

37:575:357 Social Movements, Social Change, and Work

Rutgers University

Spring 2025

SYLLABUS

Class Meetings: Wednesday 5:40-8:40 pm ET over Zoom. Sign in each week at the following link:

<https://rutgers.zoom.us/my/ebb57?pwd=RE9HQzlwT3ZoejNtSmJvbU85TTBiZz09>

Mode of Instruction: Synchronous online.

Office Hours: I'm always happy to do office hours if you have an extra question or want to talk about the course content. Send me an email with a couple times that would work for you and we'll set a time. The zoom link we'd use for the office hours is [here](#).

Instructor:

- Eric Blanc (eric.blanc@rutgers.edu)

Link to upload assignments

You upload your weekly comments/questions (as a text file) to this folder:

<https://www.dropbox.com/request/zbYaRDk4oCNVrWZxVhMg>

Course Overview:

This course introduces students to the theory and practice of social movements, especially those rooted in the workplace and among working people, in the United States and abroad. Analyzing the past and present of bottom-up struggle should provide important clues and hypotheses about the future of contentious mobilization — and the most effective strategies and tactics to transform the world.

In Unit One of the course we survey key analytical tools needed to understand social movements. Central questions raised in these writings, and throughout the course, include the following: What forms of power do ordinary people have to bring about social change? What is the role of disruption in achieving popular goals? What about organization? What is the role of advocacy, mobilizing, and organizing in winning social justice? What is the relationship between class and other forms of oppression, such as race and gender? How do different identities and relations of domination relate to each other and what does this mean for movement strategy? And how should social movements relate to the state: Are bottom-up movements and electoral politics contradictory or potentially complimentary?

Addressing these questions through case studies of key labor struggles, Unit Two looks at an array of social movements in the US and abroad— specifically, the civil rights movement, Black Power, the women’s movement, LGBT struggles, the anti-war movement, and the co-operative movement. Throughout these case studies, we will repeatedly return to theme of the intersection of labor and social movements — forms of struggle that often are assumed to be entirely separate and unrelated to the labor movement.

Unit Three focuses on labor as a social movement, starting with today’s labor struggles at companies like Amazon and Starbucks and then going back in to the 1877 Great Railway Strike and the breakthroughs of the 1930s, we will see how workers and organizers have sought to overcome the tremendous resources and might of corporations.

As students in this class examine some of the big questions related to social movements as well as key examples of mass mobilization, they will gain increased proficiency in important skills: reading for analytical insight, debating ideas, and communicating with others. From the theoretical to the practical, students should be able to use what they learn in this class for whatever their next steps might be, including making valuable contributions to social justice organizations and advocacy groups.

Learning Objectives: The student is able to...

Core Curriculum: 21C

- Analyze issues of social justice across local and global contexts. (Goal d)

School of Management and Labor Relations

- Demonstrate an understanding of relevant theories and apply them given the background context of a particular work situation. (Goal IV)

Department of Labor Studies and Employment Relations

- Analyze issues of social justice related to work across local and global contexts (Goal 8).

Additional course objectives from the instructor

Identify core concepts related to understanding social movements and learn about key moments of popular movements in the US and the world

- Apply those concepts to understanding contemporary social movements
- Synthesize information from multiple sources to generate new insights

How will you learn in this online course?

Most weeks you will:

- Read articles and watch films about the week’s subject matter
- Listen to a brief lecture by the professor
- Participate in a group discussion about the materials and their relevance for today

Notes on Grading and Extra Credit

- Note: Classroom participation is 50% of your grade! This class is largely a discussion-based class, which means you can't get a good grade in it unless you are willing to engage in our group discussion every week. *If you're looking for a class where you can get a good grade simply by submitting assignments, or if are someone unable or unwilling to speak in class, I would suggest dropping this class and finding another one.*
- To help ensure every student understands that 50% of the course is classroom participation and that they should drop the course if they are not prepared to engage in class, I am asking all students to sign this short google form acknowledging they understand the specific (high) levels of classroom participation required for this course. Please sign here ASAP:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeY6GV1oEVc3fIIBAvGhz7b8OP4xWeY6F43Pj2N-Q72hv4EdQ/viewform?usp=sharing>

