

## Labor, Status, and Identity

Tuesdays & Thursdays  
7:15 – 8:35PM  
Ruth Adams Building 208

Instructor Andrew Urban  
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Office: Ruth Adams Building 205  
Office Hours: Thursdays, 1-4 PM and by appointment

### Course Description

This course explores the relationship between different forms of labor, and the construction of class, gender, sexual, racial, and national identities. It will look at how individuals and groups shape their identities as workers, as well as the roles that the state, corporations, and the market economy assume in imposing identities upon laborers. This course will examine the historic relationship between labor, status, and identity under different systems of labor, such as slavery, colonialism, industrialism, and the service economy. Finally, through an engagement with novels, film, advertising, and music, this course will look at how labor confers status among different Americans, its connections to therapeutic discussions of “self-worth,” and what your parents truly mean when they tell you to “cut your hair and get a job.”

### Readings

**PLEASE BRING ALL READINGS TO CLASS. The repeated failure to bring readings to class, which will be used in small group and other in-class activities, will result in deductions from your participation grade.**

- Scott Reynolds Nelson, *Steel Drivin' Man: John Henry: the Untold Story of an American Legend* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), ISBN: 0195300106
- Jefferson Cowie, *Capital Moves: RCA's 70-Year Quest for Cheap Labor* (New York: The New Press, 2001), ISBN: 1565846591
- Studs Terkel, *Working: People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do* (New York: The New Press, 1997), 1565843428

In addition to the following books, there are a number of individual chapters and articles that have been posted as .pdf files on the course's SAKAI site, under the heading “Resources.” Readings that are available through SAKAI appear on the

syllabus followed by a \*. You are required to bring a copy of these readings to class for the week they have been assigned.

### Grading/QUIPs:

*Midterm Exam* – 15%

*Short Essay* – 15%

*Oral History Assignment* – 25%

*Final Exam* – 20% (Date and time TBA: <http://finalexams.rutgers.edu/>)

*In-Class Participation* – 10%

*QUIPS* – 15% (See below)

Participation and Inquiry QUIPs: In order to facilitate discussion each student will be required to submit a total of five QUIPs (Question Issue or Problem) during the semester. Post your QUIPs on SAKAI in the “Class Discussions” section by noon on the day our class meets (you will not be credited for QUIPs posted after this deadline).

QUIPs should be a paragraph or two in length, and bring up a question, an issue, or connections that relate to the readings. You are required to post five QUIPs over the course of the semester.

### **Grading Scale:**

92-100=**A**; 87-91=**B+**; 81-86=**B**; 77-80=**C+**; 70-76=**C**; 60-69=**D**; 0-59=**F**

**Note:** there are no minus grades at Rutgers.

### Important Dates

**10/4 – Oral History Workshop (class will meet in the lobby of Douglass Library)**

**10/18 – Draft oral history questions due in hard copy, in-class**

**10/21 – Take home midterm exam distributed, due in hard copy, in-class, 10/25**

**11/8 – Short essay due in hard copy, in-class**

**12/6 – Oral History assignment due, in hard copy, in-class**

## Attendance / In-Class Policies

This is a lecture-discussion seminar. **Students are expected to attend all classes.**

Attendance and participation are important in our work in the course. You are allowed 3 absences for any reason whatsoever; each subsequent absence will result in a 3-point deduction from the grade on your final. If you continually turn up late to class, you will be marked absent as well.

If you have to miss class due to sickness or a family emergency, please use the University absence reporting website <https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/> to indicate the date and reason for your absence. An email is automatically sent to me.

If you miss class, you may come to my office hours to discuss the readings or any other questions you may have. However, I will not email you my lecture notes or powerpoint slides in the case of an absence. I encourage you to identify a classmate (as we called them in my day, a “study buddy”) with whom you can share notes.

