

Black Workers in American Society

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

Spring 2026
37:575:303:90 and 37:575:303:91

Professor

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Course Description

In this course, we will take a multimedia and mixed material approach to exploring how Black workers built a national movement to challenge disparities in the economy and related sectors of society. In the words of Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois, slave rebellions were among America's first labor strikes that led to unprecedented organizing against laws and institutions that established racial, class, and gender hierarchies in the United States. We will develop an understanding of how early Black labor and political organizing led to the establishment of the Reconstruction Amendments (also known as the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments) to the U.S. constitution. We will analyze rollbacks on these critical amendments that were intended to extend citizenship rights to Black Americans and other social groups. Throughout the semester we will trace Black American workers' long movement to restore and expand labor and civil rights for themselves and other social groups including immigrants and women.

*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 be prepared to deepen their writing, thinking, and reading of written and media source materials. Everyone is 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.

Academic Freedom

Students may be exposed to views they find challenging, uncomfortable, or distressing. But, since Rutgers is a public institution, First Amendment speech protections apply. Legally, feelings of discomfort are not sufficient to restrict speech. Pedagogically, exposing people to different ideas—even challenging their most deeply held beliefs—is a feature, not a flaw, of academic life. Free inquiry is essential to a robust learning environment. Students and professors are at our best—and best able to contribute to society—when we are exposed to a wide range of challenging ideas.

Office Hours

Tuesdays-1pm-2:30pm

Wednesdays- 1pm-2:30pm

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

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students 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.

Student Goals and Outcomes

- Demonstrate an understanding of how institutions and ideologies have impacted Black workers' lives.
- Analyze the connections between systemic racial, class, and gender disparities and differential occupational outcomes for Black people.
- Explain the political, social, and economic contexts that influenced Black people's working and living conditions.
- Describe the strategies Black workers developed to establish a movement to improve the quality of work and overall life for their communities and others.

Course Materials

There are no required books for this course. However, students must have access to streaming platforms such as YouTube. Some of the required digital materials might require a low-cost purchase or temporary subscription. Links to all required materials are listed on Canvas in the Modules section.

Course Requirements

- a. Ice Breaker Assignment- 10%
- b. Quiz(zes)- 10%
- c. Remix assignments-20%
- d. Weekly Facilitations- 25%
- e. Short Papers- 35%

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 Stacey Davis Gates. Facilitation commentaries and questions are due by **Mondays at 11:59pm**. Responses to your group members' questions are due by **Wednesdays at 11:59pm**. Reflections are due by **Fridays at 11:59pm**.

Check the "Discussion Groups" file in Modules in Canvas to determine to which discussion 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 outside of your small discussion groups to discuss the readings and media materials as an entire class. The “Remix Assignments” are intended to expand learning opportunities by giving everyone opportunities to engage with more perspectives about the course materials.

4- Short Papers

Students will write short papers for this course to demonstrate their knowledge of the information covered during the course. Guidelines for each paper assignment will be posted to Canvas in advance of the deadline. It is recommended that you reach out to the professor if you have questions and especially if you would like to discuss your paper ideas with her. 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 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. It is recommended that you send all emails through the Canvas tool.

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

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>.

AI and Academic Integrity Policy:

Developing strong competencies in the skills associated with this course, from student-based brainstorming to papers to discussion board posts, will prepare you for success in your degree pathway and, ultimately, career. Therefore, the use of generative AI tools to complete any aspect of assignments for this course are not permitted and will be treated as plagiarism. This course assumes that work submitted by students – all papers, drafts and final works, and discussion board posts– will be generated by the students themselves, working individually or in groups as directed by class assignment instructions. This policy indicates the following constitute violations of academic honesty: a student has another person/entity do the work of any substantive portion of a graded assignment for them, which includes purchasing work from a company, hiring a person or company to complete an assignment or exam, and/or using generative AI tools (such as ChatGPT).

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 September 2nd—

- **Read** syllabus and online course content carefully.
- **Read** texts for “Week of September 2nd.”
- **Complete:** Syllabus Quiz (**Deadline: Friday, September 5th by 11:59pm**)

Week of September 8th—

Cowboy Carter: **Centering Black People’s Labor in America**

- **View:** Image of Beyonce’s tribute to Grace Wisher
- **Read:** “**Grace Wisher,**” National Park Service, Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine, Maryland.
<https://www.nps.gov/fomc/learn/historyculture/grace-wisher.htm>
- **View:** Opening to Beyonce’s Cowboy Carter Concert (National Anthem/Freedom)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NshBoIDmbQY>
- **Listen:** “American Requiem” by Beyonce, Ink, Cam, Jon Batiste, No ID, Dan Walsh, and other writers.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vp3BSjJdyow&list=RDvp3BSjJdyow&start_radio=1
- **Complete:** Ice Breaker Assignment (**Deadline: Wednesday, September 10th**)

Reconstruction Amendments: Outcomes of Black Labor and Political Organizing

Week of September 15th—

- **Read:** Henry Louis Gates, Jr. “Did African-American Slaves Rebel?” *The African-Americans: Many Rivers to Cross*, Public Broadcasting System.
<https://www.pbs.org/wnet/african-americans-many-rivers-to-cross/history/did-african-american-slaves-rebel/>
- **View:** Henry Louis Gates, Jr., “Reconstruction: America After the Civil War” Public Broadcasting System Documentary, 2019, (*Watch: Part 1*)
- After clicking on the link below, click on the 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
- **View:** “The Lasting Impact of Slavery in New Jersey,” 2023.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9PaQtE_TcB8
- **Respond:** Questions on the Canvas discussion board. See Canvas discussion board for guidelines.