- To do well in this class, you also *have* to do the assigned readings and watch the films. The two quizzes, as well as the multiple choice/true-false portion of the Final Exam, will test to see whether you've read and understood the assignments. There won't be any trick questions in these, and they will be open book, but you will have a hard time passing them if you don't keep up with the assigned materials!
- A 1-credit optional supplement to this class is available, in which you volunteer for a work/economic justice/labor related organization or campaign. You would sign up online for the 37:575:470 COMMUNITY ENGAGED ACTIVITY IN LABOR STUDIES course, for 1 credit. (Contact Anuja Rivera for details on how to sign up: anujab@smlr.rutgers.edu) You would be responsible for volunteering roughly ___ hours over the course of the semester, at the end of which you would write me a 1-2 page reflection on your experience and how it relates to the readings and ideas of the course.
- You can also volunteer for a work/economic justice/labor related organization or campaign, and write up a 1-2 page reflection on it, to get extra credit for our course.

- If you ever want more feedback on your assignments, your grade so far in the class, etc. do not hesitate to send me an email. I'm always happy to give more feedback if requested.

Grading Scheme:

Grading Component	Percent of Total Grade
Classroom discussion/Speaking weekly	50%
Weekly Assignments (Comments/Questions)	20%
Pop Quiz	5%
Final Presentation and Exam (week 15)	25%

Points have no “absolute meaning,” – in the end, the professor will use judgment in translating points into grades for the course.

AI Policy

The use of any form of artificial intelligence tools for this class is strictly prohibited. Using these tools will result in you receiving 0 points on the assignment/test, and could potentially lead to failing the course. Don't try it! I will be using the latest AI detection instruments to check for this.

Attendance Policy and Weekly Attendance Sign in Form

Weekly attendance is a mandatory part of this class. That said, every student gets one no-questions-asked absence, which will not impact their grade. Beyond that, all absences are considered unexcused unless accompanied by documentation. For instance, if you are sick, you need a doctor's note, or the absence is unexcused and will lower your grade. Similarly, if you have a family emergency, you will need to provide some documentation of this (e.g. have a family member email me from their personal email). I'm sorry to have to be so strict on this, but otherwise I find that some students try to abuse my trust, which makes it harder ultimately on the students who have valid excuses for absences.

Note that a trip associated with your job is not an emergency, nor is a problem with your personal computer. Students should check to make sure their computers and tech are working in the days before class, and get any issues resolved ahead of time. There are many ways to get online in hotels and in campus computing facilities. Technical difficulties are not an excused absence.

Similarly, I take attendance weekly by asking you to all fill out this attendance form at a specific time in the middle of class. Note that you should not fill out the attendance form at the beginning of class, but *only* at the designated time when I ask you (Google forms tracks what time you sign in). I've found that this is crucial for making sure everybody is engaging in the class, because there are often a few students who like to sign in to Zoom, stayed signed

in, but who are obviously not paying attention to the discussion. If you don't sign in when I ask you to, I will assume you are not paying to the class. (Similarly, if you have to briefly step off the call send me a message over the Zoom chat so I know you have a valid excuse for not signing in right on time.)

Sign in for attendance form:

<https://forms.gle/LY7XGLGrSXyYvhMNA>

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Disability:

Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all University's educational programs. 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 instructor 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>.

Course Organization:

The course is set up in three units.

- **Unit I: Understanding Social Movements** (weeks 1-3). This unit introduces students to the field of social movement studies and provides some key analytical tools, concepts, and questions that will help orient discussions and analysis of the rest of the course.
- **Unit II: Social Movements and Working People** (weeks 4-8). This unit examines case studies of social movements from the US and abroad, while exploring the relationship between social class, labor organizing, and social movements.
- **Unit III: Labor as a Social Movement** (weeks 9-14). This unit looks at key examples of labor mobilization to understand the dynamics and outcomes of workplace-related social movements.

Submitting Weekly Questions/Comments:

Every week before the beginning of the class (Wednesdays at 5:40 pm ET), you should submit your 1 question and your 1 comment about each assigned reading. Each question/comment should be 1-2 sentence long.

***If there are 2 readings, then you are expected to write a comment and question on each — that is, have 2 total comments and 2 total questions. If there are 3 or more readings, you only have to do comments/questions on 2 of them.

