

Work and Labor History from 1940 to the Present in the U.S.
Rutgers University 37:575:203:01
Spring 2026
TUES 10:20 – 11:30 – LEC 137

Professor Naomi R Williams

Email: naomi.r.williams@rutgers.edu

Office hours: Wed. 11:30-12:30 and by appointment – LEC 152

Course Description: This course explores developments in work, labor organizations, and related social movements in the mid-20th century U.S. It details the relationship of labor movements to the changing economic, social, and public policy context, including increasing globalization as we move into the 21st century. We will learn about some of the people, ideas, and institutions that shaped the U.S. labor movement, while also exploring the historical transformations of the workplace and the economy in political, social, and cultural terms. The course consists of lectures, large and small group discussions, and interrogating primary and secondary sources using history methodologies.

This course meets the writing distribution requirement of the Core Curriculum. In addition to developing your own writing skills through writing successive drafts, you will learn to provide and receive constructive feedback. At the conclusion of the course, students should demonstrate an increase in their knowledge and skills in writing and revising academic essays. Specifically, students should be able to:

- Enter a dialogue with specialists in history and labor studies,
- 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,
- Write meaningful, clear, and organized papers, and
- Make an historical argument supported by evidence.

Pre-requisite for this course: College Writing or the equivalent (01:355:101, 103, or 104).

Core Curriculum learning objectives:

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

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

School of Management and Labor Relations objective:

Students will be able to:

I: Communicate effectively at a level and in modes appropriate to an entry-level professional.

Labor Studies and Employment Relations Department objective:

Students will be able to:

4: Make an argument using contemporary or historical evidence.

Required Readings: Textbook: [*Who Built America? Vol. 2: 1877 to the Present*](#)

Other primary and secondary sources will also be available on Canvas.

Course Format and Requirements: This is a lecture and discussion-based, in-person course. It includes short lectures, film viewings, writing workshops, weekly discussions, and opportunities to pursue ideas related to students' interests.

This course uses the Rutgers Canvas course management system, <https://tlt.rutgers.edu/canvas>.

Active participation is a key to success in this course. Each week, students should come to class having completed the weekly pre-class assignments. Lectures will help solidify main points from the course materials and prepare for critical analysis in group discussions and writing assignments. Success in the course requires active engagement during discussions. This is where we will learn from each other, test the authors' theories, and formulate and test our own. Students' success on written assignments will depend on their active engagement, including involvement in discussion.

Understand course and university requirements: Read the syllabus carefully and be sure you understand all the requirements.

Course evaluation:

Discussion/participation	200 (10*20)
In-class writing assignments	200 (10*20)
Paper 1 first draft	100
Peer review 1	50
Paper 1 revision	150
Paper 2 first draft	100
Peer review 2	50
Paper 2 revision	150
Total possible points	1000

Writing assignments: Students will have various in-class writing assignments, including one that is intended to help you write short answer essays on exams better. Students will write two 5-page essays related to course themes, provide feedback to other students about their paper drafts, and respond to suggestions for revision from other students and the professor. The schedule is below. All written assignments for this class should be typed, double-spaced with 12-point

Times New Roman font, and one-inch margins. They should be carefully edited and free of grammatical, spelling, or typographical errors. All essays need a purposeful title. Essays should directly answer the prompt question. When you can distill your answer down to one sentence, this is your thesis statement (argument). The body of your essay proves (or defends) your answer. This should be your analysis (defined as your thoughts/opinions plus reasoning/evidence), not a summary of readings or class discussion. No outside sources are to be used. All source material should come from class readings, discussion, and/or films. Use parenthetical citations (*WBA2*, [chapter #], [Subheading]). For example (*WBA2*, 2, Neighborhood Cultures). Email if your essay will be late and we can plan.

Writing Instruction and Paper Due Dates/Schedule

Paper 1	After the 1950s, the civil rights movement revitalized a reforming activism within U.S. society and economic and political supremacy gave birth to a new rights mentality. In what ways did the U.S. labor movement capitalize on the shifting U.S. political economy and what challenges did the labor movement face? To address these questions you must consider economic, political, and social issues in the global economy; internal barriers to labor solidarity; and external domestic resistance to the postwar liberal agenda.
Week 2	In class: How to analyze a historical question. The SMLR Librarian will discuss information sources and their use.
Week 3	In class: What is primary and secondary evidence. How to develop an outline for your essay. Start your outline.
Week 4	In class: How to summarize and paraphrase effectively without plagiarizing. What Grammarly is and is not good for. Why generative AI like ChatGPT is forbidden in this class.
Week 5	In class: Moving from descriptive to analytical writing. How to write a strong historical paragraph.
Week 6	First draft of Paper 1 is due at start of class. In class: How to give a peer review. How to benefit from a peer review.
Week 7	Peer Review 1 due. Scheduled writing consultations with professor in lieu of class this week.
Week 8	Final draft of Paper 1 is due.
Paper 2	The economic shocks of the 1970s led to a restructuring of U.S. domestic policies while global capitalism took an increasing role in the U.S. political economy. Technological advances and service industry growth helped create new modes of work and employment relations. While many ordinary Americans became less engaged in national politics, some groups continued to challenge individual rights over collective action. After 2001, we saw a rise in social movements: consider Black liberation, Indigenous rights, women's movement, climate activism, Occupy movement, immigrant rights, and queer activism. In what ways have 21st century social movements reshaped the U.S. labor movement?
Week 9	In class: Concise writing techniques and active verbs.

