Making of America* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019), 3-26.
- Seth Rockman, “What Makes the History of Capitalism Newsworthy?” *Journal of the Early Republic* 34, no. 3 (Fall 2014): 439-466.

Assignments due 04 Feb:

- Race & Nationalism and the History of Capitalism analysis paper
- Discussion forum

**Week 3: Slavery and Freedom**

Readings:

- Priscilla Murolo and A.B. Chitty, “Slavery and Freedom in the New Republic” and “Civil War and Reconstruction,” in *From the Folks Who Brought You the Weekend: An Illustrated History of Labor in the United States*, revised ed. (New York: The New Press, 2018), 43-89.
- Bruce Levine, “The Second American Revolution,” *Jacobin Struggle & Progress* 18 (Summer 2015): 35-41.

Assignment due 11 Feb:

- Discussion forum

#### **Week 4: Immigration and Contract Labor**

Readings:

- Dennis Kearney, “Our Misery and Despair” *History Matters: The U.S. Survey Course on the Web*, 1878 ([online](#)).
- Gunther Peck, “Reinventing Free Labor: Immigrant Padrones and Contract laborers in North America, 1885-1925,” *Journal of American History* 83, no. 3 (Dec 1996): 848-871.
- Kornel Chang, “Circulating Race and Empire: Transnational Labor Activism and the Politics of Anti-Asian Agitation in the Anglo-American Pacific World, 1880-1910,” *Journal of American History* 96, no. 3 (Dec 2009): 678-701.
- David Vermette, “When an Influx of French-Canadian Immigrants Struck Fear Into Americans,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, 21 August 2019 ([online](#)).

Assignment due 18 Feb:

- Discussion forum

#### **Week 5: The Gilded Age and Progressive Era “Labor Question”**

Readings:

- Andrew Carnegie, “The Problem of the Administration of Wealth,” in *The Gospel of Wealth and Other Timely Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1886, reprinted 1962), 14-29.
- Samuel Gompers, “What Does Labor Want? A Paper Read before the International Labor Congress, September 1893” in *Samuel Gompers Papers Vol 3: Unrest and Depression 1891-94*. Eds. Stuart B. Kaufman et al. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 388–396.
- IWW, “Manifesto and Preamble,” *History is a Weapon*, 1905 & 1908 ([online](#)).
- David Brody, “The Rise and Decline of Welfare Capitalism,” *Workers in Industrial America: Essays on the Twentieth Century Struggle*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 48-78.
- Tera W. Hunter, “Domination and Resistance: The Politics of Wage Household Labor in New South Atlanta,” *Labor History*, 34, no. 2-3(1993): 205-220.

Assignment due 25 Feb:

- Discussion forum

#### **Week 6: Project Proposal Prep Week**

Assignments due 04 Mar:

- Project proposal and annotated bibliography

#### **Week 7: Industrial Unionism**

Readings:

- Daniel J. Clark, “Separating Truth from Myth in the So-Called ‘Golden Age’ of the Detroit Auto Industry,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, 9 May 2019 ([online](#)).
- Jack Metzger, “No Backward Steps: The Biggest Strike in U.S. History,” *Striking Steel* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), 58-83.

Assignment due 11 Mar:

- Discussion forum

## SPRING BREAK 12-20 MARCH

### Week 8: Labor and Social Movements

#### Readings:

- Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past,” *Journal of American History*, 91, no. 4 (Mar 2005): 1233-1263.
- Dorothy Sue Cobble, “When Feminism Had Class” in *What’s Class Got to Do With It?: American Society in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Michael Zweig (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, ), 23-34.
- William P. Jones, “The Forgotten Radical History of the March on Washington,” *Dissent*, 60, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 74-79.
- Matt Nichter, “Did Emmet Till Die in Vain? Organized Labor Says No!": The United Packinghouse Workers and Civil Rights Unionism in the Mid-1950s," *LABOR*, 18, no. 2 (May 2021): 8-40.
- Miriam Frank, “From Common Enemies to Common Causes: The Labor Movement and the Gay Movement in Action and Coalition,” *Out in the Union: A Labor History of Queer America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2014), 75-101.

#### Assignment due 25 Mar:

- Discussion forum

### Week 9: Public Sector Unions

#### Readings:

- Francis Ryan, “The New Militancy in Philadelphia,” *AFSCME’s Philadelphia Story: Municipal Workers and Urban Power in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011), 149-179.
- Joseph McCartin, “A Wagner Act for Public Employees: Labor’s Deferred Dream and the Rise of Conservatism, 1970-1976,” *Journal of American History* 95, no. 1 (Jun 2008): 123-148.

#### Assignments due 01 Apr:

- Labor and Social Movements analysis paper
- Discussion forum

### Week 10: Neoliberalism and the Decline of Collective Bargaining

#### Readings:

- David Harvey, Introduction and “Freedom’s Just Another Word...” *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1-38.
- Harold Meyerson, “If Labor Dies, What’s Next?,” *The American Prospect*, 13 Sept 2012 ([online](#)).

#### Assignment due 08 Apr:

- Discussion forum

**Week 11: New Labor Movements**

Readings:

- Rinku Sen, “Domestic Workers: “Organizing with Love,” *Race, Poverty & the Environment* 17, no. 2 (Fall 2010): 30-31, 33.
- Jeremy Brecher, “A Superfund for Workers: How to Promote a Just Transition and Break Out of the Jobs vs the Environment Trap,” *Dollars and Sense* Nov/Dec 2015 ([online](#)).

Assignments due 15 Apr:

- Discussion forum
- Project rough draft

**Week 12: Changing Nature of Work: A New Gilded Age?/Consultation Week**

Readings:

- Estelle Sommeiller and Mark Price, “The New Gilded Age: Income inequality in the U.S. by state, metropolitan area, and county,” *Economic Policy Institute*, 19 July 2018, 1-66.
- Edward T. O’Donnell, “Are We Living in the Gilded Age 2.0?,” *History Stories*, 31 Jan 2019 ([online](#)).

Assignments due 22 Apr:

- Discussion forum
- One-on-one project consultation

**Week 13: Working-Class Liberation in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Readings:

- Keeanga-Yahmattha Taylor, “From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation,” in *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016), 191-219.
- Jack Metzger, “Equality and Electability,” *Working-Class Perspectives*, 14 Oct 2019 ([online](#)).
- Megan Jula, “Millions of People are Tired of Getting Screwed. This is What a Worldwide Workers’ Movement Looks Like,” *Mother Jones*, 28 Feb 2018 ([online](#)).

Assignment due 29 Apr:

- Discussion forum

**Week 14: Final Projects**

Assignment:

- **Final projects due, 06 May 2022**