

Macalester College

History 233-01/American Studies 233-01: Intro to the History of the U.S. Working Class  
MWF 2:20-3:20PM

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The U.S. working class has had a long and dynamic history. It has “been made” by external forces (mercantilism; the slave trade; industrialization; the state; commercialized mass culture; globalization) and it has “made” itself (ethnic, racial, and social organization; workplace organization; neighborhood settlement; political and social movements; labor organizations; popular cultural innovations), leading to a process of class formation and reformation, composition and recomposition, from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the 21<sup>st</sup>. This course will explore these processes, the making, unmaking, and remaking of the U.S. working class, while paying attention to the agency manifested by working men and women throughout. We will be especially interested in the diversity which has always been the working class in the United States, a diversity which has changed over and over, and which has been a source of both strength and weakness for working class agency.

This is a heavy reading course, though I am confident you will find each reading to be interesting and well-written. There will be no exams. There will be four papers, none of which will demand research beyond course reading assignments. The papers will give you an opportunity to develop your own arguments about historical processes, supported by historical evidence taken from our texts. I expect, I hope, that your arguments will often differ from mine. I am also open to your submitting collaborative papers produced by teams of 2-3. I will be happy to meet with you as you prepare your papers and I will look over outlines and drafts as time permits. I will accept rewrites of papers one and three, provided they are turned in within two weeks of your having received your graded paper, and the rewritten paper is accompanied by the original paper. Paper two, the shortest one, will be tied to the International Roundtable. This year’s presentations seem particularly germane to our work in this course. Regular class attendance and participation are top priorities. If you want a high grade in this course, you should plan on coming to class faithfully, having done the reading assignment and being ready to take part in class discussions. Careful listening practices will also be appreciated. At times, our discussions will veer into sensitive and politically charged topics, such as racism and sexism, and it is important that our classroom environment be one in which all students feel safe to express their questions and their ideas. I will lecture occasionally, largely to provide broader historical context for the specific episodes and stories we are exploring. I will always try to respond to your questions, and we will at times revise the syllabus in order to meet your needs for context, framework, and background. For this course to succeed, it is imperative that you play active roles in communicating what you know and what you don’t know.

The following books are available at the college bookstore and will, hopefully, be on reserve at the library:

Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, THE MANY-HEADED HYDRA

Tom Dublin, WOMEN AT WORK

Alan Dawley, CLASS AND COMMUNITY

David Roediger, THE WAGES OF WHITENESS

James Green, DEATH AT THE HAYMARKET

Jeremy Brecher, STRIKE

Robin Kelley, RACE REBELS

Zaragosa Vargas, LABOR RIGHTS ARE CIVIL RIGHTS

Jan Lin, RECONSTRUCTING CHINATOWN

Annelise Orleck, STORMING CAESAR'S PALACE

Daily syllabus  
(subject to change)

