

**History 929: Labor and Working Class History in the United States  
Fall 2011**

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**Office Hours:** T 12:00-2:00 (or by appointment)

**Time:** Thursday, 9-11am

**Location:** 5255 Humanities

This course provides an introduction to the field of labor and working-class history, asking how it developed over the past fifty years and where it might be headed in the future. We will start with the birth of the “New Labor History” of the 1960s and 1970s, and ask how it both differed from and re-imagined earlier examples of labor history. We will then move to efforts to integrate labor history with the parallel fields of African American and women’s history, examining how that led both to the perception that the field had lost its focus and also a burst of dynamic study and analysis of the intersections among class, race and gender. Taking that analysis as a starting point, we will then move through a brief chronological survey of U.S. working-class history from the Revolution to the Present. While it will be far from comprehensive, the survey will sample some of the more recent and innovative examples from the field.

**Course requirements**

1. *Seminars* (25%): Each student is expected to complete all core readings before weekly seminar meetings, attend all meetings and participate actively and respectfully in class discussions. If you cannot attend a meeting please notify me well in advance so we can develop an alternative assignment.

2. *Seminar Leadership* (10%): Each student must choose two class meetings in which she or he will lead the discussion of the core readings. Prepare for this task by completing both the core readings and the additional readings for that week. If these are books, please also read a few reviews of them. Prepare a 10-15 minute introduction to the readings and a few questions to kick off the discussion. When more than one student is leading discussion, please meet in advance to divide tasks and coordinate your presentation. Please be prepared to sign up for discussion leadership on September 8.

3. *Short Paper* (25%): Each student will write one 5-7 page paper addressing a historiographical question raised by the core and additional readings for one class meeting. You may choose any topic, but it should draw all of the readings into a coherent and interesting argument. The short paper is due the week following the class meeting where the readings are discussed. It may help to write this paper during a week when you are introducing the readings.

4. *Final Paper* (40%): Each student will write a 15-20 page historiographical essay that addresses a specific question or theme raised by the course material. Similar to literature reviews in other fields, such essays summarize the existing literature on a particular topic, explain the major issues of debate among scholars addressing that topic, and point to one or two questions raised by the scholarship that warrant future research. You should choose a topic that furthers

your own research or expands your knowledge in ways that will be useful for teaching. You might also elaborate on the topic addressed in your short paper. Please make an appointment to discuss your topic with me before October 6. A complete bibliography is due on March 8. The completed paper is due in class on May 3.

**Note on writing:** All written assignments for this class should be typed, double-spaced with standard one-inch margins. They should be carefully edited and free of grammatical, spelling or typographical errors. Please use the standard humanities style of documentation as described in Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* (7<sup>th</sup> Edition) or *The Chicago Manual of Style* (15<sup>th</sup> Edition). I recommend purchasing one of these books, as they will be useful throughout your scholarly career.

**Core Readings:** All articles and book chapters are posted at Learn@UW <<https://learnuw.wisc.edu/>>. The following books can be purchased at Room of One's Own Books, 307 W. Johnson St. (257-7888).

Seth Rockman, *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore* (John Hopkins University Press, 2009)

Richard White, *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America* (Norton, 2011)

Julie Greene, *The Canal Builders: Making America's Empire at the Panama Canal* (Penguin, 2009)

Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton University Press, 2004)

Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New Press, 2010)

### **Seminar Schedule:**

September 8                    Introduction

September 15                "Old" Labor History

### **Core Readings:**

Selig Perlman, *A History of Trade Unionism in the United States* (MacMillan, 1922), 265-308

Caroline F. Ware, "New England's Cotton Mills: How the Records for Their Story Were Discovered," *Bulletin of the Business Historical Society*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (Dec., 1926), pp. 4-7

Leon Fink, "'Intellectuals' versus 'Workers': Academic Requirements and the Creation of Labor History," *American Historical Review* 96 (Apr., 1991), pp. 395-421

Ellen Fitzpatrick, "Caroline F. Ware and the Cultural Approach to History," *American Quarterly*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (Jun., 1991), pp. 173-198

Robin D. G. Kelley, "But a Local Phase of a World Problem": Black History's Global Vision, 1883-1950," *Journal of American History* Vol. 86 (Dec., 1999), pp. 1045-1077

**Additional Reading:**

W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (Atheneum, 1935), Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4

September 22            The "New" Labor History

**Core Readings:**

E.P. Thompson, "Preface," *The Making of the English Working Class* (Random House, 1963), 9-14

David Montgomery, "The Working Classes of the Pre-Industrial American City, 1780-1830," *Labor History* 9, no. 1 (Winter, 1968): 3.

Herbert Gutman, "The Workers' Search for Power: Labor in the Gilded Age," and "The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom," in *Power & Culture: Essays on the American Working Class*, ed. Ira Berlin (New York, 1987), 70-92, 357-379.

Ira Berlin, "Herbert G. Gutman and the American Working Class," in *Power & Culture: Essays on the American Working Class*, ed. Ira Berlin (New York, 1987), 1-69.

