

# **Black Workers in American Society**

Department of Labor Studies and Employment Relations  
Rutgers University  
100% Virtual Asynchronous

Spring 2025

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## **Professor**

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## **Course Description**

In this course, we will take a multimedia, mixed material, and intersectional approach to exploring systemic inequalities that have impacted Black workers' lives in the United States (US) historically and today. We will begin the semester learning about intersectionality as a theoretical framework for analyzing deeply systemic inequalities in the US economy and for imagining a future of labor justice. During the first part of the semester, we will examine the history of racial, class, and gender disparities in the US economy and how Black people have protested labor exploitation. In the second half of the semester, we will analyze how persistent disparities of race, class, and gender continue to impact the lives of Black workers today and how Black people are organizing against labor injustices. The syllabus is subject to slight changes during the semester.

## **Course Rationale**

Black people have historically and continue to organize workers in visual, media, and written forms. Every student must have access to the internet and streaming services and apps such as YouTube, Netflix, Hulu, Amazon Prime, and similar apps to read and view the required materials for this course. We will analyze and discuss book chapters, articles, policy reports, augmented reality maps, photographs, and documentaries. Students who take this course must also be prepared to deepen their writing, thinking, and reading of written and media source materials. Everyone is expected to complete the reading assignments every week. Everyone is also expected to approach the course with an open mind and a willingness to learn.

\*This is a discussion based and writing intensive course. Everyone is responsible for posting their written work to Canvas during most weeks of this course.

## **Office Hours**

Tuesdays-1pm-2:30pm  
Wednesdays- 1pm-2:30pm

**\*Students may make appointments for other meeting times as well.**

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES FOR THE COURSE.

The student will be able to:

### **Core Curriculum: 21C and SCL**

- CCD-1: Analyze the degree to which forms of human differences and stratifications among social groups shape individual and group experiences of, and perspectives on, contemporary issues. Such differences and stratifications may include race, language, religion, ethnicity, country of origin, gender identity, sexual orientation, economic status, abilities or other social distinctions and their intersections.
- SCL-1: Understand different theories about human culture, social identity, economic entities, political systems, and other forms of social organization.
- SCL-2: Employ tools of social scientific reasoning to study particular questions or situations, using appropriate assumptions, methods, evidence, and arguments.

### **The Instructor's Goals and Outcomes**

- Demonstrate an understanding of the labor injustices that have impacted Black workers since slavery.
- Examine how intersecting racial, class, and gender inequalities have shaped the labor experiences of Black people historically.
- Trace the ways in which racial, class, and gender disparities shape Black workers' lives today
- Explore Black workers' organized resistance to labor exploitation historically and today

### **Course Materials**

There are no required books for this course. As previously stated, every student is expected to have access to streaming services and apps. Some of the required digital materials might require a purchase or temporary subscription. All required materials are listed on Canvas in the Modules section.

### **Course Requirements**

- a. Ice Breaker Assignment- 5%
- b. Syllabus & Intersectionality Quizzes- 10%
- c. Remix assignments-10%
- d. Weekly Facilitations- 25%
- e. Mid-Term Assignment -25%
- f. Final Assignment – 25%

## Required Assignments

### 1& 2- Class Discussions and Facilitations:

All students are expected to begin each week of class prepared to share their interpretation, analysis and synthesis of assigned readings and media materials. Each week, everyone is responsible for co-facilitating class discussion with your own discussion questions and analysis of the assigned texts.

Everyone was randomly divided into small groups named after labor leaders to create small spaces where you can engage in deeper discussions about the readings than you can in a large lecture size class. You are a member of one of these groups: Nannie Helen Burroughs, A. Philip Randolph, and Founders of Quakertown and Black Wall Street. Facilitation commentaries and questions are due by **Mondays at 11:59pm**. Responses are due by **Wednesdays at 11:59pm**. Reflections from facilitators are due by **Fridays at 11:59pm**.