W 8/27 Introduction to the course

F 8/29 A Transatlantic Context for Working Class Formation

Read: MANY-HEADED HYDRA, Introduction and Chapter One

M 9/1 Labor Day – no class

W 9/3 Diversity Within the Transatlantic Working Class

Read: MANY-HEADED HYDRA, Chapters Two – Five

F 9/5 Resistance, Race, and Transnationalism

Read: MANY-HEADED HYDRA, Chapter Six

M 9/8 Culture, Politics, and the Transatlantic Working Class

Read: MANY-HEADED HYDRA, Chapters Seven – Nine and Conclusion

W 9/10 Women and Industrialization

Read: WOMEN AT WORK, Chapters 1-3

F 9/12 Women Workers, Organization, and Struggle

Read: WOMEN AT WORK, Chapters 4-7

M 9/15 Industrialization and Women

Read: WOMEN AT WORK, Chapters 8-12

W 9/17 Industrialization Challenges Artisans

Read: CLASS AND COMMUNITY, Introduction, Chapters 1-2

\*\*Hand out assignment #1, due 9/26

- F 9/19 Industrialization, the Workplace, and the City  
Read: CLASS AND COMMUNITY, Chapters 3-4
- M 9/22 Culture, Politics, and Class Conflict  
Read: CLASS AND COMMUNITY, Chapters 5-8
- W 9/24 Culture, Politics, and Class Conflict  
Read: CLASS AND COMMUNITY, Conclusion and Preface
- F 9/26 Rethinking Industrialization, Working Class Formation, and Class Conflict  
\*\*Assignment #1 due in class
- M 9/29 Race, Whiteness, and Class Formation  
Read: WAGES OF WHITENESS, Chapters 1-4  
\*\*Hand out assignment #2, due 10/6
- W 10/1 Race, Whiteness, and Class Formation  
Read: WAGES OF WHITENESS, Chapters 5-8
- Th 10/2 International Roundtable (4:30PM)  
James Scott, “Globalization as North Atlantic Hegemony”
- F 10/3 International Roundtable (1:30PM)  
Michael Watts, “Oil, Development, and the Politics of the Bottom Billion”
- M 10/6 The International Roundtable and Working Class Formation  
\*\*Assignment #2 due in class
- W 10/8 Emergence of a Labor Movement  
Read: DEATH IN THE HAYMARKET, Prologue, Chapters 1-5
- F 10/10 The Labor Movement and the Struggle for Social Change  
Read: DEATH IN THE HAYMARKET, Chapters 6-8
- M 10/13 Class Conflict and Social Change  
Read: DEATH IN THE HAYMARKET, Chapters 9-15
- W 10/15 The Incorporation of the Labor Movement  
Read: DEATH IN THE HAYMARKET, Chapter 16 and Epilogue
- F 10/17 FALL BREAK – NO CLASS
- M 10/20 Class Conflict in U.S. History  
Read: STRIKE, Introduction, Prologue, Chapters 1-3  
\*\*Hand out Assignment #3, due 10/31

- W 10/22 World War I and 1919  
Read: STRIKE, chapter 4
- F 10/24 Race, Class, and Historical Context  
Read: RACE REBELS, Chapters 5-6
- M 10/27 Race, Class, and Rethinking Resistance  
Read: RACE REBELS, Introduction, Chapters 1-4
- W 10/29 Race, Class, Culture, and Resistance  
Read: RACE REBELS, Chapters 7-8
- F 10/31 Informal Resistance to Organized Activism  
\*\*Assignment #3 due in class
- M 11/3 Great Depression and Labor Upheaval  
Read: LABOR RIGHTS ARE CIVIL RIGHTS, Introduction, Chapters 1-2
- W 11/5 Great Depression and Labor Upheaval  
Read: STRIKE, Chapter 5
- F 11/7 Great Depression and Labor Upheaval  
Read: LABOR RIGHTS ARE CIVIL RIGHTS, Chapter 3
- M 11/10 WWII and the Emergence of an Institutionalized Labor Movement  
Read: LABOR RIGHTS ARE CIVIL RIGHTS, Chapters 4-5
- W 11/12 WWII and the Emergence of an Institutionalized Labor Movement  
Read: STRIKE, Chapter 6
- F 11/14 The Labor Movement, People of Color, and the Struggle for Civil Rights  
Read: LABOR RIGHTS ARE CIVIL RIGHTS, Chapter 6
- M 11/17 The Crisis of the Labor Movement and the Crisis of the Working Class  
Read: STRIKE, Chapters 7-9
- W 11/19 Neoliberalism, Race, Gender, and the Remaking of the Working Class  
Read: RECONSTRUCTING CHINATOWN, Introduction and Chapter 1
- F 11/21 The Transpacific and Remaking the Working Class  
Read: RECONSTRUCTING CHINATOWN, Chapters 2-4
- M 11/24 A New Working Class?  
Read: RECONSTRUCTING CHINATOWN, Chapters 5-6  
\*\*Hand out final assignment, due 12/9, Noon

W 11/26 The Past in the Present: The Old Working Class and the New  
Read: RECONSTRUCTING CHINATOWN, Chapters 7-8

F 11/28 THANKSGIVING BREAK – no class

M 12/1 Race, Gender, and the Remaking of the Working Class  
Read: STORMING CAESAR'S PALACE, Introduction, Chapters 1-4

W 12/3 Agency, Activism, and the New Working Class  
Read: STORMING CAESAR'S PALACE, Chapters 5-7

F 12/5 Agency, Activism, and the New Working Class  
Read: STORMING CAESAR'S PALACE, Chapters 8-9

T 12/9 \*\*Final assignment due (Noon)