

Spring, 2007
 Office hours:
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HIST 157A
AMERICANS AT WORK

Required texts:

Eileen Boris and Nelson Lichtenstein, eds., Major Problems in the History of American Workers (Second edition)

David Blight, ed., Frederick Douglass, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave (Second edition)

Edward Bellamy, Looking Backward, 2000-1887

Lizabeth Cohen, Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939

Cheri Register, Packinghouse Daughter: A Memoir

Barbara Ehrenreich: Nickel and Dime: On (Not) Getting By in America

Packet of primary documents*

* For purchase

Worker making bullets in a World War II defense factory. From *Connecticut Employment Security Division Monthly Bulletin*, February, 1943.

Throughout American history, most men and women (and many children too) have spent most of their waking hours working. If we define work in the broadest sense, as any activity that leads to the production of goods and services, then the term encompasses a significant realm of human endeavor-- not just wage-earning, but also caring for children and making a home; promoting neighborly cooperation; and contributing to the welfare of the community, whether local or national. This course employs just such an expansive definition of work, and considers various groups of American workers, from the colonial period through the early twentieth-first century.

During the semester we shall focus on ideologies of social difference, and how those ideologies have shaped the social division of labor-- that is, who works at what job, and under what conditions. Chief among our themes are gender and racial ideologies, two of the major factors affecting not only the social division of labor throughout American history, but also forms of compensation for employment, patterns of labor organization, and the social status accorded different kinds of jobs.

Other topics include U. S. economic transformations, with a focus on the destruction of slavery, as well as technological innovation and the rise and fall of heavy manufacturing; unwaged work and its relation to waged work; labor management and cultures of informal resistance in the workplace; labor unions and other forms of collective action among workers; sources of conflict among various groups of workers; labor legislation regulating wages, working conditions, and health care and other benefits; and the relation between patterns of employment and larger social issues in American history.

The complementary nature of labor patterns is a major focus of this course. For example, throughout the centuries, women have performed a considerable amount of labor at home without pay and-- after the colonial period at least-- without much in the way of social status or recognition. As people began to associate work with cash payments, housewives' domestic duties were accorded rhetorical glorification; according to many, these duties amounted to a family responsibility, and not a form of "work." To cite another example: During the first half of the twentieth century, white women and African-American men and women enjoyed their greatest employment opportunities during periods of worldwide military conflict, when large numbers of men joined the army and employers were desperate for workers. These examples suggest that if we isolate specific groups of workers from other workers at the same time, we miss a crucial dimension of labor history.

Course Assignments and Expectations

1. Students are expected to attend class regularly, participate actively in class discussion, and complete assignments on time (see below for due dates). Students are required to bring to section each Thursday a list of three discussion questions based on the week's readings.

2. For all assignments, students are required to consider the ways gender and racial ideologies have shaped the themes and topics they are investigating. Throughout American history, many workplaces have been segregated by notions of racial and gender difference; students must integrate these perspectives into any analytical or descriptive piece of work they prepare for the class, written or oral.

3. Writing assignments include two short (5-page) primary-document analyses. For this assignment, students will focus on a single primary document in its socio-historical context, providing textual analysis as well as a discussion of the document's larger significance in labor history. Students will have the option of re-writing and re-submitting these papers. Due dates are Feb. 15 and March 30.

4. During the course of the semester, each student will present to his or her discussion section a brief (5-10 minute) oral presentation-- a "job report" based on an oral interview with someone who is currently working. The focus of this report will be a particular present-day workplace and its culture. Students should receive approval for their topics from the section leader, and plan to present in class no later than April 19.

5. In addition, all students will be responsible for a major research paper on a topic relevant to the course. Possible topics include the change in a specific industry over time (for example, textiles, cotton cultivation, office work); the career of a particular labor leader; major initiatives in national labor and social-welfare legislation (for example, the New Deal); conflicts between groups of workers based on religion, ethnicity, racial ideologies, or skill levels; the history of a major labor organization (for example, the Knights of Labor, the American Federation of Labor, the Industrial Workers of the World); a particular strike or other form of collective action.