All cell phones and hand-held devices must be turned off. **NO TEXTING** – if I catch you texting, you will be counted as absent that class. **NO COMPUTER USE EXCEPT FOR TAKING NOTES.**

All exams and assignments must be turned in on time; unexcused late assignments will receive a deduction.

## Learning Goals

**Conceptual Learning Goals. Students who study American Studies and History at Rutgers University can expect to develop an understanding of the following concepts:**

- 1.) How to synthesize an interdisciplinary dialogue among the different disciplinary methodologies that comprise American Studies and the investigation of American culture across time and space in the history, politics, literature, and arts of the peoples of the United States, as well as the Americas.
- 2.) How to argue and interpret through writing; how to speak articulately; and, how to think critically, analytically, and creatively.
- 3.) How individuals are shaped by their own pasts and by the pasts of their society and institutions; how human agency has brought about change in society and institutions.
- 4.) The role of diversity and difference in shaping human experience.

- 5.) The nature of cause-and-effect relationships in human affairs as they have played out over time and as they continue to operate in the present.

**Practical Learning Goals. Students who study American Studies and History at Rutgers University can also expect to develop the following practical skills:**

- 1.) The ability to read and understand a variety of literary forms.
- 2.) The ability to analyze information effectively and to construct cause-and-effect relationships from disparate data sources.
- 3.) The ability to write persuasively and communicate effectively.
- 4.) The ability to work independently and to conduct independent research.

**Specific Course Goals. Students enrolled in this course can expect to develop the following skills:**

- 1.) The role that labor – and the status associated with different types of labor – has played in the construction of American identities.
- 2.) How changes in political economy, and different ideologies seeking to promote specific theories of political economy, create cultural meaning in regard to labor, status, and identity.
- 3.) How to use and interpret oral history as a research method and form of scholarship.
- 4.) How discussions of labor, status, and identity contribute to the ways in which different interest groups imagine and envision social responsibility, productivity, and worth.

**Academic Policies**

Please review the following policies. Should a situation arise where a violation occurs, it will be assumed that you were aware of this information and its ramifications.

**Special Accommodation Requests**

All special accommodation requests must be brought to my attention the first two weeks. Full disability policies and procedures are at <http://disabilityservices.rutgers.edu/>. Students with disabilities requesting

accommodations must follow the procedures outlined at <http://disabilityservices.rutgers.edu/request.html>

### **Academic Integrity Policy**

<http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/integrity.shtml>

Violations include: cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, denying others access to information or material, and facilitating violations of academic integrity.

### **Honor Pledge**

I pledge on my honor that I will adhere to all aspects of the Rutgers Academic Integrity Policy

Take an interactive tutorial on Plagiarism and Academic Integrity:

<http://sccweb.scc-net.rutgers.edu/douglass/sal/plagiarism/Intro.html>

Consult Don't Plagiarize: Document Your Research! For tips about how to take notes so you don't plagiarize by accident.

[http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/rul/lib\\_instruct/instruct\\_document.shtml](http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/rul/lib_instruct/instruct_document.shtml)

## Class/Readings Schedule

Note: Readings must be completed prior to class for the week in which they are assigned.

### **Week 1 (9/1): Introduction**

### **Week 2 (9/6, no class 9/8): Work as Ideology**

- Bertrand Russell, "In Praise of Idleness," *Harper's Magazine*, 1932.\*
- Junot Diaz, "Edison, NJ," in *Drown* (New York: Riverhead Trade, 1997).\*

### **Week 3 (9/13, 9/15): Theories of Political Economy**

- Adam Smith, excerpts from *The Wealth of Nations* [1776], in Robert L. Heilbroner, ed., *The Essential Adam Smith* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1986), 161-208.\*
- Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "The Communist Manifesto [1848]," in Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1972), 331-353.\*

### **Week 4 (9/20, 9/22): Theories of Political Economy (cont.)**

- Max Weber, "The Spirit of Capitalism [1905]," in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 13-38.\*
- Frederick Winslow Taylor, "Fundamentals of Scientific Management," in *The Principles of Scientific Management* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1967 [1911]), 9-29.\*

### **9/22 – in-class film**

- *Modern Times*, dir. Charlie Chaplin (1936)

### **Week 5 (9/27, 9/29): Race and Labor**

- Scott Reynolds Nelson, *Steel Drivin' Man*, chapters 1 through 5.

