

**37:575:201:06: US Labor and Work Before the End of Reconstruction
Rutgers University, Spring 2026**

Instructor: Professor Francis Ryan
Email: fr156@smlr.rutgers.edu
Wednesday 10:20-1:20, Murray Hall 213

Course Description: This class will introduce the important developments and themes in the history of work in the Americas from the period of initial contact between European, African and Native American civilizations to the period after the U.S. Civil War. The approach will center on the historical shifts that influenced the decisions that shaped early American concepts of work, including slavery, indentured servitude, free labor and the rise and impact of industrialization and the early labor movement.

Please note that this course also meets the writing distribution requirement for the School of Arts and Sciences. In addition to developing your own writing skills through writing successive drafts, you will learn to provide constructive feedback to other students' writing. As part of the writing component, the class has two additional instructors who will facilitate writing instruction in the class, coordinate peer review sessions on designated days, and assess final writing projects. At the conclusion of the course, students should demonstrate an increase in their knowledge and skills in writing/revising academic essays. Specifically, student should be able to:

- enter into a dialogue with specialists in a particular field of study,
- read essays and extract and explain key points and terms,
- organize a paper from thesis, to topic sentence, to conclusion,
- interact with texts by using meaningful citations in their papers,
- use a range of sentence structures, and
- write meaningful, clear, and organized papers.
- thesis development
- logic and organization
- tone, vocabulary, and spelling

Learning Objectives: Core Curriculum: SCL, HST, WCr and WCd

Explain the development of some aspect of a society or culture over time. (HST-1)

Understand different theories about human culture, social identity, economic entities, political systems, and other forms of social organization. (SCL-1)

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. (WCr)

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. (WCd)

In the Labor Studies and Employment Relations Department:

- Demonstrate an understanding of the perspectives, theories and concepts in the field of labor and employment relations. (Goal 1).
- Apply those concepts, and substantive institutional knowledge, to understanding contemporary developments related to work. (Goal 2).
- Analyze the degree to which forms of human difference shape a person's experience of work. (Goal 6)

In the 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)
- Evaluate the context of workplace issues, public policies, and management decisions (Goal V).
- Demonstrate an understanding of how to apply knowledge necessary for effective work performance (Goal VI)

Evaluation Breakdown

Attendance and participation: 10%

Paper: 25%

Quizzes: 20%

Midterm: 20%

Final: 25%

Course Participation Guidelines

Class attendance and participation: Roll will be taken at the start of each class. You are expected to attend—repeated absences will result in a downgrade. In addition to attendance, you will have opportunities to participate in weekly discussions.

Exams: Our exams—one midterm and one final (really, a second midterm, as it is not cumulative)—will consist of short essays based upon what is covered in the class content.

Quizzes. There will be three quizzes consisting of multiple choice and short essay format.

Paper Assignments: As a writing intensive course there will be a series of assignments. All writing assignments should be emailed to your designated reader before class time the day they are due. Out of respect to those who meet this expectation, late papers will be downgraded.

Disability 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: <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/registration-form>.

This course is open to all students who meet the academic requirement for participation. Any student who has a need for accommodation based on the impact of disability should refer to the Rutgers Office of Disability Services and then contact the instructor privately to discuss the specific situation as soon as possible.

Please note that the syllabus may change during the semester as I deem necessary. Please watch for announcements via Canvas in case of Zoom classes in response to inclement weather in the first weeks of the semester.

Canvas: This course uses the web-based classroom management system Canvas. Assigned readings and other course materials will be located on this site.

Required Book. The following required book is currently out of print, but has been uploaded onto the class Canvas site. You do not need to purchase the book.

Rosenweig, et al. *Who Built America? Working People and the Nation's History Volume 1: To 1877*, 3rd edition, Bedford/St. Martin Press, 2008

The online readings compliment the material in the text. Some of the online readings are primary sources and will be noted as such on the syllabus. Other online readings are secondary sources—commentaries and historical analysis provided after the events have taken place.