Week 10	In class: Apply concise writing techniques to a one-page question answer. Be ready to give and receive live feedback from others.
Week 11	In class: Review of thesis and outline; good peer review techniques; historical analysis and longer essay structure. Review historical evidence citations.
Week 12	First draft of paper 2 is due.
Week 13	Thanksgiving week
Week 14	Peer Reviews of paper 2 due. Scheduled writing consultations with professor in lieu of class this week.
Week 15	Final Draft of Paper 2 is due

Academic Integrity: Academic integrity requires that all academic work be the product of an identified individual or individuals. Joint efforts are legitimate only when the assistance of others is explicitly acknowledged and permitted by the assignment. Ethical conduct is the obligation of every member of the university community, and breaches of academic integrity constitute serious offenses. Students must assume responsibility for maintaining honesty in all work submitted for credit and in any other work designated by the instructor of this course. Students are also expected to report incidents of academic dishonesty to the instructor or dean of the instructional unit. For more information see the Rutgers University Academic Integrity Policy. ***You may use Grammarly but not generative AI tools like ChatGPT in this class since a major goal of the class is for you to improve your own writing skills.***

Lectures and materials utilized in this course, including but not limited to videocasts, podcasts, visual presentations, assessments, and assignments, are protected by United States copyright laws as well as Rutgers University policy. As the instructor of this course, I possess sole copyright ownership. You are permitted to take notes for personal use or to provide to a classmate also currently enrolled in this course. Under no other circumstances is distribution of recorded or written materials associated with this course permitted to any internet site or similar information-sharing platform without my express written consent. Doing so is a violation of the university's Academic Integrity Policy.

Similarly, these copyright protections extend to original papers you produce for this course. If I seek to share your work further, I will first obtain your written consent to do so. Finally, as the instructor for this course, I have the responsibility to protect students' right to privacy. Classroom recordings of students will therefore be treated as educational records under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), the U.S. federal law that governs access to educational information and records. Instructors and students must provide notification if any sessions are to be recorded, and such recordings cannot be circulated outside the course.

Disability Statement: Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all University 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 instructors and discuss

the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. To begin this process, complete the Registration form: <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 should refer to the Rutgers Office of Disability Services and then contact me privately to discuss the specific situation as soon as possible.

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 me immediately.

Statement on Academic Freedom: Freedom to teach and freedom to learn are inseparable facets of academic freedom. This class will introduce an array of sometimes-conflicting ideas and interpretations of U.S. history, and all who partake in the course should feel encouraged to express their views in an open, civic forum.

Communication/Email/Electronic Devices: Feel free to email me with questions, concerns, ideas, and/or issues that may arise during the semester. Remember to check the syllabus or Canvas resources for general questions before contacting me. I will reply to most emails within 24 hours. Students are responsible for looking for announcements or updates on Canvas.

Basic Needs Security: Any student who has difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or who lacks a safe and stable place to live and believes this may affect their performance in the course, is urged to contact the [Dean of Students](#) for support. Furthermore, please notify me if you are comfortable in doing so. I will help you find resources. Other family/close relation emergencies may occur. Mental health is a key component to a sustainable life. It is sometimes necessary to miss class for physical or mental health reasons. Let me know in advance or as soon as possible if you are missing assignments for any health or quality of life reasons. If you need assistance, please communicate early and often.

Inclusive space: I am firmly committed to diversity and equality in all areas of campus life, including specifically for members of the LGBTQ community. In this class, I will work to promote an anti-discriminatory environment where everyone feels safe and welcome and that affirms people of all gender expressions and gender identities. If your name is different than what is on the class roster, please let me know. Feel free to let me know your gender pronouns over email, in class, or in office hours—whatever you prefer. I am including links below to resources that can help you with this or other issues, but if you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me or to reach out to Rutgers Student Affairs.

- [Scarlet Hub Name Change Page](#)
- [Trans@RU \(New Brunswick Student Affairs page\)](#)

Class Schedule (Subject to change):

Week 1: 20 Jan – Introductions & What is History?

