

Course No. 37:575:202:06
History of Labor and Work in the U.S. 1880 to 1945
Rutgers School of Management and Labor Relations
Spring 2025

Instructor: Dr. Dan Sidorick
Murray Hall 114
Tuesday 5:40 pm – 8:40 pm

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Office hours: Before or after class or
via Zoom - Contact Instructor

Overview

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.

What was life like for machine operators, office workers, sharecroppers, housewives, coal miners, immigrants, teachers, and retail workers during the period of American industrial dominance, and how did their actions affect the course of history? This course will tackle these questions, looking at the development of the labor movement and other movements of "ordinary" people and the enormous changes they have wrought in American history. We will not ignore the important roles of the powerful, but we will examine them together with the actions and ideologies of working-class people and their organizations. And we will look at the world surrounding the labor movement and the social and cultural changes in each period.

We will also study the differing forms and ideologies of numerous workers' organizations to understand why some made a real difference and others had little lasting effect. The labor movement has changed dramatically from the early period of industrialization, when the United States was still primarily an agricultural country, through the explosive growth of mass production in the twentieth century. Our approach will highlight the fact that American history has not been a smooth narrative of progress, but rather that change has come about only after struggle over different views of what path the country should take.

This course satisfies several specific Rutgers learning objectives that are detailed below. Please contact me at daniel.sidorick@rutgers.edu if you have any questions about the course.

Statement on Disability: 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 disability services office, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation. If the documentation supports your request for 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/getting-registered>.

Statement on Academic Honesty: All work in this course must be your own. Be careful to always cite your sources. For direct quotes, include them within quotation marks and cite appropriately. Since none of us lived during the times we are studying, we must, of course, rely on the words and writings of others, but these must always be cited -- otherwise the use of those words is considered plagiarism. Any assignments containing the work of others and not cited properly will receive a grade of zero, and could result in an F for the course. *Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns on this point.* In accordance with department policy, student papers will be submitted through 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 the course instructor immediately.

Support for students: Information on how to receive extra support for (a) victim and mental health services, (b) academics, and (c) financial assistance (mainly emergencies) is available at <https://smlr.rutgers.edu/academic-programs/current-students>

Academic Freedom: Free inquiry is essential to a robust learning environment. Faculty and students alike are free to express their viewpoints at appropriate times in class, including perspectives that differ from most in the Rutgers University community. This means that students may be exposed to views they find challenging, uncomfortable, or distressing.

Course Learning 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.

Student Requirements

1. *Class participation* (14% of your grade). Your active participation in class is essential for the success of the class. This part of your grade is based on attendance, coming to class on time and prepared by finishing all readings before class, and taking an active part in class discussions and activities. Contact the instructor if there are problems affecting your ability to attend a class.
2. *Online discussion forums and Canvas assignments* (16% of grade). To supplement our class sessions, we will also have discussions and other assignments in Canvas. In the discussion forums you will post responses to questions and to other students' postings by the deadlines listed, basing your comments on class readings and other materials. Often the forum topic will be used as a starting point for in-class discussions in the following class.
3. *First Exam* (17.5% of grade). The first class test will consist of essay questions and identification questions (people, events, concepts, etc.), and will be based on lectures, readings, films, and discussions on material covered in the first half of the course.
4. *Second Exam* (17.5% of grade). The second class test will consist of essay questions and identification questions (people, events, concepts, etc.), and will be based on lectures, readings, films, and discussions, primarily on material covered in the second half of the course.

5. *Class paper 1* (15% of grade). For a paper on an assigned topic, you will submit a draft version and later a final version (the draft is required in order to submit a final version). The draft will be reviewed by another student using a Guided Peer Review. Your review of another student's paper will be part of your grade.
6. *Class paper 2* (20% of grade). For a paper on an assigned topic, you will submit a draft version and later a final version (the draft is required in order to submit a final version). The draft will be reviewed by another student using a Guided Peer Review. Your review of another student's paper will be part of your grade.

Note: The general policy on late assignments is that all late assignments will be downgraded one letter grade (e.g. A to B) and will not be accepted more than one week after due date. Contact the instructor immediately if you experience or anticipate any problems and we will make arrangements as necessary.

The best way to attain a grade you are happy with is to come to class, pay attention, take notes (from lectures and readings and videos), and participate actively in discussions, both in class and Canvas!

Required Text

The following required book is available for purchase or free online (but see Note below):

Rosenzweig, et al., *Who Built America?: Working People and the Nation's History, Volume II: Since 1877*, 3rd ed., Bedford / St. Martin's Press, 2008. (Referred to as WBA in following pages.)

The textbook is available for free as a series of pdf files in Canvas. You may use these in place of purchasing the textbook.

Note that a new, free, [online version of the textbook](#) is now available. Reading assignments each week will list both the page numbers in the original book and links to chapters in the new online version—you may use whichever you prefer. This syllabus will list the original page numbers.

All other readings listed below will be available on the Canvas system or via the Web. In order to participate actively in discussions, you must complete the readings by the day that they are listed on the syllabus. Be sure to read the non-textbook readings as well as the textbook -- they give additional in-depth insights that may be missing in the textbook, and content from both textbook and supplemental readings will be included in exams and papers.

Class Schedule

Changes may be made in the schedule and readings -- be sure to check Canvas and your email often.

