U.S. Working-Class History

This is an advanced readings and research seminar on histories of working people in the United States. 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 (including cultural geography) to examine the everyday 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?

Course Requirements

Reading, Discussion, & the Practice of History

The first half of the semester will be devoted to class discussions of assigned readings and to developing expertise in the practice of historical research and writing. Each week, you will submit an informal one-page discussion paper that identifies the main points you would like the class to cover in discussing the week’s assigned reading. You will keep a reading and research journal throughout the course.

Historical Research and Writing

Early in the semester, you will write a short paper exploring the practice of history. The second half of the semester is devoted to research and writing. You will write a project proposal, visit research sites and repositories, devise a research plan, carry out your research, and complete a 15-20 page research paper.

Grade Distribution

40% Faithful attendance  
Preparation for & participation in discussions of course readings  
Discussion papers  
Reading & Research Journal

15% Practice of History paper

15% Project proposal  
Topic Statement  
Research Plan  
Bibliography

30% Research paper  
Polished Draft  
Revised & Polished Research Paper
The following books are available for purchase at the University Book Store and are on reserve in Helen C. White College Library:

**Required Readings**


**Required Style Books**


Calendar and Assignments

**Week 1**
Introduction

September 4

*Labor Day, September 1*

**Week 2**
Historical Meanings of Work and the “New Working Class”

September 11

**Reading:** Dana Frank, Robin D.G. Kelley, and Howard Zinn, *Three Strikes: Miners Musicians, Salesgirls, and the Fighting Spirit of Labor's Last Century*

**Due:** Discussion Position Paper:
- Submit a one-page discussion position paper that identifies the main points you would like the class to address. You should identify three to six discussion points and write a paragraph for each in which you: a) state the discussion point; b) explain why you selected this point for discussion; c) why the point is important.

**Reading Journal:** Begin your reading journal.

Your journal is where you express your informal reflections on readings, research, experiences in and out of class, and your larger research project. Your journal will allow you to involve yourself actively in the work of labor history and to try out ideas and devise your own analogies and metaphors for the academic concepts and theoretical perspectives you will encounter in the course. If you write in your journal regularly, it will be an invaluable resource when you turn to the formal writing assignments in the course.

**Week 3**
The Making of the U.S. Working Classes

September 18

**Reading:** Bruce Laurie, *Artisans into Workers*

**Due:** Discussion Position Paper

**Week 4**
Everyday Strategies of Resistance

September 25

**Reading:** Tera Hunter, *To ‘Joy My Freedom*

**Due:** Discussion Position Paper

**Library Workshop.**

*Rosh Hashana, September 30-Oct. 1*
Week 5    Proletarians in the Garden
Oct. 2

Reading: Camille Guérin-Gonzales, *Mexican Workers and American Dreams*

Due: Discussion Position Paper

*Library Workshop.*

* Eid Al-Fitr, October 1-2

Week 6    Bread and Roses
Oct. 9

Reading: Annelise Orleck, *Common Sense and a Little Fire*

Due Oct. 9: Discussion Position Paper

Due Oct. 13: The Practice of History Paper, Monday, 4:00 p.m., in mailbox 4018 Humanities.

Submit a 3-4 page essay that a) identifies an aspect of one of the readings for weeks 2-6 that you would like to know more about; b) describes one primary and three or more secondary sources that you will need for a study of the aspect you have identified and explains how and why these sources will be helpful; and c) explain why knowing more about this aspect of the readings is important to you and what contribution your exploration and potential findings will make to U.S. working-class history. You must also include a brief synopsis of the book you select that identifies the main argument, the supporting evidence presented by the author; and the contribution the book makes to U.S. working-class history.

*Yom Kippur, October 8-9*

Week 7    Defining Modernity
Oct. 16

Reading: Colleen O’Neill, *Working the Navajo Way*

Due: Discussion Position Paper.

Week 8    Audacity of Hope
Oct. 23

Reading: George Lipsitz, *Rainbow at Midnight*

Due: Discussion Position Paper
Week 9  

Audacity of Hope II  
Oct. 30

Reading:  
Michael Honey, *Going Down Jericho Road*

Due:  
Discussion Position Paper.

Week 10  

Researching Working-Class History  
Nov. 4

Due, Humanities 4119, by 5:00 p.m. (*no late papers accepted):

- Paper Topic Statement.
- Research Plan
- Bibliography

Be sure to vote!

Nov. 6

*Writing period, no class meeting*  
*Eid al Adha, November 8-9*

Week 11  

Writing Working-Class History  
Nov. 11

*Comments distributed, 4119 Humanities, between 3:30-5:30*

Nov. 13

*Writing period, no class meeting*

Week 12  

Writing Working-Class History  
Nov. 20

*Writing period, no class meeting*

Week 13  

Writing Working-Class History  
Nov. 25

Due Tuesday, November 25, Humanities 4119, by 5:00 p.m. (*no late papers accepted):

- Polished, complete draft of final paper

Nov. 27  

*Thanksgiving recess, no class meeting*
Week 15  Writing Working-Class History
Dec. 4

*Drafts returned with comments
*Writing Period

Week 16  Advancing Working-Class History
Dec. 11

*Due:
Revised & polished research paper*
Draft copy with my comments*

*Presentations of Research Projects

*Late papers will receive significantly reduced grades