- Read: Syllabus (review Canvas website), *WBA2* “Coda: ‘To Continue the Work of our Foreparents’”
- Assignment: Welcome/check-in survey
- In-class: ice breaker activity, course environment rules of engagement, group discussion on what is history and why it matters for contemporary social engagement

Week 2: 27 Jan – A Nation Transformed: The United States in WWII

- Read *WBA2* [chapter 10](#)
- In-class: SMLR Librarian Julie Peter’s in-class presentation “Information Literacy;”
- Discussion questions:
 - What role did nationalism, fascism, and militarism play in the start of WWII?
 - How successful were labor organizing and strike efforts before, during, and after WWII?
 - In what ways did war reshape U.S. society?
 - Describe the civil rights initiatives of Black Americans during WWII.
- Writing lab: Historical analysis & useful words for writing essays

Week 3: 03 Feb – The Cold War Boom

- Read: *WBA2* [part III](#) & [chapter 11](#)
- In-class: Writing Workshop (review essay 1 prompt and develop possible evidence)
- Discussion questions:
 - Describe the global context of the Cold War.
 - How did political and social factors impact Cold War domestic politics (New Deal backlash/racial politics/anticommunism)?
 - In what ways did economic prosperity reshape social experiences (family life/work life)?
 - What were the internal and external opportunities and challenges for the U.S. labor movement?
- Writing lab: Outlining for essays

Week 4: 10 Feb – The Rights Conscious 1960s

- Read: *WBA2* [chapter 12](#)
- In-class: thesis and outline
- Discussion questions:
 - Describe the commonalities and differences among local struggles over civil rights across the nation?
 - In what ways did Great Society programs impact poverty in the U.S.?
 - How did unions and labor activists engage with civil rights and individual rights?

- Explain the tensions between the antiwar movement and U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War.
- How did the civil rights movement open the door for other groups to fight for greater rights (Latine, Women's, Gay liberation)?
- Writing lab: How to paraphrase effectively; why summarize rather than paraphrase; and how to avoid plagiarism

Week 5: 17 Feb – 1968 No in-person class this week

- Watch *At the River I Stand* on Canvas
- Discussion – how the Memphis sanitation workers' strike transformed the civil rights and labor movements
- Writing lab: the difference between description and analysis - PowerPoint

Week 6: 24 Feb – Paper 1 Prep
Due before class: First draft of Paper 1

- Read: No reading this week
- Assignment: Paper 1 first draft due; in-class review & initial discussion of drafts
- [Schedule a consultation appointment in Canvas for next week](#)
- Writing lab: How to write a strong historical paragraph

Week 7: 3 Mar – Writing Consultation Week – (Individual meetings with professor)
Due 2 Mar: Peer Review

- Assignment: Peer review due
- Mandatory writing consultation appointment (sign up earlier on Canvas)

Week 8: 10 Mar – Economic Adversity Transforms the Nation
Due: Final draft of Paper 1

- Read: *WBA2* [chapter 13](#)
- Assignment: Final draft of first paper due.
- Discussion questions:
 - How did the economic crises of the 1970s transform employment relations and U.S. political economy more broadly?
 - What factors contributed the rise of the New Right?
 - How did Reagan's administration reshape how ordinary people engaged with the national politics?
 - How did Reaganomics impact the U.S. labor movement?
 - What was the role of popular culture in U.S. political polarization?

Week 9: 17 Mar – Spring Break week

Week 10: 24 Mar – The American People in an Age of Global Capitalism

- Read: *WBA2* [part IV](#) & [chapter 14](#)
- Writing lab: Concise writing; what is historical evidence?
- Discussion questions:
 - How did the end of the Cold War impact the international political order?
 - Describe and explain the simultaneous U.S. productivity and profit with economic insecurity in the 1990s.
 - What was the new immigration and how did it impact the U.S. labor market?
 - How did the U.S. labor movement attempt to revitalize the movement through collaboration with other social movements?
 - How did continuing racial divisions impact U.S. politics and economic issues?

Week 11: 31 Mar – America’s World after 9/11

- Read: *WBA2* [chapter 15](#)
- In-class: write a one-page opinion of anti-immigrant sentiment and industrial relations in the U.S. during the late 20th century (peer reviewed assignment)
- Discussion questions:
 - What was the “war on terror” and how did it illustrate a refocus of U.S. foreign policy?
 - How did the technology crash transform the U.S. economic landscape?
 - What were the long-term consequences of Hurricane Katrina and how did the Bush administration’s failure to effectively respond lead to a political shift in the U.S.?

Week 12: 07 Apr – Hope, Change, and Fear, 2007-2016

- Read: *WBA2* [chapter 16](#)
- In class: peer review techniques; historical analysis and longer essay structure; historical citation techniques
- Assignment: thesis and outline
- Discussion questions:
 - In what ways did the Great Recession impact ordinary Americans?
 - How did immigration activists shift tactics during the Obama administration?
 - Explain right-wing resistance to healthcare reform. What was the role of the Tea Party?
 - How did global economic and political shifts impact the U.S.?
 - How did the rise of social media impact technology, labor, and social movements?
 - In what ways did Occupy, the Fight for \$15, and BlackLivesMatter reshape the U.S. labor movement?

Week 13: 14 Apr – The 2008 financial crisis and the Great Recession
Due before class: First draft of Paper 2

- Watch *The Big Short*
- Assignment: paper 2 first draft due
- Group discussion on the causes and consequences of the housing market crash

Week 14: 21Apr – Writing Consultation week
Due: Peer Review of Paper 2

- Scheduled writing consultations with professor in lieu of class this week.

Week 15: 28 Apr – Working People in the United States
Due: Final Draft Paper 2

- In-class: revisit “[To Continue the Work of Our Foreparents](#)” – what is the role of the U.S. labor movement in 21st century movements for social change?

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