The research paper should be 12-15 pages in length. Students will have the option of re-writing and re-submitting these papers. Students will be required to meet the following deadlines on the way to completing the research paper:

Feb. 8: Approval of topic
 [Feb. 15: First short paper due]
 March 1: Bibliography due
 March 22: Paper outline due
 [March 30: Second short paper due]
 April 23: Rough draft due
 May 8: Final draft due

Student evaluation (for the entire course) will be based upon the following criteria:
 Two primary document analyses: each 15 percent of final grade; total 30 percent
 Final research paper: 50 percent (includes not only final product, but steps along the way—see above)

Class attendance and participation (and job report): 20 percent

If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see Prof. Jones immediately.

Students are expected to familiarize themselves with University policy regarding academic integrity, especially the rules regarding plagiarism, including the role of evidence and attribution in a scholarly paper. Cases of academic dishonesty will be forwarded to the Office of Student Life.

WEEKLY TOPICS

WEEK I

Jan. 17

Introduction to the Course: What is Work?

Jan. 18

Defining Our Terms, Historicizing Labor

WEEK II

Jan. 22

Early America: The Chesapeake
Packet documents, #1-8.

Jan. 24

Early America: The North

Jan. 25

Boris and Lichtenstein, eds., Major Problems, pp. 20-56

WEEK III

Jan. 29

Life and Labor in the Revolutionary Atlantic World
Packet documents, #9-15

Jan. 31

The Industrial Revolution: From Artisan to Factory Worker

Feb. 1

Boris and Lichtenstein, pp. 58-87, 90-111

WEEK IV

Feb. 5

Slavery, I

Feb. 7

Slavery, II

Feb. 8Douglass, Narrative, first halfBoris and Lichtenstein, eds., Major Problems, pp. 112-121

APPROVAL OF RESEARCH-PAPER TOPIC

WEEK V

Feb. 12

The Civil War: Is Fighting Work?

Packet documents #16-23

Feb. 14

Southern Sharecropping in the Postbellum Period

Feb. 15Douglass, Narrative, second half

First short paper due (no later than noon, Feb. 16)

VACATION, FEB. 19-23

WEEK VI

Feb. 26

How New was the West?

Packet documents #24-25

Feb. 28

Varieties of Union Organization in the Late Nineteenth Century

March 1Boris and Lichtenstein, eds., Major Problems, pp. 124-97Bellamy, Looking Backward, first half

BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE

WEEK VII

March 5

Immigration and Industrial Strife, I
Packet documents #26-28

March 7

Immigration and Industrial Strife, II

March 8

Bellamy, Looking Backward, second half

WEEK VIII

March 12

Racial Ideologies at Work
Packet documents #29-33

March 14

Modern Workplaces: Women in Clerical and Retail Work

March 15

Boris and Lichtenstein, eds., Major Problems, pp. 200-280

WEEK IX

March 19

The Progressive Era: How Progressive were the Progressives, North and South?

March 21

The New Deal: Crosscurrents

March 22

Cohen, Making a New Deal, first third

RESEARCH PAPER OUTLINE DUE

PASSOVER BREAK: APRIL 2-10

WEEK X

March 26

The New Deal: Rise of the CIO

Boris and Lichtenstein, eds., Major Problems, pp. 282-303

March 28

A New Deal for Workers in Rural America?

March 29

Boris and Lichtenstein, eds., Major Problems, pp. 303-24

Cohen, Making a New Deal, second third

Second short paper due (no later than noon, March 30)

WEEK XI

April 11

Workplaces and Social Strife in World War II

Boris and Lichtenstein, eds., Major Problems, pp. 327-37

Packet document #34

April 12

Boris and Lichtenstein, eds., Major Problems, pp. 337-58

WEEK XII

April 16

Revolutions in the Workplace: Title VII

Boris and Lichtenstein, eds., Major Problems, pp. 361-74

April 18

The Rise and Decline of Industrial Unions

April 19

Register, Packinghouse Daughter

Boris and Lichtenstein, eds., Major Problems, pp. 374-96

WEEK XIII

April 23

Distressed Communities in Modern America

RESEARCH PAPER DUE

April 25

“Glocalization”: The Global Economy and Its Local Discontents

April 26

Boris and Lichtenstein, eds., Major Problems, pp. 397-494

WEEK XIV

April 30

Living Wage Campaigns and Other Anti-Poverty Strategies
Packet documents # 35-36

May 2

Ehrenreich, Nickel and Dimed

May 8

FINAL DRAFT OF RESEARCH PAPER DUE