American Labor History, 1900-Present

This course surveys the history of working people in the United States in the 20th and 21st century, focusing on the historical meanings of work and working-class cultures. We will look at the ways in which a variety of scholars and “organic intellectuals” have drawn upon the methods and practices of labor history, social history, economic history, and cultural studies, to examine the lives of working women and men. Throughout the course, we will be examining relations of power by looking closely at ideas about race, class, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. We will be especially concerned with how these ideas have shaped working-class lives, informed class relations, and organized communities of solidarity. Some of the questions we will address are: What is unique about US labor history and what is part of a shared international history of workers? How have processes of cultural fusion and cultural fragmentation operated to unite and divide workers? In what ways does an interrogation of the politics of space (place, location, landscape, architecture, environment, home, neighborhood, city, region, and territory) help us to understand working-class cultures? Questions about American Exceptionalism and the American Dream; community and solidarity; class formation and social identity; and the relationship between working-class strategies of resistance and the everyday lives of working people will be the focus of our course readings, films, discussions, and research projects during the semester.

Course Requirements

1. **General**

   **Class Participation.** The success of the course depends upon your contribution to the creation of a community of scholars dedicated to cooperative learning. Thus, class participation includes: attending all class meetings, completing all reading and writing assignments in preparation for class discussions, and engaging in lively and respectful dialogue with one another.

   **Laptops and Notetaking.** The use of laptop computers or other screen-based devices is not permitted during lecture (including when films are screened). *Please take notes by hand.*

2. **Writing and Research**

   **Film Critique.** You will write one 3-page (approximately 900 words) essay discussing how one of the following pairs of films represents labor history. *Select one due date and write an essay on both films listed for that date:*

   - Oct. 22: *Cradle Will Rock & Uprising of ’34*
   - Nov. 5: *Free a Man to Fight & Wage Slaves*
   - Nov. 19: *Salt of the Earth & Uprising of ’34*
   - Nov. 24: *Cradle Will Rock & Sir! No Sir!*
   - Dec. 3: *San Francisco State & Uprising of ’34*
   - Dec. 10: *Yuri Kochiyama & Sir! No Sir!*

   **Extra Credit:** You may write 3-page essays on additional groups of films to earn extra credit toward your final grade in the course. *These must be submitted by the due dates listed.*
2. **Writing and Research** (cont.)

*Working-Class History Research Project.* You will conduct in-depth research using archival materials housed at the Wisconsin Historical Society and write a two-part essay.

**Due Tuesday, October 13:**

**Part One.**

You will identify an archival collection at the Wisconsin Historical Society used in the book assigned for this course listed below, familiarize yourself with the contents of the archival collection, and write a 900-word essay (approximately three pages) describing the contents of the collection and offering a more detailed description of one box contained in the collection.


**Due Tuesday, December 15:**

**Revised Version of Part One & Part Two.**

**Part Two.** You will write a 1,500-word essay (approximately five pages) explaining how the collection expanded your understanding of an event, issue, relationship, community, or institution that is addressed in your course readings. You must include examples and evidence from the collection (in the form of quotations or photocopied documents or photographs) to support your analysis. You will conclude your essay by suggesting or proposing future research projects based on the collection. Be insightful and brilliant.

**Part One, Revised.** Please submit a revised version of Part One as the introduction to Part Two of your working-class history project. Your final paper will be 2,400-words in length (approximately 8-pages).

3. **Examinations.**

*Midterm Examination.* There will be an in-class midterm examination Tuesday, October 27, consisting of one long essay question and four short identification questions.

*Final Examination.* The final examination will cover material since the midterm. This will be an in-class examination on Friday, December 18, 7:45 to 9:45 a.m.

**Grade Distribution:**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Film Critique</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm Examination</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Project</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Examination</td>
<td>25%</td>
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Readings*

The following books are available for purchase at the University Bookstore, 711 State Street, and are on reserve in Helen C. White College Library. The Barbara Ehrenreich essay, “Down and Out in America: Barbara Ehrenreich Talks about Life as a Minimum Wage Employee,” is on the Learn @ UW site for this course. Readings should be completed by Tuesday of each week.

