

# **Graduate Colloquium on US Labor History (16:510:521)**

**Wednesdays, 1-4PM**

**Van Dyke Hall 301**

**Professor Andy Urban**

**American Studies & History**

**[aturban@rutgers.edu](mailto:aturban@rutgers.edu)**

**Office Hours by Appointment, Online**

**he/him pronouns**

This course introduces students to labor history, and examines how scholars have addressed work, workers, and labor movements in the context of changing political economies from the colonial era to the present. Our focus is on the U.S./ Americas, but we will also foreground how imperialism, migration, and the movement of capital have globalized studies of labor.

We will begin by discussing “New Labor History” and social histories of work from the 1960s, addressing how histories of race, gender, and sexuality intersect with labor history, and how the field has evolved. We will explore how free and unfree labor, paid and unpaid labor, labor regulations and laws, craft and industrial unionism, labor markets and migration, cultures and ideologies of work, and global supply chains have been explored by labor historians and scholars working in the field of labor studies more broadly. To this end, we will approach the history of labor from an interdisciplinary perspective and incorporate perspectives and methodologies from anthropology, sociology, women’s and gender studies, as well as other fields.

Lastly, this colloquium will examine labor history and its relationship to the public humanities, community-engaged activism, and organizing. Special class sessions will focus on 1) how the digital humanities inform research and public-facing scholarship conducted by labor studies’ scholars, and 2) Rutgers’ institutional labor history, the role that the AAUP-AFT union plays in representing and organizing faculty, and on what the changing political economy of academia means to its workforce.

## **Required Readings**

The required readings for this course are available for purchase through numerous online vendors, or they can be acquired through the Rutgers’ libraries system or EZBorrow/Interlibrary Loan. If you plan on borrowing certain books, be sure to leave enough time to acquire them. Required books are listed in the syllabus below, on the dates in which we will be discussing them in class. Readings will need to be completed before class to complete the weekly response papers.

I strongly recommend buying or borrowing hard copy version of these books, since we will be exploring them in detail in class, and, as we all know, it is easy to get distracted while reading digital, online texts. If you do use an e-version of a book, please note that for the weekly response papers you will be required to complete, you are responsible for making sure that references to pages in your digital version of the text corresponded to the page numbers found in the hard copy version. (You can google how to do this for your device.)

There will also be the occasional article or chapter that you will be asked to read. These will be available as .pdf files on our Canvas site, in our “Readings” folder, unless otherwise noted.

### **COVID Protocols and Regulations**

For the fall 2021 semester, Rutgers is requiring masks in all classrooms and other meeting spaces, regardless of the vaccination status of the students and instructors involved. The Delta variant surge makes it highly unlikely this policy will change any time soon.

In keeping with Rutgers University policy, you will be required to wear a nose-and-mouth covering at all times. While I do not anticipate that this will be an issue, I am mandated to state that students who fail to wear a mask will be asked to leave the classroom and will be marked absent. Masks are not required outdoors and based on what we decide as a class, we might hold – weather permitting – a couple of our class meetings outside. In the classroom, we will try to maintain social distance as much as possible.

Presently, Rutgers is instructing faculty to hold all non-instructional meetings online, unless a face-to-face meeting is somehow essential. Accordingly, my office hours will take place on Zoom. To set up a meeting time, please just email me with your availability and we can schedule something.

If you are feeling ill or sick, please do not attend class in person. I can work with you to catch up via Zoom. (I’ll preach for a second and note that even before Covid, it was not a great idea to attend class while sick. Since this is a seminar on labor history, we can talk out how capitalistic ideologies that govern expectations of “productivity,” at any cost, deserve to be challenged...) I am also aware that you may need to help out a friend, family member, or loved one who becomes ill or is facing other difficulties due to the pandemic. Throughout these difficult times, I have tried my best to be understanding and accommodating, and I will continue to do so. I just ask that you communicate with me so that we can come up with appropriate contingency plans.

If Covid causes multiple students to have to miss in-person teaching, we will discuss whether it makes sense to move – temporarily – to online instruction.

For the latest information and updates on Rutgers’ various policies and regulations concerning Covid-19, please consult: <https://coronavirus.rutgers.edu/>.