GETTING STARTED

Tuesday, Jan 21

Introduction and overview. What is the Labor Movement? Why 1880? Studying history "from the bottom up." U.S. labor history up to 1880, and the state of working people in 1880.

THE "GREAT UPHEAVAL OF 1877"; INDUSTRIAL CAPITALISM IN THE GILDED AGE (1877 to 1893)

Tuesday, Jan 28

Readings:

- Jeremy Brecher, "The Great Upheaval," pp. 138-148.
- WBA Ch. 1 - pp. 23-49, 70-71.

WORKING PEOPLE'S RESPONSES TO INDUSTRIAL CAPITALISM IN THE GILDED AGE

Tuesday, Feb 4

Readings:

- WBA Ch. 2 – pp. 77-79, 91-120.
- Susan Levine, "Labor's True Woman"

INDUSTRIAL CAPITALISM AT HOME AND ABROAD (1893 to 1900)

Tuesday, Feb 11

Readings:

- WBA Ch. 3 – pp. 124-157, 167-174.
- "Statement from the Pullman Strikers" [PS]
- Eugene Debs, "Interview from Jail" and "A Call to the People." [PS]

THE PROGRESSIVE ERA (1900 TO 1918): REFORM AND EFFICIENCY

Tuesday, Feb 18

Readings:

- WBA Ch. 4 - pp. 181-202, 216-217
- "Frederick Winslow Taylor Explains..." [PS]
- "Machinist Testifies on the Taylor System..." [PS]

Assignment – Submit 1st Draft of Writing Assignment 1; Peer Review of Another Student's 1st Draft

THE PROGRESSIVE ERA (1900 TO 1918): RADICALS AND SOCIALISTS

Tuesday, Feb 25

Readings:

- WBA Ch. 5 – pp. 223-225, 241-269
- Sidorick, "The 'Girl Army': The Philadelphia Shirtwaist Strike of 1909-1910"
- "Lawrence Textile Strike" [PS]

WORLD WAR 1 AND THE 1918 PANDEMIC; FIRST HALF OF COURSE REVIEW

Tuesday, Mar 4

Readings:

- WBA Ch. 6 - pp. 279-280, 292-312, 320-329
- Cal Winslow, "[When the Seattle General Strike and the 1918 Flu Collided](#)"

Review for Midterm Exam

Assignment -- Final Version of Writing Assignment 1

FIRST EXAM

Tuesday, Mar 11

Exam #1 (covering material from the first half of the course through 1918)

SPRING BREAK * No Class *****

Tuesday, Mar 18

THE FIRST RED SCARE AND THE "LEAN DECADE" FOR AMERICAN WORKERS (1918 to 1929)

Tuesday, Mar 25

Readings:

- WBA Ch. 7 – pp. 335-339, 343-352, 375-384
- Sharon McConnell-Sidorick, "[Silk Stockings and Socialism](#)"

THE GREAT DEPRESSION & THE FIRST NEW DEAL (1929 to 1935)

Tuesday, Apr 1

Readings:

- WBA Ch. 8
- Sidorick, "The Dorrance Dynasty" and "Camden in the Great Depression"

LABOR UPSURGE: THE INDUSTRIAL UNION MOVEMENT AND SECOND NEW DEAL (1935 to 1939)

Tuesday, Apr 8

Readings:

- WBA Ch. 9, pp. 444-491
- "Dollinger Remembers the Flint Sit-down Strike," pp. 345-349. [PS]
- (Optional) "Flint Sit-down Strike Graphic Comic": <https://bit.ly/32etb6w>

Assignment: Submit 1st Draft of Writing Assignment 2; Peer Review of Another Student's 1st Draft

DIVISION AND UNITY IN AMERICAN WORKING-CLASS HISTORY

Tuesday, Apr 15

Readings:

- James Barrett, "Unity and Fragmentation: Class, Race, and Ethnicity on Chicago's South Side, 1900-1922," *Journal of Social History* (1984)

Viewing of *Matewan* and discussion**WORKING PEOPLE & WORLD WAR II (1939 to 1946)**

Tuesday, Apr 22

Readings:

- WBA Ch. 10, 497-505, 517-547.
- Robert Korstad and Nelson Lichtenstein, "Opportunities Lost and Found: Labor, Radicals, and the Early Civil Rights Movement," *Journal of American History* (December 1988)

Assignment: Final Version of Writing Assignment 2

WORK AND THE LABOR MOVEMENT IN POST-WAR AMERICA

Tuesday, Apr 29

Brief lecture on work and labor after 1946.

Review for Exam #2 (covering material primarily from the second half of the course through 1946)

FINAL EXAM

--TBA--

Grading Criteria and Components

Grading Criteria:

A	90-100%	900 to 1000 points
B+	85-90%	850 to 899 points
B	80-85%	800 to 849 points
C+	75-80%	750 to 799 points
C	70-75%	700 to 749 points
D	60-69%	600 to 699 points
F	59% and below	0 to 599 points

Grading Components:

Grades are based on the following components:

Eight Canvas Discussion Forums

16% of the grade (Each forum = 20 points)

Two Tests

35% of the grade (Each test = 175 points)

Two Class Papers

35% of the grade (First paper = 150 points, second paper = 200 points)

Class participation

14% of the grade (140 points [80 attendance, 60 active participation])

Please note: All late assignments will be downgraded one letter grade (e.g. A to B) and will not be accepted more than one week after due date.