Course Description & Format

Guided by the transnational turn in labor and migration studies, this seminar will focus on the lived experiences of working people in the Americas. Our scholarly inquiry will specifically consider how laborers in and from various parts of the Western Hemisphere confronted U.S. imperialism and how they, in the words of some recent scholars, "made the U.S. empire work." Topics of study will include the interconnections between labor and migration; the construction of the Panama Canal; the expansion of the banana industry; ethnoracial tensions and collaborations among working people; and the role of U.S. imperialism in prompting migration to the United States, among others. The course will be of particular interest to students training in Central American, Caribbean, U.S. labor, and/or U.S. Latina/o/x histories.

Course Learning Outcomes

1. Understand working people’s responses to, and engagement with, the multiple forces of U.S. empire
2. Comprehend the role and range of U.S. imperialism in shaping the lives of working people in the Americas
3. Learn about the linkages between labor and migration, at both regional and transnational levels
4. Grapple with various approaches and methodologies for examining transnational labor, corporate power, and imperial undertakings
5. Augment skills in critical thinking, reading, and writing as applied to historical knowledge

Course Readings

Essays and book chapters will be available via:
[JSTOR], a journal database available through the GC library
[GC], e-books available through GC library
[NYPL], e-books available through New York Public Library: nypl.org (library account required)

8. E. Melillo, Strangers on Familiar Soil: Rediscovering the Chile-California Connection (2015)
Course Requirements and Evaluation

1. This course will be driven by discussion. Students are expected to attend every weekly session and be prepared to participate actively and meaningfully. Students must come to class with the ability to articulate the key argument(s) and themes, conceptual and methodological frameworks, body of evidence, and historiographical issues presented in the readings. A record of class absences and tardiness will negatively affect a student’s participation grade.

2. Two in-class oral presentations:

   A. Book presentation: Each class session will begin with an oral presentation (7–10 minutes) based on the book assigned for the week. During the presentation, the student will identify the book’s central aims and main argument(s), offer one or two concrete examples of how the author supports their argument(s), and identify two strengths and a limitation of the book.

   B. Research presentation: On the last session of the semester (14 May), each student will take 10–12 minutes and offer an overview of their independent research work, including their objectives, arguments, major findings, and connections to the themes of the course. If time permits, students will also take questions from their peers.

Make-up presentations will only be scheduled if a student provides documentation (e.g., a doctor’s note) to excuse an absence.

3. One short essay (2–3 pages) based on the monograph selected for the book presentation (see above). This essay should function as a critical review of the book at hand; it should not be a book report. It will be the written, fuller, and more formal counterpart to the book presentation. It should state the book’s aims and argument(s), assess its use of evidence, and weigh its strengths and limitations. It should also consider how the book expands or complicates our understanding of labor and U.S. empire, transnational history, the connection between labor and migration, or some other key theme of the course.

   This small assignment will offer the instructor an opportunity to assess students’ engagement with class readings and provide feedback on their writing. The essay must meet these requirements: 2–3 pages in length, typed, double-spaced, 12-point font, Times New Roman font, and 1-inch margins all around the page. Students will submit one (1) hard copy on the day of the book presentation.

4. One independent research essay (12–15 pages) based on a historical question/problem of a student’s choice, but informed by the themes of the class. It can take the form of A) a research paper based on secondary sources, B) a historiographical essay, or C) a research paper based on primary sources. Students should meet with the instructor by 01 May 2020 to discuss their plans.

Option A: Students will work on a research paper using secondary sources. The student will first identify a guiding question or problem and then use material from the secondary sources to tackle that question/problem. This essay should not be a book report. Rather, the task is to use material from the secondary sources to carry out an analytically rich discussion held together by a thesis.

   The essay will be based on three books. Students may select one book from class and couple it with two additional historical monographs OR work with three outside monographs.
**Option B**: Historiographical essays ask students to consult and assess what and how historians have written about a selected subject, topic, problem, debate, etc. The essays should review and weigh historians’ interpretations, arguments, sources, and methodology. They must also consider how the ideas and arguments of various historians compare to one another. In thinking about an essay’s thesis, students should consider the following: What should readers know and understand about the body of historical scholarship related to this topic or question?

The essay should be based on three books. Students may select one book from class and couple it with two additional historical monographs OR work with three outside monographs.

**Option C**: Students will work on a research paper using primary sources (e.g., newspaper articles, letters, government reports, legal cases, sociological studies, autobiographies/memoirs, pamphlets). The exercise will give students the opportunity to conduct their own historical analysis; students will use material from primary sources to construct and defend a thesis. The task is to persuade and convince the reader of an argument by drawing on examples, episodes, and selections from primary sources and placing the discussion in its historical context.

The essay should be based on at least one book-length primary source and a collection of smaller sources (e.g., newspaper articles, pamphlets). Students should also use at least monograph from class as a secondary source.

All independent essays must meet these requirements: 12–15 pages in length, typed, double-spaced, 12-point font, Times New Roman font, and 1-inch margins all around the page. Students will submit one (1) electronic copy via email by **Wednesday, 20 May 2020 at 7:00 p.m.**

6. **Late Work**: Students will have the opportunity to submit late assignments without penalty if they provide documentation to excuse the tardiness. Acceptable forms documentation include a doctor’s note, a court notice, etc. All late assignments without documentation to excuse the tardiness will be downgraded by one full letter grade (e.g., B+ to C+) for every business day (Monday thru Saturday) that the assignment is late.

