

Macalester College

Fall 2011

History 233-01/American Studies 233-01: Introduction to the History of the U.S. Working Class

MWF 9:40 – 10:40 AM

Old Main 001

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## INTRODUCTION TO THE HISTORY OF THE U.S. WORKING CLASS

The course number and title reveals much of our approach:

(1) "200 level" because I expect you to have some familiarity with basic elements of historical study at Macalester – how to weigh competing interpretations of the past; how to engage primary historical documents; how to write papers which present and support an argument through the statement of a "thesis" and the provision of evidence, and which include the scholarly conventions of footnotes and bibliography. I do not expect you to "know" U.S. history or the specific history of the working-class.

(2) "Introduction" because this is a one-time journey through 300-plus years of a complex history. In such an "introduction" we can build some framework – the macro context provided by the political economy and the micro context provided by the organization/re-organization of work and workplaces; the shifting demographics grounded in immigration and migration; the internal categories of race, ethnicity, and gender, and their interface with skill and hierarchy; the bourgeoisie's project of hegemony, on the one hand, and workers' quest for agency, on the other; unions and the labor movement as a particular expression of that agency; working-class culture as another manifestation of that agency, interwoven with the evolution of the dominant culture; the long-term impact of working women and men on the culture and institutions of the United States. As an "introduction," however, much content will remain left out, hopefully for you to discover later.

(3) "History" because we will take an historical approach to our subject matter. That is, we will be interested in change over time, trying to pay attention to what does not change, as well as what does. At many points, we will explore the relationships between "the past" that we are examining and our "present," as well as its relationships between an era in the past and other eras in the past. To be sure, we will, at different points, load our analytical suitcases with sociology, anthropology, political philosophy, political economy, and cultural studies, but we will never forget that the carriers of those suitcases (us!) are traveling in time, functioning as historians.

(4) "U.S." because I wince at sloppy uses of the adjective "American," which typically assumes that the experiences of the people inside the United States *are* "American" experiences. What of our neighbors to the North or the South, who also inhabit the *Americas*? What of the indigenous people who have lived on this continent for many centuries, with their own names, identities, and histories? Better, I say, to use the adjective "U.S." and even to try to wrap our tongues around the noun "United Statesians."

(5) "Working Class" because the category has great explanatory value, even when it is *not* used by the very people we might wish to place in it. The "working class" can be defined by its relationship to the means of production (lack of ownership), its dependence on wage-labor, its role as the producers of goods, services, information, and ideas, which are owned by others. Our job is not to impute or impose an identity on the U.S. working class, but to explore why it has adopted, at different historical eras, the identities that it has. Adding "history" to the study of "the working class" means paying attention to the composition and re-composition of that class, how its external boundaries and internal categories have changed over time.

While I have been teaching this course longer than most of you have walked the earth, I have often revised and re-organized its approach. Never moreso than this time around. Welcome to this great experiment! This iteration of the course will rely heavily on our reading of first-person materials – memoirs, autobiographies, oral histories, journals, diaries, poems, letters, and the like. While I will take the responsibility to present historical context on a regular basis, collectively we will be wrestling with the ways that working people understood and explained their experiences. In addition to the core primary readings, we will rely on one contextual text and I will provide additional scholarly readings via emailed pdf's. It is important that you read your emails from me, and I would like nothing better than for you to use the course email list to share your own thoughts, questions, or to post materials you find of interest. Yes, the reading load is extensive, but I am confident you will find it stimulating and engaging.

Typically, I will present material on Mondays, we will discuss the readings on Wednesdays, and we will continue our discussions, hear from guests, or view films on Fridays. There might be some weeks where we will diverge from this plan. A good part of the Wednesday discussions will take place in small groups, and I ask that, in preparation, you identify a passage in the reading which you found particularly interesting and be prepared to share that reading – and the ways that it interested you – with other students. Your class participation will be a significant factor in your grade. The rest of your grade will depend on your work on four paper assignments, which will vary in nature and length, but will never require research beyond the course materials. I am happy to talk with you as you prepare these papers and I am open to your rewriting any of the first three for an improved grade. There are some out of class learning opportunities that I will encourage you to attend, even require you to attend by asking you to incorporate them into your paper(s).

At times we will discuss experiences and issues that you might find sensitive – racism, sexism, homophobia, strong political views, etc. – and it will be important that we maintain an environment in the classroom where everyone feels safe to express herself or himself. I am confident that we can make this course a great journey together.

