Hist. 75500 – History of U.S. Labor and Capitalism

This course will consider the history of work, workers, and labor movements in the context of the changing capitalist economy, from the colonial period to the early 21st century. It will not be a comprehensive survey of this very large subject but rather consider selected topics. While the bulk of the course will be devoted to labor and labor relations, some attention will be paid to capitalist development more generally, including trade, corporate organization, and globalization. Topics will include free labor, artisan culture and craft unionism, the constitutive role of labor law, labor radicalism, Fordism, the rise of industrial unionism, corruption and labor violence, gender and race in labor markets and labor movements, deindustrialization, capital mobility, precarity, and global supply chains. The course focuses primarily on the United States, but some sessions will consider the global economy in which it has been situated. Readings will be in secondary works, including both recent and classic studies. Students who are unfamiliar with the basic outline of U.S. labor history should read a survey history as soon as possible. Some possibilities are:


Philip Dray, *There Is Power in a Union: The Epic Story of Labor in America*

Daniel Nelson, *Shifting Fortunes: The Rise and Decline of American Labor, from the 1820s to the Present*

All assigned books are on reserve at the Graduate Center library. All the assigned articles are available through the Graduate Center library on-line full-text journals or, if marked by an asterisk (*), on the Blackboard site for the course.

The most important requirement for the course is to do all the reading on schedule, come to class, and participate in class discussion. In addition, there will be a number of written assignments:

1) Each week one or two students will prepare a short paper (3-5 pages) on the readings for that week to begin our discussion. The papers should identify the issues, themes, and questions you
think we should discuss, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the readings. **Do not summarize the reading.** You might want to look at reviews of the books we are reading or supplementary readings, but you do not have to. The paper should be distributed to the class by e-mail **no later than the Tuesday before we meet.** Also, submit a hard copy in class.

2) Write a book review of one of the books that we are reading for the course. Read the entire book, even if for the course we are reading only part of it. Write the review as if you were submitting it to *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas, Reviews in American History,* or the *Journal of American History.* If you are not familiar with these journals, pick an issue and look at the reviews. You do not have to maintain the fiction that you are reviewing a newly published book; if you like you can review the book in light of the subsequent literature. Your review should be 1000 to 1500 words long. It is due at the class at which we will discuss the book you are reviewing.

3) Write a historiographic paper, due at the last class. The paper should be on a topic that interests you and that is related to the issues addressed in the course. Please clear your topic with me before starting. Your paper should be ten to fifteen pages long.

There may be occasional additional short written or oral assignments.

**CLASS TOPICS AND READING ASSIGNMENTS**

**Aug 29: INTRODUCTORY SESSION**

**Sept. 5: NO CLASS – COLLEGE ON MONDAY SCHEDULE**

**Sept. 12: THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF CAPITALISM/ COMMODITIES AND THE BIRTH OF CAPITALISM**


Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History,* introduction and chapters 1-11
Sept. 19: THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF LABOR
ARTISANS AND THE TRANSITION TO FACTORY PRODUCTION

*Elizabeth Faue, “The United States of America,” in *Histories of Labour: National and International Perspectives*, edited by Joan Allen, Alan Campbell, and John McIlroy

LABORonline, “The University of Illinois Working Class in American History Series at 40”


Alan Dawley, *Class and Community: The Industrial Revolution in Lynn*, chapters 1-3


recommended:

Sept. 26: THE TRANSITION FROM SLAVE LABOR TO WAGE LABOR

James Oakes, “Capitalism and Slavery and the Civil War,” International Labor and Working-Class History, 89 (Spring 2016)


Eric Foner, Nothing But Freedom: Emancipation and its Legacy


recommended:


Oct. 3: ORGANIZED LABOR AND THE REORGANIZATION OF PRODUCTION

David Montgomery, The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865–1925


recommended:

Selig Perlman, A Theory of the Labor Movement, pages 3-10, 154-303

Oct 10: VIOLENCE, HEGEMONY, AND THE LAW

Thomas G. Andrews, Killing for Coal: America’s Deadliest Labor War

William Forbath, Law and the Shaping of the American Labor Movement, introduction and chapters 2-3, 5
Oct. 17: CORPORATE CAPITALISM

Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business*, introduction and chapters 3-13


Oct. 24: LABOR RADICALISM

Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World*, chapters 2-4, 6-12 (if you want, feel free to read the abridged edition edited by Joseph McCartin)


Oct. 31: JUNGLE CAPITALISM

Andrew Wender Cohen, *The Racketeer's Progress: Chicago and the Struggle for the Modern American Economy, 1900-1940*


Nov. 7: INDUSTRIAL UNIONISM AND THE NEW DEAL

Steve Fraser, “The ‘Labor Question’,” in Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle, eds., *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980*


Dana Frank, *Women Strikers Occupy Chain Stores, Win Big: The 1937 Woolworth’s Sit-Down*, pages 11-54 (also available in Howard Zinn, Dana Frank, and Robin D. G. Kelley, *Three Strikes: Miners, Musicians, Salesgirls, and the fighting spirit of labor’s last century*)

Jack Metzgar, *Striking Steel: Solidarity Remembered*, pages 1-117

recommended:

Antonio Gramsci, "Americanism and Fordism," in *Selections From the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, edited by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith
Nov. 14: GENDER, RACE, AND POSTWAR LABOR

Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America*, pages 1-4, 6-7

Joshua B. Freeman, "Hardhats: Construction Workers, Manliness, and the 1970 Pro-War Demonstrations," *Journal of Social History* 26 (Summer 1993), 725-44

Nancy MacLean, *Freedom is Not Enough: The Opening of the American Workplace*, prologue, chapters 1-3, epilogue

Nov. 21: SERVICE WORKERS AND PUBLIC EMPLOYEES: THE CASE OF NEW YORK CITY

LaShawn Harris, “Sex Work and the Underground Economy,” in Joshua B. Freeman, ed., *City of Workers, City of Struggle: How Labor Movements Changed New York*

Premilla Nadasen, “Domestic Workers,” in Joshua B. Freeman, ed., *City of Workers, City of Struggle: How Labor Movements Changed New York*

Leon Fink and Brian Greenberg, *Upheaval in the Quiet Zone: 1199SEIU and the Politics of Health Care Unionism*, 2nd edition


Nov. 28: NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING

Dec 5: DEINDUSTRIALIZATION AND DEUNIONIZATION

Jack Metzgar, *Striking Steel: Solidarity Remembered*, pages 118-201


Jefferson Cowie, *Capital Moves: RCA’s 70-Year Quest for Cheap Labor*, introduction and chapters 1-5, 7
Dec. 12: GLOBAL CAPITALISM AND PRECARITY

Nelson Lichtenstein, *The Retail Revolution: How Wal-Mart Created a Brave New World of Business*