Your questions should be about the readings, reflecting something you didn't understand or would want more clarification on from myself or the group. Your comments should be substantive. For example, don't just say "I didn't agree with the author when they made the point that [insert point]" Instead, say something like "I didn't agree with the author when they made the point that [insert point] because [insert the reason you disagreed with this and perhaps 1 further sentence justifying your argument."

For example, "I agree with Frances Fox Piven's point that disruption is central to social change because we've seen recently how strikes have won important gains for workers. The recent strike of autoworkers across the Midwest is a good example of this."

You need to upload your comments/questions (as a text file) to this folder:

<https://www.dropbox.com/request/zbYaRDk4oCNVrWZxVhMg>

Make sure to upload your questions with the following format as the document's title:

"Last Name, Week ____"

For example "Blanc Week 1"

Assignments and the Final Exam/Presentation:

- The main assignment each week is to do the readings and to participate in class. We will watch films included in the syllabus during the beginning of class (so please don't watch them before). If you happen to miss a certain week of class, though, you still are expected to do the reading *and* watch the video.
- If there are 3 or more readings for the week, you only have to do comments/questions for 2 of the readings.
- In addition to doing the readings, each week every student is assigned to bring to class at least one comment on the readings and at least one question about the
- Links to movies and articles posted online are hyperlinked into the titles below; just click on those titles to access the material. Other readings will be provided on Canvas.
- I also am happy to suggest additional optional readings for any of the weeks; reach out to me any week and I'm happy to send you some additional readings on any of these topics.

Unit I: Understanding Social Movements

Week 1: Introduction (January 22)

Discussion of syllabus in class

Week 2: Understanding Social Movements: Power, Disruption, Strategy (January 29)

Readings: Jane McAlevey, *No Shortcuts* 2016, pg. 1-16 [reading on Canvas]

Frances Fox Piven, *Challenging Authority: How Ordinary People Change America* 2006, pg. 19-36 [reading on Canvas]

In-class movie: [When We Fight](#) 2022

Assignment: Read the assigned reading(s) by the date of the class meeting. Bring at least one comment and at least one question for each reading.

Week 3: Understanding Social Movements: Identity, Class, Intersectionality (February 5)

Readings: Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, “The Defeat of Identity Politics,” 2022 [file in Canvas readings]

Paul Heideman, [“Class Rules Everything Around Me,”](#) 2019

In-class movies: Olúfẹ̀mi O. Táíwò, [How the Powerful Took Over Identity Politics](#), Watch from beginning to minute 39

Assignment: Read the assigned reading(s) by the date of the class meeting. Bring at least one comment and at least one question for each reading.

Unit II: Social Movements and Working People

Week 4: The Civil Rights Movement and Black Workers (February 12)

Readings: Martin Luther King Jr, [“All Labor Has Dignity,”](#) 1968

Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, [“Martin Luther King’s Radical Anticapitalism,”](#) 2018

In-class movie: [At the River I Stand](#), 1993

Assignment: Read the assigned reading(s) by the date of the class meeting. Bring at least one comment and at least one question for each reading.

Week 5: Black Power and Black Labor (February 19)

Reading: [“To the Point of Production: An Interview with John Watson of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers,”](#) 1969

In-class movie: [Finally Got the News](#), 1970. Start at minute 10, watch to end.

Assignment:

Read the assigned reading(s) by the date of the class meeting. Bring at least one comment and at least one question for each reading.

Week 6: Gender and Labor Struggle in Bangladesh, Iceland, Argentina, Mexico, Chile, and the US (February 26)

Assignment: *** Email me a proposal on what social movement you’d like to focus on for your final presentation. A few sentences is fine, just give me the movement, time period, and a sentence or two on why this topic appeals to you. I will then reply to you over email with either a confirmation to move ahead with this topic or a suggestion for how to adjust your proposal (e.g. if you suggest a topic that there’s not any scholarly literature on, I’ll suggest you find another topic, since as noted above, you need at least two scholarly readings for your presentation.)

Read the assigned reading(s) by the date of the class meeting. Bring at least one comment and at least one question for 2 of the readings.