The following books are available at the college bookstore:

Murolo and Chitty, FROM THE FOLKS WHO BROUGHT YOU THE WEEKEND  
PETER LINEBAUGH PRESENTS THOMAS PAINE, *THE RIGHTS OF MAN AND COMMON SENSE*  
Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, A MIDWIFE'S TALE  
DAVID WALKER'S APPEAL  
Thomas Bell, OUT OF THIS FURNACE  
Philip Foner, ed., AUTOBIOGRAPHIES OF THE HAYMARKET MARTYRS  
Upton Sinclair, THE JUNGLE  
Meridel LeSueur, THE GIRL  
Harriette Arnow, THE DOLLMAKER  
James Boggs, PAGES FROM A BLACK RADICAL'S NOTEBOOK  
Mario Garcia, ed., MEMORIES OF CHICANO HISTORY: THE NARRATIVE OF BERT CORONA  
Carlos Bulosan, AMERICA IS IN THE HEART  
Cheri Register, PACKINGHOUSE DAUGHTER  
Biju Mathew, TAXI! CABS AND CAPITALISM IN NEW YORK CITY

Daily Syllabus  
(subject to change)

- W 9/7 Introduction to the course
- F 9/9 Mercantilism, Labor, Freedom and Unfreedom in Early North America  
Reading: FROM THE FOLKS WHO BROUGHT YOU THE WEEKEND, Chap.1: "Labor in Colonial America"
- M 9/12 Labor and Independence (economic, social, political, national)  
Reading: FROM THE FOLKS WHO BROUGHT YOU THE WEEKEND, Chap.2: "The American Revolution"  
Jesse Lemisch, "Jack Tar in the Streets: Merchant Seamen in the American Revolution"  
Al Young, "George Robert Twelves Hewes: A Boston Shoemaker and the Memory of the American Revolution"
- W 9/14 Labor and Independence  
Reading: Linebaugh/TOM PAINE
- F 9/16 Labor and Independence  
Reading: Linebaugh/TOM PAINE  
\*\*Hand out essay assignment #1, due 9/26
- F 9/16 PM and Sat 9/17 8:30-3:30PM "ORGANIZING FOR POWER – WISCONSIN AND BEYOND"  
Labor conference at Macalester. Free and Open to all.
- M 9/19 Women in the American Revolution  
Reading: Ulrich, ed., A MIDWIFE'S TALE  
Linda Kerber, "The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment – An American Perspective"
- W 9/21 Women and the Early U.S. Economy  
Reading: Ulrich, A MIDWIFE'S TALE
- F 9/23 Gender, Labor, and Independence  
Reading: Ulrich, A MIDWIFE'S TALE  
Film: A MIDWIFE'S TALE
- Th 9/22 – F 9/23 – Sat 9/23 IMAGINING AMERICA Conference  
Saturday's sessions take place on the Macalester campus
- M 9/26 Slavery and Labor  
Reading: DAVID WALKER'S APPEAL  
FROM THE FOLKS WHO BROUGHT YOU THE WEEKEND, Chap.3: "Slavery and Freedom"  
Ch.4: "Civil War and Reconstruction"  
\*\*Essay Assignment #1 is due TODAY by 5PM

- W 9/28 Slavery and Labor  
Reading: DAVID WALKER'S APPEAL
- F 9/30 Slavery and Labor  
Reading: DAVID WALKER'S APPEAL  
David Montgomery, "Wage Labor, Bondage, and Citizenship in 19<sup>th</sup> Century America"  
\*\*Hand out essay assignment #2 – due W 10/12
- M 10/3 Immigration and Labor  
Reading: FROM THE FOLKS WHO BROUGHT YOU THE WEEKEND, Ch.5: "Labor Vs. Monopoly in the Gilded Age"  
Herbert Gutman, "Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America"  
Bell, OUT OF THIS FURNACE
- W 10/5 Immigration and Labor  
Reading: OUT OF THIS FURNACE
- F 10/7 Immigration and Labor  
Reading: OUT OF THIS FURNACE  
Film: "1877: The Grand Army of Starvation"
- M 10/10 Capitalism and Anti-Capitalism  
Reading: Bruce Nelson, "Revival and Upheaval: Religion, Irreligion, and Chicago's Working Class in 1886"  
Foner, ed., AUTOBIOGRAPHIES OF THE HAYMARKET MARTYRS
- W 10/12 Capitalism and Anti-Capitalism  
Reading: AUTOBIOGRAPHIES OF THE HAYMARKET MARTYRS  
\*\*Essay assignment #2 due, 5PM
- F 10/14 Capitalism and Anti-Capitalism  
Reading: AUTOBIOGRAPHIES OF THE HAYMARKET MARTYRS  
Film: "The River Ran Red"
- M 10/17 Labor and Empire  
Reading: FROM THE FOLKS WHO BROUGHT YOU THE WEEKEND, Ch.6: "Labor and Empire"  
Upton Sinclair, THE JUNGLE
- W 10/19 Labor and Empire  
Reading: THE JUNGLE  
James Barrett and David Roediger, "In Between Peoples: Race, Nationality, and the New Immigrant Working Class"
- F 10/21 Labor and Empire  
Reading: THE JUNGLE  
Film: "The Killing Floor"