Check the “Discussion Groups” file in Modules in Canvas to determine to which writing group you have been assigned.

**Carefully read the guidelines and examples for the weekly facilitation assignment in the Modules section on Canvas** before writing your first facilitation commentary, questions, responses, and reflections. The examples will provide you with the quality of work that is expected for each type of assignment and that adheres to the assignment rubrics.

The facilitation rubric will be used to grade each weekly discussion board assignment. You can view the rubrics for all course assignments in the rubrics and Modules sections in Canvas.

### 3- Remix Assignments

At times, we will convene online as an entire class to discuss materials related to Black workers. We will do this to provide opportunities for everyone to engage with people outside of your respective discussion group members and explore Black worker experiences in different ways.

### 4- Paper #1

Students will complete a mid-term assignment to demonstrate and apply their knowledge of the information covered during the first half of the course.

### 5- Paper #2

Students will complete a final assignment that builds upon the mid-term project to demonstrate and apply comprehensive knowledge of the information covered throughout the entire course.

## **Technical Assistance**

This course will be conducted asynchronously via Canvas (occurring at different times rather than at the same place and time). Canvas can be accessed through <https://canvas.rutgers.edu/>. You can mark this URL as a bookmark in your computer system. Canvas is a course delivery system that provides private space on the web server that is used for members of this course. No one has access to the “space” except for those who are registered for the class. The space that is set aside for our course includes places to post comments and questions, access course grades, send email messages to your colleagues and me, view links to outside resources, and submit assignments.

To access the Canvas system, you’ll need a Rutgers user ID and password. If you have any difficulty accessing Canvas or course materials, contact Rutgers Canvas Help.

Support Website: <https://canvas.rutgers.edu/canvas-help/>

Email: [help@oit.rutgers.edu](mailto:help@oit.rutgers.edu) Call: 833-648-4357

## **Access to Internet and Word Processing Software**

You will need regular internet access to participate in this course. Although you do not need extensive experience with computers or the Internet, you need to have a basic familiarity with web browsing, personal computers, and the internet. You will need to make sure that your internet service provider and web browser will work together with Canvas. If you wish to participate in Canvas courses from your place of employment, this may be difficult if there are firewalls at your workplace. You also will need to use Microsoft Word to prepare and submit your written assignments. I am not responsible for grading assignments that I cannot open.

## **Email**

Make sure that the email address listed for you in Canvas is the email address that you use and check regularly. You are responsible for checking the announcements board and your Canvas email regularly to stay in tune with the latest course developments. All emails sent to me must be sent through Canvas.

## **Rules of Engagement**

Internet-based courses have unique opportunities and challenges. Our interactions in Canvas will be text-based and will be asynchronous (occurring at different times rather than at the same place and time). Since our written contributions in Canvas will be posted electronically and accessible to all participants, each of us have the opportunity to contribute to this course and respond to each other’s contributions in more thoughtful and carefully considered ways than we might in face-to-face classroom sessions. We will also have the opportunity to refer back to what we have written in earlier weeks to build on our ideas throughout the semester.

However, we will not be able to make use of body language and other cues to help us interpret each other’s words in Canvas. Therefore, responses that we post must be carefully written, thoughtful, and respectful. We’ll need to pay attention to both what we say and how we say it. Your postings should be well-written with few or no typographical or grammatical errors.

Language and symbols commonly used in texting should not be used when posting in the Discussion Board forums. Before making any postings to the Discussion Board, you should read and follow the guidelines about “netiquette” (rules of online communication) found here: <https://rlc.rutgers.edu/node/443>. This site also includes helpful tips for success in online courses.

## Attendance Policy

Consistent and attentive participation online multiple times a week is vital to academic success and expected of everyone in the course. Grades are determined by academic performance and the level and quality of participation. If you cannot participate in class discussions for more than one week because of a personal emergency, it is your responsibility to inform me. Three or more weeks of non-participation will likely result in a failing grade.