Week of September 22nd—Rollbacks on Reconstruction Amendments

- **View:** “Amend: The Fight for America (Episode),” Netflix, 2021.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pi8ep8ZyGIE>
- **Read:** 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution: Civil Rights (1868), National Archives.
<https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/14th-amendment>
- **Read:** The White House, “Executive Order 14160”, 2025. See pdf on Canvas.
- **Read:** Luis Ferre-Sadurni, Wesley Parnell, Mark Bonamo, “Pair of Immigration Raids, Disrupts a New Jersey Shipping Hub,” *The New York Times*, August 22, 2025.
https://www.nytimes.com/2025/08/22/nyregion/immigration-raids-edison-new-jersey.html?unlocked_article_code=1.hU8.B6B_.BDhcEWEppqOt&smid=url-share
- **Read:** South Asian American Policy and Research Institute, “Policy Shifts and Hate Crimes in 2025: Key Updates Affecting South Asian Communities,” June 2025. See pdf on Canvas.
- **Respond:** Questions on discussion board. See Canvas discussion board for guidelines.

**Organizing Against Reconstruction Rollbacks:
Black Workers Build Labor, Civil, and Women’s Rights Movement for All**

Week of September 29th—

- **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**)
- **Listen:** Bessie Smith, Washwoman’s Blues, 1928.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GTSDWOI4TJc&list=RDGTSdWOI4TJc&start_radio=1
- “The Woman’s Club Movement,” Public Broadcasting System, 2023.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ABm2KwKnNHU>
- **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.
- **Complete:** Facilitation Assignment (see guidelines and examples on Canvas)

Week of October 6th

- **View:** Convict-Leasing System, Public Broadcasting System, 2022.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fATymSYfSWA>
- **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.
- **Read Map:** Sugar Land, Texas, <https://www.sugarlandpodcast.com/soiled>.
- **Complete:** Facilitation Assignment (see guidelines on Canvas as a reminder)

Week of October 13th—

- **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.
- **View:** “Pullman and the Railroad Rebellion—Chicago Stories,” Public Broadcasting System.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i-kxAUwLktM>
- **Read:** “March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom,” National Park Service.
<https://www.nps.gov/articles/march-on-washington.htm>
- **View:** “The March on Washington,” Smithsonian Education, 2014.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qfo7rN7Alu4>
- **View:** Smithsonian’s National Museum of African American and History of Culture, “1963 March on Washington History by NMAAHC.”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZA9TJCV-tks>
- **Complete:** Facilitation Assignment (see guidelines on Canvas as a reminder)

Week of October 20th—Remix! Large Group Discussion

- **View:** Signing of Civil Rights Act of 1964, President Lyndon Baines Johnson and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., 1964.
- **Read:** Civil Rights Act (1964), National Archives, <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/civil-rights-act>
- **Read:** Voting Rights Act (1965), National Archives, <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/voting-rights-act>
- **Read:** *Shelby County v. Holder*, Brennan Center for Justice.
<https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/court-cases/shelby-county-v-holder>.
- **Read:** Executive Order 14173 (April 2025).

Short Paper #2: Due by 11:59pm on October 27th

Movement for Labor, Civil, and Voting Rights Continues

Week of November 3rd—

- **Read:** Premilla Nadasen, “Unsung Black Heroines Launched a Modern Domestic Workers Movement—powered by their own stories,” Adapted excerpt from *Household Workers Unite: The Untold Story of African-American Women Who Built a Movement*, Beacon Press, 2016.
<https://theworld.org/stories/2016/03/18/unsung-black-heroines-launched-modern-domestic-workers-movement-powered-their-own>
- **Read:** Domestic Workers’ Bill of Rights, New Jersey Department of Labor (2024).
https://www.nj.gov/labor/lwdhome/press/2024/20240702_domesticworkers.shtml
- **Read:** Danielle Phillips-Cunningham, “How Black Women’s Labor Organizing Strategies Can Revitalize the Labor Movement,” *Power At Work*, June 15, 2025.
<https://poweratwork.us/nannie-helen-burroughs-black-womens-organizing-strategies>
- **Read:** Economic Policy Institute, “Department of Labor halts enforcement of minimum wage, overtime rights for home care workers,” July 2025.
<https://www.epi.org/policywatch/departement-of-labor-halts-enforcement-of-minimum-wage-overtime-rights-for-home-care-workers/>
- **Complete:** Facilitation Assignment (see guidelines on Canvas as a reminder)

November 10th—

- **Read:** A. Hsu and A. Selyukh. “He was fired by Amazon 2 years ago. Now he’s the force behind the company’s 1st 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’ US Senate Testimony, 2022, CSPAN.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WbIKMpx8c8g>
- **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/>

(Texts for November 10th continued on next page)

- **View:** Chicago Teachers’ Union, “The Third Reconstruction: Stacy Davis Gates’ Powerful City Club Speech,” June 2025.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MgrCBxESLL0>
- **Complete:** Facilitation Assignment (see guidelines on Canvas as a reminder)

November 17th—

Cultural Workers/Artists

REMIX Assignment—Concluding Reflections

- Beyonce (featuring Kendrick Lamar), “Freedom,” Black Entertainment Television Awards, 2016.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f0m8HWTUvm4&list=RDF0m8HWTUvm4&start_radio=1
- Kendrick Lamar, National Football League Superbowl Halftime Show, 2025.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KDorKy-13ak&list=RDKDorKy-13ak&start_radio=1

November 24th—No Class; Thanksgiving Break.

December 5th—Paper #3 due by 11:59pm on Canvas.