- M 10/24 Labor, Empire, Race, and Class  
 Reading: FROM THE FOLKS WHO BROUGHT YOU THE WEEKEND, Ch.7: "America, Inc, From the Roaring Twenties to the Great Depression"  
 Peter Rachleff, "The Dynamics of Americanization: The Croatian Fraternal Union between the Wars"  
 Film: "The Killing Floor" (continued)
- W 10/26 Labor, Empire, Race, and Class  
 Discussion
- F 10/28 – Sun 10/30 FALL BREAK
- M 10/31 The Great Depression  
 Reading: FROM THE FOLKS WHO BROUGHT YOU THE WEEKEND, Ch.8: "Labor on the March"  
 Jeremy Brecher, "Depression Decade" from STRIKE  
 Meridel LeSueur, THE GIRL
- W 11/2 The Great Depression  
 Reading: THE GIRL  
 Peter Rachleff, "Organizing from Wall-to-Wall: The Independent Union of All Workers"  
 \*\*Hand out essay assignment #3, due 11/21
- F 11/4 The Great Depression  
 Reading: THE GIRL  
 Film: "Labor's Turning Point"
- M 11/7 Labor in Depression and War  
 Reading: Harriette Arnow, THE DOLLMAKER
- W 11/9 Labor in Depression and War  
 Reading: THE DOLLMAKER
- F 11/11 Labor in Depression and War  
 Reading: THE DOLLMAKER  
 Film: "Rosie the Riveter"
- F 11/11 through Sat 11/19: The play "The Inland Sea" is being produced by the Theater Department
- M 11/14 Constructing the New Deal Order: Race, Class, and Gender  
 Reading: James Boggs, PAGES FROM A BLACK RADICAL'S NOTEBOOK  
 FROM THE FOLK WHO BROUGHT YOU THE WEEKEND, Ch.9: "Hot War, Cold War"
- W 11/16 Constructing the New Deal Order: Race, Class, and Gender  
 Reading: PAGES FROM A BLACK RADICAL'S NOTEBOOK
- F 11/18 Constructing the New Deal Order: Race, Class, and Gender  
 Reading: Mario Garcia, ed., MEMORIES OF CHICANO HISTORY

- M 11/21 Constructing the New Deal Order: Race, Class, and Gender  
 Reading: MEMORIES OF CHICANO HISTORY  
 \*\*Essay assignment #3 due, 5PM
- W 11/23 Constructing the New Deal Order: Race, Class, and Gender  
 Film: "Finally Got the News"
- Th 11/24 – Sun 11/27 THANKSGIVING BREAK
- M 11/28 From the New Deal Order to Neoliberalism  
 Reading: Carlos Bulosan, AMERICA IS IN THE HEART  
 FROM THE FOLKS WHO BROUGHT YOU THE WEEKEN D, Ch.10: "The Sixties"
- W 11/30 From the New Deal Order to Neoliberalism  
 Reading: AMERICA IS IN THE HEART
- F 12/2 From the New Deal Order to Neoliberalism  
 Reading: Cheri Register, PACKINGHOUSE DAUGHTER
- M 12/5 From the New Deal Order to Neoliberalism  
 Reading: PACKINGHOUSE DAUGHTER  
 FROM THE FOLKS WHO BROUGHT YOU THE WEEKEND, Ch.11: "Hard Times"  
 \*\*Hand our essay assignment #4, due 12/14
- W 12/7 Globalization and Neoliberalism  
 Reading: FROM THE FOLKS WHO BROUGFHT YOU THE WEEKEND, Ch.12: "Brave New World"  
 Mathew, TAXI! CABS AND CAPITALISM IN NEW YORK CITY
- F 12/9 Globalization and Neoliberalism  
 Reading: TAXI! CABS AND CAPITALISM IN NEW YORK CITY
- M 12/12 The U.S. Working Class, Past, Present, and Future: A Discussion
- W 12/14 Essay assignment #4 due, Noon