An incomplete may be granted if you have already completed 80 percent of the course assignments. Incompletes are not issued in this course unless you are unable to finish the course due to dire and extreme circumstances. Finally, you must provide strong evidence as to why you cannot register for the course when it is offered again. See Rutgers policy regarding incomplete grades here:

[https://catalogs.rutgers.edu/generated/sph\\_current/pg34.html](https://catalogs.rutgers.edu/generated/sph_current/pg34.html)

## Referrals

If you experience emotional distress during the semester, do not hesitate to contact medical and counseling services: <http://health.rutgers.edu/medical-counseling-services/counseling/>

**Disability Services:** 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/getting-registered>.

**Academic Integrity Policy:** All members of the Rutgers University community are expected to behave in an ethical and moral fashion, respecting the human dignity of all members of the community and resisting behavior that may cause danger or harm to others through violence, theft, or bigotry. All members of the Rutgers University community are expected to adhere to the civil and criminal laws of the local community, state, and nation, and to regulations promulgated by the University.

All members of the Rutgers University community are expected to observe established standards of scholarship and academic freedom by respecting the intellectual property of others and by honoring the right of all students to pursue their education in an environment free from harassment and intimidation. Please see <https://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/> for details regarding the Academic Integrity Policy. Students are expected to refrain from cheating, fabricating information, plagiarizing, inappropriately denying others access to material, and facilitating others in academic dishonesty. Avoid plagiarism or other violations of academic integrity! Your written questions will be submitted to "Turnitin.com" to ensure that your answers are yours alone – not answers from another student, from the web, or another source. Be careful not to "copy" phrases or sentences excessively from the readings. The goal is to put the ideas into your own words. Plagiarism is the use of another person's words, ideas, or results without giving that person appropriate credit. To avoid plagiarism, every direct quotation must be identified by quotation marks or appropriate indentation and both direct quotation and paraphrasing must be cited properly according to the accepted format for the particular discipline or as required by the instructor in a course. Students agree that by taking this course all required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review via Turnitin in Canvas.

## Reading Schedule

### Week of January 20th— Exploring Course Site and Introducing Ourselves

- Review syllabus and online course content carefully
- Read texts for “Week of September 2nd”
- Complete Syllabus Quiz (**Deadline: Friday, January 24th by 11:59pm**)
- Complete Ice Breaker Activity (**Deadline: Friday, January 24th by 11:59pm**)

### Week of January 27th—Intersectionality: The Framework for Understanding Labor

- Crenshaw, Kimberlé. “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics.” University of Chicago Legal Forum: Vol. 1989: Issue 1, Article 8, 138-167.
- **View:** Kimberle Crenshaw, “The Urgency of Intersectionality” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sWP92i7JLIQ>
- **Complete Intersectionality Quiz by Friday, January 31st.**

#### *Histories of Intersectional Disparities in Labor and Quality of Life*

### Week of February 3rd—Black Workers, Organizing, and Strategists During Racial Segregation Era

- **Read:** Tera Hunter, *To ‘Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women’s Lives and Labors After the Civil War*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997. (**chapter 2**)
- **View:** Henry Louis Gates, Jr., “Reconstruction: America After the Civil War” PBS Documentary, 2019, (Part 1 of 2)
- After clicking on link below, click on red button “Watch Now.” Type Rutgers University Libraries into the box under “Log in via your academic institution.” Press enter. Lastly, log in using your Rutgers username and password to view the entire documentary.

[https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic\\_entity%7Cvideo\\_work%7C5067716](https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cvideo_work%7C5067716)

### Week of February 10th—Black Workers, Organizing, and Strategists During Racial Segregation Era

- **Read:** Sarah Haley, “‘Like I Was a Man’: Chain Gangs, Gender, and the Domestic Carceral Sphere in Jim Crow Georgia,” *Signs: Journal of Women and Culture in Society*. Vol. 39, No. 1 (Autumn 2013), pp. 53-77.
- **Read:** Mary Church Terrell, “Peonage in the United States: The Convict Lease System and the Chain Gangs,” *The Nineteenth Century And After: A Monthly Review*. London: New Street Square Publishing (August 1907): 306-322.