**Required Readings**


**Required Style Books**


**Calendar and Assignments**

**Week 1**  
Sept. 3  
*Labor History and Historical Meanings of Work*

*Note that Readings must be completed by Tuesday of each week*

**Week 2**  
Sept. 8 & 10  
*The Agrarian Dream and Wage Slavery*

**Readings**


**Film:**  
*Wage Slaves: Not Getting By in America*  
Labor Day Sept. 7
**Week 3**  
**Freedom and “Free Labor”**  
Sept. 15 & 17  
*Readings*  

_Eid-al-Fitr Sept. 20_  
_Rosh Hashanah Sept. 19-20_

**Week 4**  
**The Making of the U.S. Working Class**  
Sept. 22 & 24  
*Readings*  
*Photograph Essay*  

*Research Instruction at the Wisconsin Historical Society, Harry Miller, Reference Archivist*

**Week 5**  
**“Bread and Roses”: Workers’ Control of the Workplace**  
Sept. 29 & Oct. 1  
*Readings*  

*Film:  Cradle Will Rock (part one)*  
_Yom Kippur Sept. 28_

**Week 6**  
**Mass Culture & Working-Class Communities**  
Oct. 6 & 8  
*Readings*  

*Film:  Cradle Will Rock (part two)*

**Week 7**  
**Revolution or Reform?**  
Oct. 13 & 15  
_Tuesday_  
*Part One of Research Project due*

*Readings*  
Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal*, pp. 213-289  

*Film:  Uprising of ’34 (screening begins at 12:50; 85 minutes)*
**Week 8**  
"Workers' Common Ground"  
Oct. 20 & 22  
*Readings*  

*Due Thursday*  
Film Critique of *Uprising of ’34 & Cradle Will Rock*

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**Week 9**  
"There's Work to be Done and a War to be Won"  
Oct. 27 & 29  
*Tuesday*  
**Midterm Examination**  

*Film:*  
*Free a Man to Fight*

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**Week 10**  
The Working Class & Hollywood During the Cold War  
Nov. 3 & 5  
*Readings*  

*Film:*  
*Salt of the Earth (part one)*  

*Due Thursday*  
Film Critique of *Free a Man to Fight & Wage Slaves*

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**Week 11**  
Working-Class Culture Wars  
Nov. 10 & 12  
*Readings*  

*Film:*  
*Salt of the Earth (part two)*

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**Week 12**  
Working-Class Soldiers & the Vietnam War  
Nov. 17 & 19  
*Readings*  

*Film (Tuesday):*  
*Sir, No Sir!* (screening begins at 12:50; 84 minutes)  

*Due Thursday*  
Film Critique of *Salt of the Earth & Uprising of ’34*
Week 13  "The War at Home"
Nov. 24 & 26

Readings
Annelise Orleck, Storming Cesar's Palace, pp. 1-97

Film: San Francisco State; Film Clips: The War at Home

Due Tuesday:
Film Critique of Cradle Will Rock & Sir! No Sir!
Thanksgiving Nov. 26, Eid-al-Adha Nov. 27

Week 14  The Politics of Working-Class Resistance
Dec. 1 & 3

Readings
Annelise Orleck, Storming Cesar's Palace, pp. 98-207.

Film: Yuri Kochiyama: Passion for Justice

Due Thursday:
Film Critique of San Francisco State & Uprising of '34

Week 15  “We Shall Overcome”: Building New Communities of Solidarity
Dec. 8 & 10

Readings
Annelise Orleck, Storming Cesar's Palace, pp. 208-310.

Due Thursday:
Film Critique of Yuri Kochiyama: Passion for Justice & Sir! No Sir!

Week 16  Working-Class Communities in the 21st Century
Dec. 15

Reading & Discussion:

Working-Class History Research Paper Due* at 1:00 p.m.

*Submit a revised version of Part One as the introduction to Part Two of your paper. You should merge both into one polished research paper.
*No late papers accepted for any reason other than a documented religious or health excuse. No exceptions, including computer & transportation problems.

Dec. 18  Final Examination, Friday, 7:45 a.m.-9:45 a.m.