

Course Syllabus

RUTGERS UNIVERSITY– SYLLABUS SPRING 2025

UNITED STATES WORK & LABOR THROUGH RECONSTRUCTION

PEOPLE AND POWER

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Course Description: Welcome to U.S. Work and Labor through Reconstruction at Rutgers University. This course is designed to introduce you to both field of history as a discipline including specific critical thinking skills, and the content of labor studies; the people, events, and ideas that produced our world today.

The content of the course will trace labor history from pre-conquest to Reconstruction. This is a big expanse, and we will not be able to cover everything. Instead, we are going to focus on particular moments, themes, and ideas. As such, we will look at cultural and material factors in history, the ideological, social, cultural, political, environmental, and economic forces that shape that history. Through this we will work on developing arguments of historical causation. And above all we will be in a constant process of reading, writing, and asking questions.

Among the key questions this course asks are, why does work and labor in the United States look the way that it does? Why did the Americas turn toward systems of racialized chattel slavery? How should we understand capitalism in relation to human labor? How did the process of industrialization and urbanization impact labor in America? How have workers related to US war and empire? What role has race and gender played in shaping U.S. labor? Why is U.S. labor history so violent?

With these questions, learning the methodology of history is important. Interrogating sources, developing analysis, and crafting your ideas are skills that take practice. They are the building blocks of critical thinking. They will undoubtedly help you in your future course work as a university student, but more than this, the process of history helps us develop essential life skills. Ultimately, the process of historical discovery is also a process of self-discovery. It is a process of discovering your own ideas about our world, about how we got here, and what we can do to make it a better place. Therefore my hope is that as better historical and critical thinkers, you'll be happier, stronger, and more engaged social and historical agents.

In addition to a substantial reading load, you will be writing essays based on primary source materials. Participation and engagement in class discussion is vitally important; the expectation is that every one of you has something to contribute, and the more you engage in the work of the class, the richer the class discussions will be. To that end there will be weekly reading responses, in class discussion sessions, two argumentative essay assignments, and one final exam.

Finally, if we are to succeed in our goals for this course we must work together to create a collaborative, inclusive and respectful learning culture. I look forward to getting to know you and working together this year.

Goals:

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.

Rutgers Core - you will be able 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 - you will be able 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 - you will be able to:

- 1: 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.
- To develop strong writing and critical thinking skills
- To develop the practice of asking productive, conceptual questions
- To learn how to participate effectively and contribute meaningfully to class discussion
- To understand the work of historical scholarship
- To understand labor history as diverse, contested, and nonlinear
- To be able to discuss and debate the structures of class in American society

- To have an introductory knowledge of class as historically contingent and a social construction

Accommodations: Everyone will need some type of accommodation at some point throughout the semester. My goal is to normalize the need for accommodation requests to the extent the university policy allows me to. There are various types of accommodation requests. I can help with some accommodation requests, but there are also accommodation requests that you will need to go through the university's ODS. I can help with the following (**without you going to the ODS**):

- Extended time for exam and/or assignment submissions (already built in for all but let me know if you require something different).
- Make up exams, assignments, due to work travel, illness, family responsibilities. No need to ask, just tell me. I just need a heads up so I know you're ok and that you don't fall behind on your course work.

Rutgers' Official Accommodation 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 ([See Documentation Guidelines](#)[Links to an external site.](#)). If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus's disability services office will provide you and your instructor with a Letter of Accommodations. Please discuss the accommodations with your instructors as early in your courses as possible. To begin this process, please complete the [registration form](#)[Links to an external site.](#). I am happy to facilitate the process if you need me to. Just let me know.

Office of Disability Services contact and address

Lucy Stone Hall, Livingston Campus, 54 Joyce Kilmer Avenue, Suite A145, Piscataway, NJ 08854-8045.