## Week of February 10<sup>th</sup> (continued)

- **View:** Mary Church Terrell: She was a Civil Rights Activist and Co-Founder of the NAACP, Public Broadcasting System Short Documentary, 2020.  
<https://www.pbs.org/video/she-was-civil-rights-activist-and-co-founder-naacp-q3ypkj/>
- **Listen to Episodes 1, 3, and 7: Sugar Land Podcast: National Public Radio**  
<https://www.sugarlandpodcast.com/>
- **View:** Sugar Land Map and Video  
<https://www.sugarlandpodcast.com/soiled>

## Week of February 17<sup>th</sup>— Black Workers, Organizing, and Strategists During Racial Segregation Era

- **Read:** Danielle Phillips-Cunningham and Veronica Popp, “Labor Organizer Nannie Helen Burroughs and her National Training School for Women and Girls,” *Journal of Women, Gender, and Families of Color*. 10, 1 (Spring 2022): 9-40.
- **Read:** Beth Tompkins Bates, “No More Servants in the House: Pullman Porters Strive For Full-Fledged Citizenship,” 17-39. In *Pullman Porters And The Rise of Politics in Black America, 1925-1945*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001.
- **Read pamphlet:** *The Pullman Porter* by the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, New York, 1927.
- **Listen:** “Pullman Porter Blues” by Clarence Williams  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-1adVIetKo>
- **Read:** “Pullman Porter Blues” Sheet Music (3 pages). Courtesy of The National A. Philip Randolph Pullman Porter Museum, Chicago, Illinois.  
<https://www.pullman-museum.org/theCompany/production/pullmanporterblues2.tif.jpg>  
<https://www.pullman-museum.org/theCompany/production/pullmanporterblues3.tif.jpg>  
<https://www.pullman-museum.org/theCompany/production/pullmanporterblues4.tif.jpg>

## Week of February 24th—REMIXING CLASS---

### Black Wall Streets

#### Entrepreneurship and Property Ownership as Black Labor Resistance

\*See assignment guidelines on Canvas under Module “Week of October 7th”

- **Read Parts 1 and 2:** Danielle Phillips-Cunningham, Alma Clark, and Betty Kimble. “Quakertown: a thriving community established after Juneteenth.” *The Washington Post*, June 18 & 19, 2022.

<https://wapo.st/4cPGxuv>

<https://wapo.st/3TcLE0K>

- **Listen to Podcast Episodes 10 and 11:** Alma Clark, Dianne Randolph, and Danielle Phillips-Cunningham, “Quakertown: A Juneteenth Labor and Migration Story,” *1/3 Of Your Life: A Podcast from Rutgers School of Labor and Management Relations*, 2024.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8MubIekbIQo>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MNONf4jwmM8>

## Week of March 3<sup>rd</sup>—REMIX Class (continued) “Exploring Greenwood (Black Wall Street)”

- **Read:** Hollie Teague, “Bullets and Ballots: Destruction, Resistance, and Reaction in 1920s Texas and Oklahoma,” *Great Plains Quarterly*. 39, 2 (Spring 2019): 159-177.
- **View:** “Black Wall Street: Tyler Lockett Revisits The History of Tulsa Race Massacre Through the Ashes,” 2022.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nli0Wz5g9gc>

- **View:** “Tulsa Race Massacre Survivors Testify,” *C-SPAN*, 2021.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i3L1e90L9cE>

- **Navigate Digital Map of Greenwood**

- <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/05/24/us/tulsa-race-massacre.html>



