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 finance, corporate organization, and globalization. Topics will include 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, and global supply chains. Readings will be in secondary works, including both recent and classic studies. Students who are unfamiliar with the basic outline of American labor history should read a survey history as soon as possible. Some possibilities are:


Ronald Filippelli, Labor in the USA: A History

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

Steve Babson, The Unfinished Struggle: Turning Points in American Labor, 1877-Present

All assigned books are on reserve at the Graduate Center library. If you are going to purchase books on-line, consider ordering them through the Amazon link on the library website, since it gets a payment at no cost to you. All the assigned articles are available through the library on-line full-text journals.

The most important requirement for the course is to do all the reading, 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 Saturday before we meet. Also, submit a hard copy in class.

2) Write a book review of one of the following books that we are reading for the course. Make sure to read the entire book, even if for the class we are reading only part of it.

Steve Fraser, *Every Man a Speculator: A History of Wall Street in American Life*

David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor*

Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World*

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

Thaddeus Russell, *Out of the Jungle: Jimmy Hoffa and the Remaking of the American Working Class*


Jack Metzgar, *Striking Steel: Solidarity Remembered*

Daniel J. Clark, *Like Night and Day: Unionization in a Southern Milltown*

Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women’s Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America*

Nancy MacLean, *Freedom in Not Enough: The Opening of the American Workplace*

Jefferson Cowie, *Capital Moves: RCA's 70-Year Quest for Cheap Labor*


Write the review as if you were submitting it to the Journal of American History or Reviews in American History. However, 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, and is due at the class at which we 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.

**CLASS TOPICS AND READING ASSIGNMENTS**

**Aug. 28: INTRODUCTORY SESSION**

**Sept. 4: 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 Cambell, and John McIlroy


Alan Dawley, Class and Community: The Industrial Revolution in Lynn, chapters 1-3, 5, 7

Jeanne Boydston, "To Earn Her Daily Bread: Housework and Antebellum Working-Class Subsistence," Radical History Review 35 (Spring 1986), pp. 7-25

Herbert Gutman, "Work, Culture, and Society in Industrial America, 1815-1919," The American Historical Review, June 1973 (reprinted in Gutman, Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America, chapter 1)


recommended:

E.J. Hobsbawm and John Wallach Scott, “Political Shoemakers,” Past and Present, no. 89 (Nov. 1980), 86-114


Tom Vanderbilt, The Sneaker Book: Anatomy of an Industry and an Icon
Sept. 11: THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF CAPITALISM/FINANCE


Steve Fraser, Every Man a Speculator: A History of Wall Street in American Life, introduction and parts one and two

Recommended:

Giovanni Arrighi, The Long Twentieth Century: History, Power and the Origins of our Times

NO CLASSES ON SEPTEMBER 18 AND 25 (JEWISH HOLIDAYS)

Oct. 2: THE TRANSITION FROM SLAVE LABOR TO WAGE LABOR

Eric Foner, Nothing But Freedom: Emancipation and its Legacy


Oct. 9: VIOLENCE, HEGEMONY, AND THE LAW

William Forbath, Law and the Shaping of the American Labor Movement, introduction and chapters 2-3, 5

James Green, Death in Haymarket: A Story of Chicago, the First Labor Movement and the Bombing That Divided Gilded Age America, chapters 1-15

Recommended:

Thomas G. Andrews, Killing for Coal: America’s Deadliest Labor War
Timothy Messer-Kruse, The Trial of the Haymarket Anarchists: Terrorism and Justice in the Gilded Age

Oct. 16: CORPORATE CAPITALISM

Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., Scale and Scope: The Dynamics of Industrial Capitalism, pp. 1-233


Oct. 23: ORGANIZED LABOR AND THE REORGANIZATION OF PRODUCTION

David Montgomery, The Fall of the House of Labor, entire book except chapter 9

Recommended:

Sharon Hartman Strom, Beyond the Typewriter: Gender, Class, and the Origins of Modern American Office Work, 1900-1930

Oct. 30: LABOR RADICALISM


Nov. 6: JUNGLE CAPITALISM

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

Thaddeus Russell, Out of the Jungle: Jimmy Hoffa and the Remaking of the American Working Class introduction and chapters 1-8

Nov. 13: MASS PRODUCTION, INDUSTRIAL UNIONISM, AND THE NEW DEAL


Steve Fraser, *Every Man a Speculator: A History of Wall Street in American Life*, chapters 12 and 13

**Nov. 20: WHAT UNIONS MEANT FOR WORKING PEOPLE**

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

Daniel J. Clark, *Like Night and Day: Unionization in a Southern Milltown*

**Nov. 27: GENDER, RACE, AND POSTWAR LABOR**

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


Nancy MacLean, *Freedom in Not Enough: The Opening of the American Workplace*, prologue, chapters 1-2, epilogue

**Dec. 4: DEINDUSTRIALIZATION AND DEUNIONIZATION**

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


Jefferson Cowie, *Capital Moves: RCA's 70-Year Quest for Cheap Labor*, introduction and chapters 1-5, 7

**Dec. 11: GLOBAL CAPITALISM**

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