- E-mail Address: dsoffice@rci.rutgers.edu
- Phone: (848) 445-6800 • Fax: (732) 445-3388
- <https://ods.rutgers.edu/>

Rutgers Diversity Statement

The Division of Student Affairs works to create an environment of **inclusion** which respects and affirms the inherent dignity, value, and uniqueness of all individuals, communities and perspectives. Our practices reflect awareness and understanding of the complexity of identity and the increasing interconnectedness of our world. It is our **responsibility** to promote and maintain a community of compassion, embracing the rich dimensions of **diversity**, and facilitating opportunities for understanding and the expression of both individual and shared truths.

Course Materials

- All course materials: lecture videos, multimedia, and readings are provided in each week's module. You do not need to purchase any textbook.

Coursework

Essays

You will complete two main writing assignments over the course of the term. The first essay will ask you to craft a unique argument using class readings. The second will involve conducting research using scholarly secondary source materials. Some work will be completed in class including rough drafts and peer reviews. There will also be supplementary homework assignments related to these two papers. An essay is not a solitary endeavor. The process of editing, revising, and rethinking can and should involve colleagues and teachers. More information about the essays will be provided during the term.

Weekly Analysis and Argumentation Assignments

In general, you will be asked to complete a weekly reading response of about one page (250 words) that involves locating key ideas in the reading and coming up with discussion questions to bring to class.

A central component of this course is discussion. It is important that our conversations revolve around your own questions and not just mine. As you are reading the material, not only should you be sorting through the ideas in the text, the way in which those ideas are expressed, and in general coming to an understanding of the text, but you should also be asking questions: what is the central argument or idea from a text? How does this writer's ideas compare with another's? What does the author's argument reveal about the values and attitudes of the time? What is confusing about this text, what is problematic, what is beautiful? How does this text inform our understanding of the historical period we are studying?

Midterm and Final Exams

You will complete an in-class midterm and final exam.

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity

The process of learning is hard, and sometimes students are tempted to take shortcuts in the form of plagiarism. However, any student who uses words, ideas, or sources without proper citation will be given a failing grade and reported for further action in line with the University's policies. This includes using the work of AI generated essay content in any way, including brainstorming, drafting, or writing by AI technologies. We will talk more about what constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid it.

Assignments Breakdown

- Weekly Reading Responses - 10 points each
- Midterm Exam - 40 points
- Final Exam - 50 points

- Essay 1 (Reading Analysis Paper) - 40 points
- Essay 2 (Research Paper) - 50 points

Grading Scale

Points Range	Grade	Performance
90 - 100	A	Outstanding
88 - 89.99	B+	Good
80 - 87.99	B	Good
78 - 79.99	C+	Satisfactory
70 - 77.99	C	Satisfactory
69.99 and below	F	Poor

Textbooks

Course Packet available as pdf on the Canvas site

Rutgers Support Resources for Your Well-Being

Rutgers Student Health Services:

- Rutgers Student Affairs is dedicated to health for the whole student body, mind and spirit. It accomplishes this through a staff of qualified clinicians and support staff. [Health, Counseling, and Wellness services](#) [Links to an external site.](#) are available at several locations throughout Rutgers University.

Crisis Intervention - Student Health

- [Crisis Situations](#) [Links to an external site.](#)
- [In the Wake of Trauma](#) [Links to an external site.](#) [Open this document with ReadSpeaker docReader](#) [Links to an external site.](#)

Academic Services:

- For academic support including tutoring, visit the [Rutgers - New Brunswick Learning Centers](#) [Links to an external site.](#)
- For coaching help with writing skills and assignments visit the [Rutgers - New Brunswick Writing Tutors in the Learning Center](#) [Links to an external site.](#)
- Many library resources are available online. Assistance is available through phone, email, and chat. For information, check the [Rutgers Libraries website](#) [Links to an external site.](#)

Veteran Services:

- - Rutgers is proud to support veterans. If you are a veteran of the armed forces, please visit the [Office of Veteran and Military Programs and Services website](#) [Links to an external site.](#) for more information.

Student Code of Conduct

You are expected to conduct yourself in a professional, responsible, courteous, and respectful manner at all times during the course. Offensive language, harassment, posting videos or other media that is not related to the course, and/or any other inappropriate behavior will not be tolerated. Your responses to discussion posts, or any other communication with your classmates and/or your instructor must be of the highest professional and respectable standard. Refer to [Discussion Post Guidelines](#) when communicating in your Canvas class.