**Week of March 10th**—No class discussion; Submit Paper #1

### **Tracing Histories of Disparities into the Present**

**Week of March 24<sup>th</sup>**—**Black Workers, Inequalities, and Covid-19 Pandemic**

- **Read:** Tamara Lee & Maite Tapia, “Confronting Race and other Social Identity Erasures: The Case for Critical Industrial Relations Theory,” T. Lee, S. Davis-Faulkner, N. Williams, M. Tapia, eds. *A Racial Reckoning in Industrial Relations: Storytelling As Revolution from Within*. Labor and Employment Research Association Series, 2022.
- **Read:** Rutgers University’s Center for Women and Work, “Black Workers in New Jersey during the Pandemic: Occupational Crowding and Disparate Impacts on Health and Work,” August 2022.  
chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://smlr.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/Documents/Centers/CWW/Publications/Black%20Workers%20in%20NJ%20during%20the%20Pandemic.pdf

**Week of March 31st**— **Black Workers, Inequalities, and Covid-19 Pandemic**

- **Read:** Michelle Holder, “How Gender and Racial Discrimination Lead to a Double Wage Gap for African American Women,” Policy Report, Roosevelt Institute, May 2020.  
chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://rooseveltinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/RI\_DoubleGap\_Report\_202003.pdf
- **Read:** Negin Owilaei and Sofia Salazar, “Black Immigrant Domestic Workers Share Notes on the Storm,” National Domestic Workers Alliance, *Institute for Policy Studies*. June 2020.  
<https://inequality.org/great-divide/black-immigrant-domestic-workers/>
- **View:** Sheri Davis-Faulkner and Naomi Williams, “Black Womxn Demands: Black Women’s Equal Pay Day, A Live Discussion,” Advancing Black Strategists Initiative & Center for Innovation in Worker Organization (Rutgers University), 2020.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fmmZne65f0I&t=1s>

**Week of November 4<sup>th</sup>—REMIXING CLASS: Black Labor Futures**  
**(Final community gathering)**

- **Read:** Matthew Cunningham-Cook and Marc Bayard, “In Bessemer and the South, Black Workers Hold The Key,” *The American Prospect*. February 18, 2022.  
<https://prospect.org/labor/in-bessemer-and-the-south-black-workers-hold-the-key/>
- **Read:** A. Hsu and A. Selyukh. “He was fired by Amazon 2 years ago. Now he’s the force behind the company’s 1<sup>st</sup> union,” *National Public Radio*, April 2, 2022.  
<https://www.npr.org/2022/04/02/1090353185/amazon-union-chris-smalls-organizer-staten-island>
- **View:** “Chris Smalls on Unionizing Against Amazon, Protesting Unfair Working Conditions,” *The Breakfast Club*, 2022.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= ktmxT-rh2U>

**Week of November 11<sup>th</sup>— Black Labor Futures (Continued)**

- **Read Interactive Timeline:** History of Service Employees International Union  
<https://www.seiu.org/about/#history>
- **Read:** “Introducing SEIU’s New President, April Verrett!” *Service Employees International Union Blog*.  
<https://www.seiu.org/blog/2024/5/im-proud-to-introduce-seius-new-president-april-verrett>
- **View:** “SEIU President April Verrett Keynote Speech,” Service Employees International Union Convention in Philadelphia, 2024.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bLQoDYNE9dg>
- **Read:** “Stacey Davis Gates Won’t Back Down,” *Chicago Magazine*, April 19, 2022.  
<https://www.chicagomag.com/chicago-magazine/may-2022/stacy-davis-gates-wont-back-down/>
- **View:** “A Conversation with Stacy Davis Gates: Black History & Black Futures,” Center for Innovation in Worker Organization, Rutgers University.  
<https://youtu.be/AUJQA7r5qlg>

**Week of November 18<sup>th</sup>—**

- Work on Paper #2/Discuss Paper Ideas with Professor Phillips-Cunningham

**Week of November 25—No class due to holiday.**

**Week of December 2<sup>nd</sup>—Work on Paper #2**

**December 9<sup>th</sup>—Submit paper #2 due by 11:59pm**