Primary Sources and some of the secondary readings are from the following books:

Zinn and Arnove, *Voices of A People's History of the United States*. (2004)

Baron and Lichtenstein, *Major Problems in the History of American Workers*. (1991)

Weekly Class Summary

Week 1: January 21: Introduction to the Class.

Syllabus presented in class. No assigned readings.

Week 2: January 28: A Meeting of Three Worlds: Europe, Africa and American Colonization, 1492-1680.

Who Built America? 7-56.

Bartolome de las Casas, "*In Defense of the Indians*" (1550)

C.L.R James, "The Old United States."

Week 3: February 4: Servitude, Slavery, and the Growth of the Southern Colonies, 1620-1760.

Who Built America? 63-106

Traveler Peter Kalm on Unfree Labor in Pennsylvania (1753)

Week 4: February 11: Family Labor and Growth of the Northern Colonies, 1640-1760.

Quiz 1 in class

Who Built America? 111-155.

In class reading: "First Mate Edward Coxere Describes a Storm at Sea." (1659)

Week 5: February 18: Toward Revolution, 1750-1776.

Who Built America? 160-209.

"Samuel Drowne's Testimony on the Boston Massacre," March 16, 1770.

"New York Mechanics Declaration of Independence," May 29, 1776.

Week 6: February 25 MIDTERM WEEK

Week 7: March 4: A Revolution, Constitution, and the People, 1776-1815.

Who Built America? 210-257.

Francis Hopkinson, "Account of the Grand Federal Procession, Performed at Philadelphia on Friday July 4, 1788."

Peter Bestes and Other Slaves Petition for Freedom (April 20, 1773)

Week 8: March 11: The Consolidation of Slavery in the South.

Who Built America? 271-318.

Harriet A Jacobs, "Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself," (1861)

Introduction to the artisan labor system:

Indenture Agreement, Philadelphia, John Henry Coates. (May 29, 1750)

Quiz 2 in class

Week 9: March 18: Spring Break

Week 10: March 25: Northern Society and the Growth of Wage Labor, 1790-1837.

Who Built America? 324-375.

David Johnson remembers apprenticeship life in the artisan shoe shop. (1830)

Week 11: April 1: Immigration, Urban Life and Social Reform in the Free Labor North, 1838-1860.

Who Built America? 377-425.

A Reporters Account of Lynn Women's Mass Meeting During the Great Strike. (1860)

Week 12: April 8: The Spread of Slavery and the Crisis of Southern Society, 1836-1848.

Who Built America? 426-475.

Frederick Douglass Confronts Working Class Racism. (1836)

Paper Draft Due

Week 13: April 15: The Settlement of the West and the Conflict Over Slave Labor.

Who Built America? 483-527.

John Brown's Last Speech. (November 2, 1859)

Week 14: April 22: The Civil War: America's Second Revolution, 1861-1865.

Who Built America? 533-582.

A Mechanic, "Voting by Classes." (October 13, 1863)

Quiz 3 in class

Week 15: April 29: Reconstructing the Nation, 1865-1877.

Who Built America? 589-626.

Martin Delany's advice to former slaves (July 23, 1865)

A Northern Unionist Lectures Ex Slaves on the Work Ethic (1865)

Final Paper due in class

Final Exam as scheduled by Registrar

Paper Assignment

As the industrial revolution developed in the United States, traditional patterns of work were disrupted and replaced by more rigid, structured, factory-based workplaces. The older notion of the "Artisan Republic"—in which craftsmen could aspire to the status of a master within their given field—was threatened. American workers resisted this change. In what ways did Americans seek to maintain these older traditions of work, and how successful were they?

Write a 5 page paper that addresses the question posed above. In your response, be sure to base your claims on materials read in the assigned readings (you do not need to read additional sources for this assignment.)

The first draft is due to your designated reader on **April 8**. You will be given additional feedback from the TAs assigned to work with you in the following week. The final draft of the paper should be submitted via email attachment to your assigned reader no later than class time **April 29**.

It is important that you know who your assigned reader is: please consult the group listed provided on the Canvas sight. Paper drafts that are not sent in a timely fashion to the appropriate reader will be downgraded.

Final drafts are to be submitted electronically to your designated reader by class time the day they are due.