For this week, we’ll meet as normal for the first half of class, but instead of the normal discussion after we watch the movies, each of you should instead immediately (during the class period itself) send me a 3-4 minute video of your reactions to the movies. Feel free to answer the following (or other relevant) questions: What did you learn? What surprised you? Do you think these types of actions are still needed, or possible, today? Did you agree or disagree with any of the tactics used?

Reading: [“The Working-Class Origins and Legacy of International Women’s Day,”](#) 2014

[“9to5 Brought Women Into Labor and Working-Class Women Into the Women’s Movement,”](#) Karen Nussbaum

[“How We Won Abortion Rights \[in Chile, Argentina, and Mexico\],”](#) 2022

In-class movies: [The Day in 1975 Women Shut Down Iceland](#), 2023

[Argentina Abortion Victory](#), 2021

[When flight attendants fought the airline industry and won](#), 2023

Week 7: LGBTQ Struggles and Social Class in Britain and Beyond (March 5)

Reading: Jeff Goodwin and Gabriel Hetland, [“The Strange Disappearance of Capitalism from Social Movement Studies”](#), 2013

In-class movie:

Jon Stewart [on LGBTQ politics and corporations](#)

Lesbian and Gays Support the Miners

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-0anR1AMGrY>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IzL8gm88pvM>

Starbucks Pride

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w7r07UpenRY>

Assignment: Read the assigned reading(s) by the date of the class meeting. Bring at least one comment and at least one question for each reading.

Week 8: Vietnam, Anti-War Movements, and Working People (March 12)

Reading: Joel Geir, [“The Soldiers’ Revolt,”](#) 1999

In-class movie: [Sir, No Sir](#), 2004

Assignment:

Read the assigned reading(s) by the date of the class meeting. Bring at least one comment and at least one question for each reading.

UNIT THREE: Labor as a Social Movement

Week 9: Steps Towards Organizing a Union (March 26)

Reading: [“Unite and Win: The Workplace Organizer’s Handbook”](#) 2024

In-class movie: [Why Unions Are Good And Cool \(and how you can get one in your workplace\)](#), 2024

[How Volkswagen Workers in Tennessee Won a Union](#), 2024

Assignment: Read the assigned reading(s) by the date of the class meeting. Bring at least one comment and at least one question for each reading.

Week 10: New Unionization Efforts Today, from Amazon to Starbucks (April 2)

Readings: Angelika Maldonado, [“Here’s How We Beat Amazon,”](#) 2022

Sam Smith, Harper McNamara, Atulya Dora-Laskey, [“Unionizing Chipotle,”](#) 2022

Chris Brooks, [“How Amazon and Starbucks Workers Are Upending the Organizing Rules,”](#) 2022

In-class movies: [Secret Union Tactic Fuels Unprecedented Labor Wins](#) 2023

[Gen Z is driving the Starbucks unionization movement](#), 2022

[Inside Amazon Labor Union: How Workers Took On Amazon And WON](#), 2022

[“We Just Unionized Amazon”: How Two Best Friends Beat the Retail Giant’s Union-Busting Campaign](#) 2022

Assignment: Read the assigned reading(s) by the date of the class meeting. Bring at least one comment and at least one question for each reading.

Week 11: Red State Teachers’ Strikes (April 9)

Readings: Eric Blanc, *Red State Revolt*, pg. 1-8, 103-139 [reading included in files on Canvas]

Eric Blanc, [“Can Social Media Help With Real-World Organizing?”](#) 2022

In-class movies:

[“Teachers End Historic Strike in West Virginia with 5% Pay Raise for All State Workers”](#) 2018

[“A Crowdsourced Look at the 2018 West Virginia Teacher Strike: Part 1”](#) 2018

[“What Was Behind the Arizona Teachers Strike”](#)

[“Arizona Joins Red State Revolt,”](#) 2018

Assignment: Read the assigned reading(s) by the date of the class meeting. Bring at least one comment and at least one question for each reading.

Week 12: The General Strikes of 1877 (April 16)

Readings: Jeremy Brecher, [“The great upheaval of 1877,”](#) 1972

Devin Thomas O’Shea, [“Every July, We Should Celebrate the St Louis Commune,”](#) 2021

In-class movie: [1877: The Grand Army of Starvation,](#) 1985

Assignment: Read the assigned reading(s) by the date of the class meeting. Bring at least one comment and at least one question for each reading.