### **Assignment and Grading Summary:**

*Assignment details, including information on how to complete the weekly response papers, will be made available in class.*

- Short Reflection Essay on “Labor History as Lived Experience” panel – 10% (Due Monday, October 25)
- Short Reflection Essay on “Doing Labor History Online: Digital Humanities Skills and Projects” panel – 10% (Due Monday, November 22)
- Weekly responses and participation – 30%
- Final Literature Review Essay – 35% (Due, Friday, December 17)
- In-class presentations on Labor History/Studies and your research – 15%

### **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.

### **Course Goals:**

To examine how labor history as evolved over time as a field within U.S. history, and to understand the key historiographical interventions, periodizations, and questions that have animated scholarship in the field, past and present.

To explore the different methodologies and approaches that labor historians and labor studies’ scholars employ, and to understand how these approaches and methodologies intersect with work being done in fields ranging from environmental studies to sexuality studies.

To produce a literature review essay that can be used to aid preparation for comprehensive exams; to provide context and background for dissertation research; or, be submitted for publication.

To reflect on what it means to study labor in an age of heightened economic precarity, and to consider how labor historians/scholars position themselves in relationship to worker organizing, community and political activism, and academic workplace governance.

### **Class Policies:**

#### **Class Announcements:**

Please make sure that you are receiving and checking Canvas announcements. All important information related to class will be disseminated through this system. You are responsible for knowing the information and instructions posted to Canvas.

#### **Special Accommodation Requests:**

All special accommodation requests should be brought to my attention during the first two weeks of class. Full policies and procedures are available for review at:

<https://ods.rutgers.edu>.

#### **Academic Integrity Policy:**

<https://nbprovost.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-students>

The principles of academic integrity require that a student:

- properly acknowledge and cite all use of the ideas, results, or words of others.
- properly acknowledge all contributors to a given piece of work.
- make sure that all work submitted as their own in a course or other academic activity is produced without the aid of impermissible materials or impermissible collaboration.
- obtain all data or results by ethical means and report them accurately without suppressing any results inconsistent with their interpretation or conclusions.
- treat all other students in an ethical manner, respecting their integrity and right to pursue their educational goals without interference. This requires that a student neither facilitate academic dishonesty by others nor obstruct their academic progress.
- uphold the canons of the ethical or professional code of the profession for which they are preparing.

Any violation of academic integrity is a serious offense and is therefore subject to an appropriate sanction or penalty. If you are unsure about whether something might violate Rutgers' academic integrity policy - please ask me for clarification!

### **Honor Pledge:**

I pledge on my honor that I will adhere to all aspects of the Rutgers Academic Integrity Policy and to Rutgers policies concerning bullying, intimidation, and harassment (<https://policies.rutgers.edu/10211-currentpdf>).

By accepting this syllabus and enrolling in this course, you assume responsibility for knowing the above policies and the possible penalties - including suspension and expulsion - should you violate them.

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## **Class Schedule and Readings**

### **September 1 - Introductions; Assessing "New Labor History" in 2021**

- Julie Greene, "Rethinking the Boundaries of Class: Labor History and Theories of Class and Capitalism," *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 18, no. 2 (May 2021): 92-112.

### **September 15 - Conceptualizing "Free" vs. "Unfree" Labor**

- Talitha LeFlouria, *Chained in Silence: Black Women and Convict Labor in the New South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), ISBN# 9781469630007.
- Edward Baptist, "Toward a Political Economy of Slave Labor: Hands, Whipping-Machines, and Modern Power," in eds. Sven Beckert and Seth Rockman, *Slavery's Capitalism: A New History of American Economic Development* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 31-61.
- Gavin Wright, "Slavery and Anglo-American Capitalism Revisited," *Economic History Review* 73, no. 2 (2020): 353-383.

### **September 22 – Theorizing Work**

- Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), ISBN# 9780822351122.

### **September 29 – Labor History, Immigration, and Empire**

- Manu Karuka, *Empire's Tracks: Indigenous Nations, Chinese Workers, and the Transcontinental Railroad* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019), ISBN# 9780520296640.
- Adam Moore, “Colonial Legacies and Labor Export,” in *Empire’s Labor: The Global Army That Supports U.S. Wars* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019), 35-48.

