

August, 2011

**Swarthmore College
Department of History**

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History Department
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Office Hours:

History 50
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History 50: The Making of the American Working Class

History 93: Directed Reading in American Working Class Literature

Solidarity is not a matter of sentiment but a fact, cold and impassive as the granite foundations of a skyscraper. If the basic element, identity of interest, clarity of vision, honesty of intent, and oneness of purpose, or any of these is lacking, all sentimental pleas for solidarity, and all other efforts to achieve it will be barren of results.

---Eugene Debs

In this course we will explore the history of the American Working Class in the United States and as it relates to the world economy. From the Atlantic trade system of the 17th century to globalization in the 1980-1990's, the history of labor in the new world is one of migration and struggle. There is a mid-term, paper and final exam in the class, absences will affect your grade and there are no late papers accepted. A reading attachment is offered.

Books:

Book Orders History 50

Irving Bernstein, *The Turbulent Years: A History of the American Worker, 1933-1941*

Peter Dray, *There is Power in a Union: The Epic Story of Labor in America*

Bruce Nelson, *Divided We Stand: American Workers and the Struggle for Black Equality.*

Aaron Brenner, *Rebel Rank and File: Labor Militancy and Revolt During the Long Seventies.*

Josh Freeman, *Working Class New York*

Miriam Powell, *The Union of Their Dreams*

In the first half of the class you will be reading from Blackboard.

Everyone will read at least one of these novels, we will discuss the Steinbeck book in class. For those desiring credit for a directed reading will read them all.

Novels:

Herman Melville, *Bartleby, the Scrivener*

Jack Conroy, *The Disinherited*

John Oliver Killens, *YoungBlood*

Denise Giardina, *Storming Heaven*

Howard Fast, *The American*

Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle*

John Steinbeck, *In Dubious Battle*

Carlos Bulosan, *America is in the Heart*

Directed Reading Students: You must read each novel and write a final paper. Your final paper can be fiction based on a strike or person or it can be based on an actual event. See me for more details.

Requirements

Class Trip to the Hagley Mills Museum, Saturday September 3 & 10

Movies: *Matewan*, *Modern Times*

Assignments: (Class attendance is mandatory the Department by penalty of one half grade), midterm examination, paper and final examination. Your participation in discussion counts for a lot in class: (15%) Be sure you have done the reading. Our Class Trip is to Hagley Mills, the first month of Classes. The Trip is *required*. (5%) Mid-term is one hour, (30%) essay questions and ten Ids, final exam (20%), three hours, essay questions, ten Ids. Papers are 10-15 pages including interview, history and analysis. (30%) Find one labor activist (Government official i.e. Bureau of Labor, NLRB); Labor Lawyer (pro-management or labor) union officer, shop steward or rank and file. Find your source in the phone book, web page, alumni directory. Before you interview read the history of the union, plant or industry. (You will write an annotated bibliography) Offer to leave a copy of the interview for their use, transcribe it; incorporate it into an essay where you evaluate the future of American labor in a globalized world. **OR Using the archives in McCabe or Archives at Hagley Mills in Delaware, write a research proposal using primary and secondary sources, same page length.** Discussions are 15% divided into discussion sessions and graded according to the content and extent of your participation.

Schedule of Classes, assignments, movies.

WEEK 1 Labor and Capital August 30-September 1

August 30

“Merchant Capital and Labor: Fundamental Relationships in Colonial America”

Eileen Boris and Nelson Lichtenstein, *Major Problems in the History of American Workers*. (2nd edition). Chapter 2: *The Labor Systems in Early America*. Read for Thursday.

September 1

“Four Labor Systems and Class Relationships in an Imperial System.”

Discussion (1): Does our Colonial past inform class formation in Early America? Was the American West more properly a symbol of bondage than freedom when it came to labor systems? How was labor organized in New England? Was this a capitalist system? What do we mean by capital? What were the Navigation Acts? How were they related to trade? How did one accumulate wealth in the colonies? Did they have capital? What does it mean to accumulate capital? How do you do it?

Eileen Boris and Nelson Lichtenstein, *Major Problems in the History of American Workers*. (2nd edition Chapter 3 on the factory system. Peter N. Stearns, *The Industrial Revolution in World History*, Ch. 1&2; Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*, ch. 1. Naomi Lamoreaux, “Rethinking the Transition to Capitalism,” *Journal of American History* 90/2 (September 2003).

WEEK 2 Revolutions: American and Industrial September 6-8

September 6

“Economics, Social Relations and Merchant Capital in Revolution”

September 8

“Why did these Revolutions Happen When and Where they did?”

Eileen Boris and Nelson Lichtenstein, *Major Problems in the History of American Workers*. (2nd edition). Ch.4; Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*;

Discussion (2): Why did the Industrial revolution happen and why in 18th century England?

What did it do? What difference does that make in the history of the US? What is a mode of production? What was the prelude to industrialization? Were American Colonists capitalists without capital? Did the colonial relationship shape the class relationship within the British Colonies? What did it take to reorganize labor? What was the role of the machines in the early labor systems of America? What is the difference between an artisan and an operator?

Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*, ch. 1; Eugene Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll*, Pt.2 pp. 285-324. ; David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness, Pt. I*.