Brody, David. "The Old Labor History and the New: In Search of an American Working Class," *Labor History* 20 (Winter 1979), 11-26

**Additional Reading:**

Barbara Weinstein, "The New Latin American Labor History: What We Gain," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, No. 36 (Fall, 1989), pp. 25-30

September 29            Race, Gender and the "Crisis" of Labor History

**Core Readings:**

Sean Wilentz, "Against Exceptionalism: Class Consciousness and the American Labor Movement, 1790-1920," *International Labor and Working Class History* (Fall, 1984), 1-24

Carole Shammas, "Black Women's Work and the Evolution of Plantation Society in Virginia," *Labor History*, 26 (January, 1985), 5-28

Joan W. Scott, "On Language, Gender, and Working-Class History," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, No. 31 (Spring, 1987), pp. 1-13

Herbert Hill, "Myth-Making as Labor History: Herbert Gutman and the United Mine Workers of America," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (Winter, 1988), pp. 132-200

Nell Irvin Painter, "The New Labor History and the Historical Moment," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (Spring, 1989), pp. 367-370

David Roediger, "'Labor in White Skin': Race and Working Class History," *Toward the Abolition of Whiteness* (Verso, 1994), 21-38

**Additional Reading:**

Ava Baron, ed., Work Engendered: Towards a New History of American Labor (Ithaca, 1991), Chapters 1, 4, 9, 10

October 6                      Rethinking the Origin Story

**Paper Topics Due**

**Core Readings:**

Seth Rockman, *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore* (John Hopkins University Press, 2009)

**Additional Reading:**

Jeanne Boydston, "The Woman Who Wasn't There: Women's Market Labor and the Transition to Capitalism in the United States," *Journal of the Early Republic* 16 (Summer, 1996), pp. 183-206

October 13                      Rethinking Free Labor

**Core Readings:**

Amy Dru Stanley, "Conjugal Bonds and Wage Labor: Rights of Contract in the Age of Emancipation," *Journal of American History*, 75 (Sept. 1988), 471-500.

Gunther Peck, "Reinventing Free Labor: Immigrant Padrones and Contract Laborers in North America, 1885-1925," *Journal of American History*, 83(3), 848-871.

Paige Raibmon, "The Practice of Everyday Colonialism: Indigenous Women at Work in the Hop Fields and Tourist Industry of Puget Sound," *Labor* 3 (Fall 2006)

Tera Hunter, "Domination and Resistance: The Politics of Wage Household Labor in New South Atlanta," *Labor History* 34 (1993), 205-220

Moon-Ho Jung, "Outlawing 'Coolies': Race, Nation, and Empire in the Age of Emancipation," *American Quarterly* 57 (September, 2005), 677-701

**Additional Reading:**

Heather Cox Richardson, *The Death of Reconstruction: Race, Labor, and Politics in the Post-Civil War North, 1865-1901* (Harvard University Press, 2001)

October 20                      Labor and Nature in the Gilded Age

**Core Readings:**

Richard White, *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America* (Norton, 2011)

**Additional Reading:**

Richard White, "Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?": Work and Nature," in William Cronin, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (Norton, 1996), 171-185

Gunther Peck, "The Nature of Labor: Fault Lines and Common Ground in Environmental and Labor History," *Environmental History*, 11 (2006), 212-238

October 27                      Labor and Empire

**Bibliography Due**

**Core Readings:**

Julie Greene, *The Canal Builders: Making America's Empire at the Panama Canal* (Penguin, 2009)

**Additional Reading:**

Leon Fink ed., *Workers across the Americas: The Transnational Turn in Labor History* (Oxford University Press, 2011)

November 3            Class and Culture

Leon Fink, "The New Labor History and the Powers of Historical Pessimism: Consensus, Hegemony, and the Case of the Knights of Labor," (with responses by Jackson Lears, John P. Diggins, George Lipsitz, Mari Jo Buhle, Paul Buhle) *Journal of American History* 75 (June, 1988), 115-161

Robin D. G. Kelley, "We Are Not What We Seem": Rethinking Black Working-Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South," *Journal of American History* 80 (Jun., 1993), 75-112

Nan Enstad, "Fashioning Political Identities: Cultural Studies and the Historical Construction of Political," *American Quarterly*, 50 (Dec., 1998), pp. 745-782

**Additional Reading:**

Lizabeth Cohen, Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939 (Cambridge, 1990)

November 10            Immigration and the Making of the Working Class

**Core Readings:**

Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton University Press, 2004)

**Additional Reading:**

Leon Fink, "Labor and Immigration History: First Principles," in Reed Ueda ed., *A Companion to American Immigration* (Blackwell, 2006), 394-408

November 17            Labor and the New Deal Order

**Core Readings:**

Nelson Lichtenstein, *Most Dangerous Man in Detroit: Walter Reuther and the Fate of American Labor* (Basic Books, 1995)

**Additional Reading:**

November 24    **Thanksgiving - No Class**

December 1            No Class – Work on your paper

December 8            Workers and Rights

**Core Readings:**

Dorothy Sue Cobble, "'A Spontaneous Loss of Enthusiasm': Workplace Feminism and the Transformation of Women's Service Jobs in the 1970s," *International Labor and Working-Class History* No. 56, Fall 1999, pp. 23-44

Dennis A. Deslippe, "'Do Whites Have Rights?': White Detroit Policemen and 'Reverse Discrimination' Protests in the 1970s," *Journal of American History* 91 (December 2004), 932-960

Kathleen M. Barry, "'Too Glamorous to Be Considered Workers': Flight Attendants and Pink-Collar Activism in Mid-Twentieth-Century America," *Labor* 3 (2006), 119-138

Joseph A. McCartin. "'A Wagner Act for Public Workers': Labor's Deferred Dream and the Rise of Conservatism, 1970-1976," *Journal of American History* 95.1 (2008): 123-148

William P. Jones, "The Unknown Origins of the March on Washington: Civil Rights Politics and the Black Working Class," *Labor* 7 (2010): 33-52

**Additional Reading:**

Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor* (Princeton University Press, 2002), Chapters 4 & 5

December 15            The End of the Working Class?

**Final Papers Due****Core Readings:**

Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New Press, 2010)

**Additional Reading:**

Andrew Battista, *The Revival of Labor Liberalism* (University of Illinois Press, 2008)