7. Final grades will be determined as follows:

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presentations</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Short Essay</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Essay</td>
<td>50%</td>
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COURSE POLICIES

Email & Blackboard

Students must check their GC email on a regular basis. Students should also ensure their Blackboard account is linked to an email address that is current. Email will keep students updated on matters related to course readings, office hours, etc. Students will also use Blackboard to check their progress in the class.

Laptop Computers, Cell Phones, and Other Gadgets

Students may use laptop computers and tablets to access course readings and take notes only. Cell phones and other electronic gadgets are strictly prohibited. Please turn off these items before class begins. Audio and/or video recording of class meetings using any device is prohibited as well.

Students who ignore this policy will receive a first-time warning. Students who ignore this policy a second time will receive an automatic “D” for class participation during the term, and lose the privilege of using laptops/tablets for reading and note taking. Continued disregard of the policy will result in an “F” for participation during the term.

Respect, Safety, and Classroom Behavior

The classroom is a safe and professional space. We must treat each other with courtesy and respect. Personal attacks, use of derogatory language, unprofessional and/or aggressive behavior that detracts from a productive and safe learning environment will not be tolerated. Students should not engage in any activity or behavior that disrupts class: texting, passing notes, snoring, walking in and out of the classroom, etc. Students are allowed to eat during the class, but please chew slowly and softly.

Communication with Instructor

We are entering into a professional relationship. Students should interact and communicate with their instructor in a professional manner. Please do not use overly informal language or tone when communicating with your professor. Greetings such as “Yo,” “Man,” “Dude,” etc. are not acceptable.

Professor Contreras will typically respond to email messages within 24 hours on weekdays and within 48 hours on weekends. Please plan accordingly whenever questions/concerns present themselves. Messages must be written in standard English. Please do not use textspeak.

Discussing Your Performance

Professor Contreras is happy to discuss ways to improve grades and class performance. However, he is not in the business of haggling over grades. Grades in the course are products of careful deliberation and are non-negotiable. All queries about grading should be approached with a courteous manner that reflects a desire to improve the quality of one’s work. Rude or aggressive interactions will not be tolerated.
INSTITUTIONAL POLICIES

Academic Honesty and CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity

“The Graduate Center of the City University of New York is committed to the highest standards of academic honesty. Acts of academic dishonesty include—but are not limited to—plagiarism (in drafts, outlines, and examinations, as well as final papers), cheating, bribery, academic fraud, sabotage of research materials, the sale of academic papers, and the falsification of records. An individual who engages in these or related activities or who knowingly aids another who engages in them is acting in an academically dishonest manner and will be subject to disciplinary action in accordance with the bylaws and procedures of The Graduate Center and of the Board of Trustees of the City University of New York.”

For more information on GC standards and procedures, as well as the CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity, see: https://www.gc.cuny.edu/CUNY_GC/media/CUNY-Graduate-Center/PDF/Publications/Student_Handbook_web.pdf?ext=.pdf

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

It is Graduate Center and CUNY policy to provide appropriate accommodations to students with disabilities. Any student with a disability who may need accommodations in this class is advised to speak directly to the manager of Student Disability Services, located in Student Affairs, room 7301, or call 212-817-7400 as early in the semester as possible. All discussions will remain confidential.

For more information about Student Disability Services, visit: https://gc.cuny.edu/Prospective-Current-Students/Current-Students/Disability-Services

Policy on Sexual Misconduct

In compliance with CUNY’s Policy on Sexual Misconduct, “the Graduate Center seeks to create and maintain a safe environment in which all members of our campus community—students, faculty, and staff—can learn and work free from fear of sexual assault and other forms of violence. The City University of New York and The Graduate Center prohibit gender-based harassment of any kind, by students, faculty, and staff. Harassment is unwelcome conduct that may include sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or physical conduct of a sexual nature. Harassing conduct, also implicated by sexual assault, domestic and intimate partner violence, or stalking on any CUNY campus, creates a “hostile environment” which, when sufficiently severe or pervasive, may limit or interfere with a student’s ability to participate in educational activities, or an employee’s ability to perform his or her job.”

CUNY’s Policy on Sexual Misconduct and CUNY Students’ Bill of Rights can be found here: https://gc.cuny.edu/TitleIX
SCHEDULE

**Week 1 (30 January)**


**Week 2 (06 February)**

1. Matthew Frye Jacobson, “Where We Stand: U.S. Empire at the Street Level and in the Archive,” *American Quarterly* 65, no. 2 (June 2013): 265–90. [JSTOR]

**Week 3 (13 February)**


**Week 4 (20 February)**

Melillo, *Strangers on Familiar Soil*

**Week 5 (27 February)**

Colby, *Business of Empire*         Dessane
Week 6 (05 March)
Green, *Canal Builders* Michelle

Week 7 (12 March)
McGreevey, *Borderline Citizens* Cathy

Week 8 (19 March)


Week 9 (26 March)
Cowie, *Capital Moves* Mary Beth

Week 10 (02 April)
Chomsky, *Linked Labor Histories* Zack

Week 11 (09 April)
No Class

**Spring Break: 08 – 16 April 2020**

Week 12 (23 April)
Young, *Blood of the Earth*

Week 13 (30 April)
Lipman, *Guantánamo* Jack

Week 14 (07 May)
Fink, *Maya of Morganton* Jane

Week 15 (14 May)
Research Presentations