Week 13: Teamster Rebellion and the 1934 Strike Wave (April 23)

Readings: Caleb Brennan, [“Remembering the Minneapolis General Strike of 1934,”](#) 2022

Sharon Smith, *Subterranean Fire* 2006, pg. 140-157 [reading included in files on Canvas]

In-class movie: [Labor’s Turning Point](#) 1981

Assignment: Read the assigned reading(s) by the date of the class meeting by the date of the class meeting. Bring at least one comment and at least one question for each reading.

Week 14: Labor Struggle and the State: The New Deal Experience (April 30)

Readings: Eric Blanc, “Labor Struggle from Below and Above: Lessons from the 1930s,” 2022, [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#)

In-class movie: [The Great Sit-Down,](#) 1976

Assignment: Read the assigned reading(s) by the date of the class meeting. Bring at least one comment and at least one question for each reading.

Week 15: Final Exam (Due midnight Monday May 12)

The written portion of the exam will be a short, timed, multiple choice online exam, to be taken anytime in the 5 days I make it available during the final exam period.

In addition, you will all record yourself doing a 12-15 minute presentation on a labor/worker movement of your choice

Due date: Midnight, Monday May 12

Your final presentation should be 12-15 minutes long. It should consist of a video/slide show of you speaking about your topic, coinciding with slides demonstrating your points and citing relevant materials from the class. You can pick any labor or worker struggle or movement, past or present. **You cannot present on a topic you've already presented on in another course; I am expecting new research on this (and will check in with past faculty members if I suspect a topic might be a repeat.)**

The purpose of this presentation is to discuss your chosen topic in relation to the main topics and themes and readings of the course — e.g. in relation to topics such as organizing, mobilizing, interdependent power, disruption, the relation of class/race/gender, elite capture, class structure, the relationship between bottom-up activity and state politics, etc. If you just present on your movement without tying it to the course's main topics, you will get a bad grade.

— Things to include in the presentation:

- You need at least 10 slides total, but you can include as many total as you'd like.
- Your slide visuals should include at least 4 citations from our required course readings (including Author and page or time!) related to the major themes of the course that are relevant for your topic
- In addition, you need at least 4 citations in the slides related to your chosen readings on your movement (including Author and page or time). Note: all of these citations should be from your peer reviewed/scholarly readings, not the popular press pieces. If you do not include these citations you will get a bad grade!
- In addition to tying it to our course topics, your presentation can touch on any of the following topics: short overview of your movement, description of some pivotal moments, challenges faced by the movement, its victories, its tensions, its rise and fall, etc. You can touch on other topics too, I'm just including this list here to give you ideas for things to discuss.
- It's fine to have a few slides about the emergence and development of the movement, but most slides should concern your analysis of the movement, its challenges/tensions, and especially how its experience relates to our course topics. In other words, please don't do a presentation primarily focused on repeating basic facts about the movement, I'm looking for something more analytical.

No use of AI is allowed for this presentation. It's pretty easy for me to tell if you've done your presentation on the basis of AI tools! Don't try it, it could mean failing the class! And I'd much prefer you speaking informally about your topic than reading from a pre-

written script; my suggestion would be to take notes ahead of times with the main ideas, but not a word for word script. If you absolutely insist on reading a pre-written script for your presentation, make sure it's in your own words and is composed for an oral presentation (not a written paper, which has a more formal grammar structure).

- If you'd like, the last 3-4 minutes of the presentation can focus on the lessons or relevance of your movement for making social change today.

The best/easiest way to do record this is in Zoom. Meaning that you will "schedule" a zoom meeting using you Rutgers Zoom account. Do your presentation in that "Zoom" meeting where it is just yourselves doing the presenting. You have to make sure to "Record" that meeting. You will "screen-share" while recording the presentation. You then will upload the Zoom recording link. I do not recommend you the Power Point built-in audio. That gets a bit clunky, and the audio doesn't always work depending on what kind of computer/software one is using.

Here's the Rutgers Zoom webpage with the students for Zoom tutorials and other FAQs: <https://it.rutgers.edu/zoom/>