### **Week 6 (10/4 workshop in library, 10/6): Race and Labor (cont.)**

- Nelson, *Steel Drivin' Man*, chapter 6 to the end.

**Week 7 (10/11, 10/13): Race and Labor (cont.)**

- James Barrett and David Roediger, "Inbetween Peoples: Race, Nationality and the 'New Immigrant' Working Class," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 16 (1997): 3-44.\*
- Robin D.G. Kelley, "Shiftless of the World Unite!" in *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 17-34.\*
- Samuel Gompers and Herman Gutstadt, *Meat vs. Rice; American Manhood against Asiatic Coolieism; Which Shall Survive?* (Asiatic Exclusion League: San Francisco, 1908 [1902]).\*

**Week 8 (10/18, 10/20): Gendering Labor**

- Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Yellow Wall-Paper (1892)," in Denise Knight, ed., *Herland, the Yellow Wall-Paper, and Selected Writings* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), 166-82.\*
- Alice Kessler-Harris, "Gendered Interventions: Exploring the Historical Roots of U.S. Social Policy," in *Gendering Labor History* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 208-21.\*
- Arlie Hochschild, "Exploring the Managed Heart," in *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003 [1983]), 3-23.\*

**Week 9 (10/25, 10/27): The Sounds of Labor; Industrialization and Deindustrialization**

- Jefferson Cowie, *Capital Moves*, introduction through chapter 3.

**Week 10 (11/1, 11/3): Industrialization and Deindustrialization (cont.)**

- Cowie, *Capital Moves*, chapter four to end.

NOTE: Please review these websites prior to class

- The Pullman Strike (<http://www.pullmanil.org/>)
- The Great Flint Strike (<http://www.historicalvoices.org/flint/>)

**Week 11 (11/8, 11/10): The Global Politics of Production and Consumption**

- Shirley Steinberg, "Barbie: The Bitch Can Buy Anything," in Jennifer Sandlin and Peter McLaren, *Critical Pedagogies of Consumption: Living and Learning the Shadow of the "Shopocalypse"* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 148-56.\*
- T.A. Frank, "Confessions of a Sweatshop Inspector," *Washington Monthly*, April 2008.\*
- David Henderson, "The Case for Sweatshops," *Hoover Daily Report*, February 7, 2000.\*

**Week 12 (11/15, 11/17): Narrating Work**

- Rutgers' Career Services (<http://careerservices.rutgers.edu/OCAmain.shtml>) – for class, go to this website and complete the three assessment tests at the bottom of the website. Print and bring to class with you.
- Studs Terkel, *Working*, Foreword; Introduction; Books Three and Four

**Week 13 (11/22, no class 11/24): Narrating Work (cont.)**

No reading, in-class film

- *Office Space*, dir. Mike Judge (1999)

**Week 14 (11/29, 12/1): Narrating Work (cont.)**

- Terkel, *Working*, Books Five, Six, and Eight

**Week 15 (12/6, 12/8): White Collar Labor, Neoliberalism, and Present-Day Crises**

- Richard Zitrin and Carol Langford, "A Gun to the Head of the Junior Attorney," in Zitrin and Langford, eds., *The Moral Compass of the American Lawyer: Truth, Justice, Power, and Greed* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1990), 74-93.\*
- Grace Chang, "Undocumented Latinas: The New Employable Mother," in *Disposable Domesticity: Immigrant Women Workers in the Global Economy* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2000), 55-92.\*
- Michael Lewis, "The End," *Portfolio Magazine*, December 2008.\*

**Week 16 (12/13): Conclusion**

No reading, end of semester celebration with Oral History interviewees in Douglass Library