### **October 6 – Labor History and Environmental History**

- Bathsheba Demuth, *Floating Coast: An Environmental History of the Bering Strait* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2019), ISBN# 9780393635164.
- Gunther Peck, “The Nature of Labor: Fault Lines and Common Ground in Environmental and Labor History,” *Environmental History* 11, no. 2 (April 2006): 212-238.

### **October 13 – Labor History as Lived Experience**

*Note: For class this week, we will be speaking with organizers and leaders of the Rutgers AAUP-AFT union. This panel will consist of:*

- Rebecca Givan, Associate Professor, Labor Studies and Employment Relations (LSER); Co-Director, Center for Work and Health (CWH); President of Rutgers AAUP-AFT
- Ann Gordon, Emerita Research Professor, History; Editor of *The Selected Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony*
- Kathleen Shannon, Staff Assistant; Organizer, Rutgers AAUP-AFT
- Sherry Wolf, Senior Organizer, Rutgers AAUP-AFT

Members of the panel will be selecting readings for this week's discussion, which I will post as soon as they are available. There will be no response paper due this week.

Readings:

- Kim Moody, "The Rank and File Labor Strategy," 2000 (Sherry).
- Alessandro Portelli, "The Death of Luigi Trastulli: Memory and Event," in *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Events: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany, NY: The State University of New York Press, 1991), 1-26 (Andy).
- Additional readings TBA

### **October 20 - Labor History and Legal History (Zoom class)**

- Nate Holdren, *Injury Impoverished: Workplace Accidents, Capitalism, and Law in the Progressive Era* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020), ISBN# 9781108657730.

*Nate will be joining us during the second half of class to discuss his book.*

### **October 27 - Doing Labor History Online: Digital Humanities Skills and Projects (Zoom class)**

Class this week will be held virtually and consist of a workshop with labor historians working in the field of digital humanities. Rutgers faculty and students from outside our class will also be invited to attend. The below panelists have been asked to select readings for the workshop, which I will provide when available. No response paper this week.

- Andrew Gomez, Assistant Professor of History, University of Puget Sound
- Tobias Higbie, Professor of History; Faculty Chair, Labor Studies; Associate Director, Institute for Research on Labor and Employment, UCLA
- Vilja Hulden, Instructor, History, University of Colorado, Boulder

Readings:

- Adam Crymble, *Technology and the Historian: Transformations in the Digital Age* (University of Illinois Press, 2021), chapter 1 - Vilja
- Scott Weingart, "'Digital History' Can Never be New," <http://scottbot.net/digital-history-can-never-be-new/> (access online) - Vilja

- Optional (but recommended!): Tyler Anbinder, “Moving beyond ‘Rags to Riches’: New York’s Irish Famine Immigrants and Their Surprising Savings Accounts,” *Journal of American History* 99, no. 3 (December 1, 2012): 741–70. Companion website: <http://beyondragstoriches.org/> - Vilja

Additional Readings TBA.

### **November 3 – Labor History and the History of Sexuality**

- Ryan Murphy, *Deregulating Desire: Flight Attendant Activism, Family Politics, and Workplace Justice* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2016), ISBN# 9781439909898.
- Stephen Vider, “Public Disclosures of Private Realities: HIV/ AIDS and the Domestic Archive,” *The Public Historian* 41, no. 2 (2019): 163-89.

### **November 10 – Anthropology and Labor Studies**

- Angela Steusse, *Scratching Out a Living: Latinos, Race, and Work in the Deep South* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016), ISBN# 9780520287211.
- Karen Ho, “Disciplining Investment Bankers, Disciplining the Economy: Wall Street’s Institutional Culture of Crisis and the Downsizing of American Corporations,” *American Anthropologist* 111, no. 2 (2009): 177-89.

### **November 17 – Labor History, Deindustrialization, and the Rise of Service Economies**

- Gabriel Winant, *The Next Shift: The Fall of Industry and the Rise of Health Care in Rust Belt America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2021), ISBN# 9780674238091.

### **December 1 - Student-Led Discussions**

### **December 8 – Student-Led Discussions**