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Work and Labor in the United States until 1877
Spring 2025 Syllabus

Thursday, 3:50 to 5:10 PM and 5:30 to 6:50 PM

Professor Michael Merrill

Office Hours: By appointment

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DESCRIPTION: The colonial and early national periods in the history of the United States were important chapters in humanity's transition from patriarchal modes of settlement, with their various forms of slavery and domination, to newer commercial modes of existence, with their various forms of liberty and participation. In the 17th and 18th centuries, European colonists and enslaved Africans evolved ways of living together on the North American eastern seaboard that would become the model for "democracy in America." In this course, we explore the rise of that democracy between the European conquest of the continent through the period of Reconstruction after the Civil War, and its various forms of power, freedom, and equality, in the context of the complex history of the diverse peoples of North America. Who are we? What is our message to the world? Is it the egalitarian, democratic aspiration of *e pluribus unum* (out of many, one)? Or is it the belligerent, authoritarian desire of *super pluribus unum* (over many, one)? How did the formative first quarter millennium of European migration to and conquest of the Americas shape our democratic ideal? What failures of principle, policy and practice lie behind the current crisis?

THEMES

- A. We do not yet know if the transition from traditional to modern societies will succeed. **No modern society has yet established itself as a sustainable, well-regulated system.**
- B. **Instead, they are all parasitic on the Earth.** Whether a sustainable commercial system can be symbiotic rather than parasitic on the Earth remains an open question.
- C. The US is the world's first fully modern nation founded on the political principles articulated by the champions of modernity, including, among English writers, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Adam Smith.
- D. Hobbes' *Leviathan* argues that because modern societies are capable of potentially lethal intra- and inter-communal violence, they require strong states able to suppress internal dissent and defend against external invasion to which all citizens unquestioningly submit.
- E. Locke's *Second Treatise on Government* argues that because strong states can be turned to private as well as public ends, can oppress and enslave as well as empower and liberate, citizens must be able to replace a government that does not serve their interests.
- F. Smith's *Wealth of Nations* argues that because modern societies have such immense powers at their command, they must respect the "natural liberty" of citizens and leave them free to the greatest extent possible to live as they choose.
- G. The history of the US to 1877, as the first nation modern democratic society, is in part the story of a continuing effort to reconcile these incompatible principles.
- H. We will ask, first, how democratic was American society before 1877; second, how free were its people? **What is democracy? What is freedom? Can they be lost?**

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students who successfully complete this course will have met the following objectives:

Course Objectives

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.

DISABILITY ACCOMMODATION: Rutgers welcomes students with disabilities into all its educational programs. To receive consideration for one or more reasonable accommodations, you must contact the appropriate disability services office on the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation to support your request for accommodations. For additional info, go to: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines>. If the documentation supports your request, your campus's disability services office will provide you with a Letter of Accommodations. Please share this letter with your instructors as early in your courses as possible and discuss the accommodations with them. To begin this process, please complete the form found at: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/registration-form>.

PROCESS: This course has **two streams**, **four components**, and **six requirements**. The two *streams* are: (A) an online *Reading Group*; and (B) an online *Writing Group*.

The four *components* are: (1) *reading* chapters of the required text, *Who Built America?* vol. I; (2) *participating* in weekly online writing and reading group activities; (3) *attending* two online reading group and two online writing group analysts meetings; and (4) *writing* a first and final draft of two papers, one on **Democracy** and one on **Freedom**, described more fully below.

REQUIREMENTS:

The six *requirements*, with the maximum number of points possible for each, are:

- I. 100 points:** *Critical summaries of the assigned reading posted to Canvas each week.* A post is worth 10 points, but you must participate in your reading group to receive them.

To participate in your reading group, you must: (a) post an excerpt of your summary to your group discussion page, (b) “like” the posted summary of someone else in your group, and (c) briefly explain why you liked it.

You can earn a maximum of 100 points in this area and there are 12 weeks of reading. As a result, you can miss two weeks without explanation or penalty and still earn the maximum number of points available in this area.