Academic Integrity

Be sure to review and abide by the [Rutgers Academic Integrity](#)

TurnItIn Statement

Students (You) agree that by taking this course all required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to **Turnitin.com** (via Canvas Assignments Portal) 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 \(Links to an external site.\)](#) posted on the Turnitin.com site.

If you do not agree please contact me immediately.

Class Schedule and Assignments

Please note: all readings are subject to change. Check your weekly course module for the most up-to-date assignments.

Week 1 (Since MLK Day is a holiday, the first week of this class is Mon. Jan. 27)

Course Introduction: From Labor to Class

Central Question: What is history? What is labor, work, and class?

Readings:

Bertolt Brecht, A Worker Reads History

Week 2 (due Mon Feb. 3)

Native Life and Labor Before Conquest and Early Encounters

Readings: Pre-European Native societies overview; Facing East From Indian Country chapter; John Locke

Week 3 (due Mon Feb. 10)

From Servitude to Slavery/ Bacon's Rebellion

Readings:

Edmund Morgan, American Slavery, American Freedom

Angela Davis, Women's Work in Slavery

Week 4 (due Mon Feb. 17)

Slavery, Race, and Enslaved People's Resistance/ Artisans, Enslaved People, and Others in the American Revolution

Jennifer Morgan, ["Deluders and Seducers of Each Other": Gender and the Changing Nature of Resistance](#)[Links to an external site.](#)

Week 5 (due Mon Feb. 24)

Industrial Revolution and the Transformation of Work

Readings: TBA

Paper #1 Outlines Due in Class for Peer Review

Week 6 (due Mon March 3)

Gender and the First Industrial Revolution - women factory workers and the emergence of separate spheres- paid versus unpaid labor

Central Question: Why were women the first industrial workforce?

Readings: Harriet Hanson Robinson, excerpts from Factory Girl,

Women work and protest in the Early Lowell Mills, Thomas Dublin

Jeanne Boydston, Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic

Paper #1 First Draft Due

Week 7 (due Mon March 10)

In Class Mid Term Exam

Week 8 (due Mon March 17)

Race, Immigration, and Industrialization: Chinese and Irish Immigrant Experiences

Race, Immigration, and Industrialization

Central Question: What is race? What is the relationship between industrialization and racial formation?

Readings: Excerpts from Helen Zia, *Asian American Dreams: The Emergence of an American People*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001),.

Wong Hau-hon, "A Chinese Immigrant Recalls the Dangers of Railroad Work,"

Paper #2 Research topic and questions due

Week 9 (due Mon March 24)

Slavery and American Capitalism, Abolitionist Movements in the mid 19th c/ slave narrative and resistance

How and why did slavery expand in the early 19th century?

Readings: Excerpts from Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom*, (Belknap Press: An Imprint of Harvard University Press, 2017).

WPA narratives on labor experiences

Paper #1 Revision Due

Week 10 (due Mon March 31)

Western Expansion, 5 Civilized Tribes, and Trail of Tears; Jacksonian Era, the Common Man

Readings: Theda Purdue

Annotated bibliography due

Week 11 (due Mon April 7)

Mexican American War, Gold Rush, Native genocide

Reading: TBA

Thesis and reading notes due in class for peer review

Week 12 (due Mon April 14)

Civil War and Labor

Why did the Civil War happen? What led to emancipation?

Readings: WEB Du Bois, excerpts from *Black Reconstruction*, other TBA

Outline due in class for peer review

Week 13 (due Mon April 21)

Reconstruction

Central Question: Why did Reconstruction fail to live up to its promises of equality?

Readings:

Tera Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom*

Excerpts from Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family, from Slavery to the Present*, (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2009). Chapter 2 "Freedwomen"

Paper #2 Due

Week 14 (due Mon April 28)

Course Re-cap and Final Exam prep

Week 15 (Mon May 5)

In-class Final Exam