- II. 100 points:** *Considered responses to the Writing Group exercise posted each week.* A post is worth 10 points, but you must participate in your writing group to receive them.

To participate in your writing group, you must: (a) post a response to the writing group discussion question(s) on your group discussion page, (b) “like” the posted response(s) of someone else in your group, and (c) briefly explain why you liked them.

You can earn a maximum of 100 points in this area and there are 12 weeks of writing group exercises. As a result, you can miss two weeks without explanation or penalty and still earn the maximum number of points available in this area.

- III. 100 Points:** *Participation in and summaries of four synchronous online discussions, two before the midterm and two the after midterm, as described below.* Each participation, including the required summary, is worth 25 points.

You are required to attend two reading group and two writing group discussions during the term, one before and one after the midterm for each group. You will only receive points for participating if you post a summary of the discussion on your weekly group’s discussion page. Weekly writing group discussions meet on Zoom Thursdays from 3:50 to 5:10 PM. Weekly writing group discussions meet on Zoom Thursdays from 5:30 to 6:50 PM.

- IV. 100 points:** *Drafts of the Midterm and Endterm Essay posted to Canvas at least three weeks before the finished drafts are due.* At the direction of your instructor, you are required to write a first draft of each of the six distinct elements of the required essays.

These drafts will be reviewed by the instructors and be peer reviewed by two other members of your writing group. Each completed draft element of the essays earns 10 points. Each completed draft containing the three required elements earns 30 points.

You are also expected to read and comment on the midterm and endterm drafts of two other members of your writing group. Each completed peer review earns 10 points.

- V. 100 points:** *Final Draft of Midterm Paper posted to Canvas.* *How democratic were the British North American colonies before the American Revolution and how democratic was the system of government formed by the ratification of the US Constitution in 1787*

A final draft of an original essay on the above topic. The essay must have all the 6 required elements of the midterm essay listed on the assignment page, each of which earns 10 points. It must also be a corrected and substantially improved version of the first draft, as measured by each draft's Pro Writing Aid assessments and the number of changes made. A completed, corrected and improved final draft with all six elements earns 100 points. Incomplete drafts earn fewer points.

- VI. 100 points:** *Final Draft of Endterm Paper posted to Canvas.* *An essay on freedom in the United States before and immediately after the Civil War that describes which Americans were free and which were not free and why.*

A draft of an original essay on the above topic. The essay must address all 6 of the required elements of the end-of-term essay and be a corrected and substantially improved version of the first draft. A completed, corrected and improved final draft with all 6 elements earns 100 points. Incomplete drafts earn fewer points.

GRADING SCALE: Points are awarded on the basis of expended effort rather than achieved excellence. There are no good or bad, right or wrong responses. There are only responses that have been attempted, where an effort has been made, and responses that have not been attempted, where no effort has been made. Grades are based on the following scale.

A = 600 to 570 points	(570 > B+ > 550 points
B = 550 to 520 points	(520 > C+ > 500 points
C = 500 to 470 points	(470 > D+ > 450 points
D = 450 to 420 points	(420 > F

There are fourteen weeks of class, January 21 through May 1, for twelve of which there will be required readings. Points may thus be earned as follows:

- Reading Group Activities (16.7 percent):** Up to 100 points, 10 points per week of activity
Writing Group Activities (16.6 percent): Up to 100 points, 10 points per week of activity
Class Participation (16.7 percent): Up to 100 points, 25 points per participation
First Drafts (16.6 percent): Up to 100 points, 60 for required elements, 40 for peer reviews
Midterm Essay (16.7 percent): Up to 100 points, with 20 points for each required element
Final Essay (16.7 percent): Up to 100 points, with 20 points for each required element

Final Grade = Reading Activities + Writing Activities + Online Discussions + First Drafts + Peer Reviews + Midterm Essay + Final Essay

REQUIRED TEXT:

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

Copies of each chapter are available as PDF files on Canvas, but used copies are quite inexpensive online, if you desire a tangible version. If you do not already have a copy, you may download Adobe Reader at <http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html>.

CLASS SCHEDULE:

INTRODUCTION: Thursday, January 23 (EVERYONE on ZOOM)

3:50 to 5:10 PM: Introduction to Course and Online Format

5:30 to 6:50 PM: *When Civilizations Collide: Who Owes What to Whom?*

WEEK I: Thursday, January 30

3:50 to 5:10 PM: [Writing] **WG 1:** *What is Democracy? What Is Equality?*

5:30 to 6:50 PM: [Reading] **WBA I:** Europe, Africa and American Colonization, 1492-1680

WEEK II: Thursday, February 6

3:50 to 5:10 PM: [Writing] **WG 2:** *Identifying Democracy, Part I: The Southern Colonies*

5:30 to 6:50 PM: [Reading] **WBA II:** Servitude, Slavery and the Southern Colonies, 1620-1760

WEEK III: Thursday, February 13

3:50 to 5:10 PM: [Writing] **WG 3:** *Identifying Democracy, Part II: The Northern Colonies*

5:30 to 6:50 PM: [Reading] **WBA III:** Family Labor and the Northern Colonies, 1640-1760

WEEK IV: Thursday, February 20

3:50 to 5:10 PM: [Writing] **WG 4:** *Evaluating the American Revolution: Was It Justified?*

5:30 to 6:50 PM: [Reading] **WBA IV:** Toward Revolution, 1750-1776

DEMOCRACY FIRST DRAFTS ARE DUE THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 22

WEEK V: Thursday, February 27

3:50 to 5:10 PM: [Writing] **WG 5:** *Was the 1787 US Constitution Democratic?*

5:30 to 6:50 PM: [Reading] **WBA V:** Revolution, Constitution and the People, 1776-1815

WEEK VI: Thursday, March 6

3:50 to 5:10 PM: [Writing] **WG 6:** *Was the 1787 US Constitution Pro- or Anti-Slavery?*

5:30 to 6:50 PM: [Reading] **WBA VI:** The Consolidation of Slavery in the South, 1790-1836

WEEK VII: Thursday, March 13

3:50 to 5:10 PM: [Writing] WG 7: *What Is Freedom?*

5:30 to 6:50 PM: [Reading] WBA VII: Northern Society and Wage Labor, 1790-1837

DEMOCRACY FINAL DRAFTS ARE DUE THURSDAY, MARCH 15

MARCH 15 to 23 – NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK

WEEK VIII: Thursday, March 27

3:50 to 5:10 PM: [Writing] WG 8: *Who Is Free? How Free Are They?*

5:30 to 6:50 PM: [Reading] WBA VIII: Immigration, Urban Life and Social Reform, 1838-1860

WEEK IX: Thursday, April 3

3:50 to 5:10 PM: [Writing] WG 9: *Slavery and Southern Whites*

5:30 to 6:50 PM: [Reading] WBA IX: Slavery and the Crisis of Southern Society, 1836-1848

WEEK X: Thursday, April 10

3:50 to 5:10 PM: [Writing] WG 10: *The North, the West, and the Slave Power*

5:30 to 6:50 PM: [Reading] WBA X: Slavery and Sectional Conflict, 1848-1860

FREEDOM FIRST DRAFTS ARE DUE THURSDAY, APRIL 12

WEEK XI: Thursday, April 17

3:50 to 5:10 PM: [Writing] WG 11: *Slavery, King Cotton, and the Industrial Revolution*

5:30 to 6:50 PM: [Reading] WBA XI: Civil War: America's Second Revolution, 1861-1865

WEEK XII: Thursday, Thursday, April 24

3:50 to 5:10 PM: [Writing] WG 12: *Did the Civil War Establish Freedom?*

5:30 to 6:50 PM: [Reading] WBA XII: Reconstructing the Nation, 1865-1877

CONCLUSION: Thursday, Thursday, May 1

[Reading] *Reviews and Reflections: The Meaning of Early American History*

[Writing] *Reviews and Reflections: How Democratic and How Free Are We?*

FREEDOM FINAL DRAFTS ARE DUE THURSDAY, MAY 3

Revised: January 28, 2025