WEEK 3 **Wage Labor/Slave Labor** **September 13-15**

September 13 “Labor Power, Exchange Value and Commodities”

September 15 “The Machine in the Garden: Plantation, Company Town and ‘Free’ Labor”

“The hard coal district of eastern Pennsylvania was an important industrial center in the nineteenth century. But it was far from the urban paradigm often associated with the industrial revolution. Its cities and towns were separated by long stretches of rural and semi-rural landscape, much of it mountainous and heavily wooded.”

Kevin Kenny

Discussion: How do the machines make money? Who owns the machines? Where did they get the money to buy them? What is capital? What are wages? What makes it such a big deal? How were workers paid before wages? What is the relationship between wages and production? Who are the workers? Where do they come from? Do workers have ideas? What do we mean by free labor? How free was the labor? How did slave labor shape free labor? Compare and contrast the social relations between the company town and the plantation work ethic.

Bruce Laurie, *Artisans Into Workers*, 1-3

Kevin Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires.*, Intro, 1-4, 5-9.

WEEK 4

Class Consciousness

September 20-22

September 20 “Artisan, Journeyman and the New Idea: Unions”

“Was American labor less class-conscious in comparison with European labor, and were conditions in the United States exceptional? Sean Wilentz...finds American workers to have been acutely aware of their class interests during the nineteenth century, for they fought the transformation of their labor power into a commodity to be bought and sold like any other merchandise. They expressed their opposition to capitalism in the language of republicanism...”

Bruce Laurie pg. 9

September 22 “Class Consciousness and American Workers.”

Discussion: How did these rural immigrant cultures integrate into the new urban industrialized society? Labor is so much the history of migration, how does this movement shape class consciousness in America? Does ethnicity determine one’s relationship to class struggle? In what way were the Journeymen in NYC the pioneers in the labor movement? What was the GTU? Who was in it? How did the depression of

1837 destroy the Workingmen's Party? What were the differences between Free and Radical Labor? What are the Wages of Whiteness? What distinction does R. draw between the broad context of class formation and the narrow arguments of job competition? What is the history of Whiteness? What does he mean by White Republicanism?

Peter Dray, *There is Power in a Union: The Epic Story of Labor in America*, Ch 1-4; Paul Avrich, *The Haymarket Tragedy* 1-4; James Green, *Death in the Haymarket*, ch 2,5,9;

WEEK 5

Labor v. Capital

September 27-29

September 27

"The Organization of Labor: The Knights of Labor and the Strike of 1877"

"When the great railroad strike of July and August 1877 swept across the United States from the east coast to the Midwest, Pennsylvania was one of the major sites of conflict. In Pittsburgh, the railroad yards were set on fire after troops brought in from Philadelphia killed twenty strikers...Schuylkill County, hitherto the center of labor activism in the anthracite region, remained quiescent and played no part in the upheaval..."

Kevin Kenny, pg.277.

September 29 "Producerite Ideology, Republican Ideology and the First International

"American craftsmen like Parsons were also quite familiar with practical experiments in cooperative production and exchange, because the Knights of Labor and, on a much large scale, the Farmers Alliance were busy creating them all over the country in 1885. Through these efforts, confidence in working people and a new kind of hope that they could reconstruct the economy on a democratic basis. Thus the dream of a self-governing community of equal producers articulated by Parsons and the Chicago anarchists had something in common with the idea of a cooperative commonwealth embraced by labor reformers and agrarian populists in the 1880's."

James Green, pg.130

Discussion: Who was William Sylvis and the National Labor Union? Where did the eight hour leagues come from? How many of you have done physical labor for 12 hours? How long did you do it? Why was a 12 hour day standard in the pre-Civil War era? How did that change? What was Lincoln's promise in the Civil War? What was the Knights of Labor? Why were so many labor unions secret societies? How did this secrecy effect the union movement? Who was Terrence Powderly? What kind of

unionism did he believe in? When did the AFL emerge? How did they differ from the Kof L? Where were women in this organization? Who made the work rules? How did management change its attitudes about worker knowledge? What is a sympathetic strike? What contemporary examples can you think of in sympathetic strikes? Who was Johann Most? Do you think it made a difference that he could not speak English? Who were the immigrants who followed him? How did the depression contribute to his success? Who was Albert Parsons, August Spies and George Schilling?

Peter Dray, *There is Power in a Union: The Epic Story of Labor in America*, Ch 5-7;
David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor*, p. 1-57.

Douglas A. Blackmon, Green Cotton's World," in *Slavery by Another Name* ch. 3-4;
David Oshinsky, *Worse than Slavery: Parchment Farm and the Ordeal of Jim Crow Justice*, Ch. 2, 5-6.

WEEK 6 Race, Labor and Incarceration October 4-6

October 4 "Convict Labor, Race and Class Politics"

Bruce Nelson, *Divided We Stand: American Workers and the Struggle for Black Equality*.
Part 1.

October 6

Midterm examination

WEEK 7 October Break October 9th-October 19th.

WEEK 8 The Manager's Brain Under the Workman's Cap October 18-20

Movie, *Modern Times*

"The second distinctive feature of Taylor's thought was his concept of control. Control has been the essential feature of management throughout its history, but with Taylor it assumed unprecedented dimensions."

Harry Braverman, Labor and Monopoly Capital, pg. 90

Discussion: What was the managerial ethos? How was Taylorism a new form of managerial control? How was the manager's brain under the workman's cap? How did Taylor contribute to the change? What was the relationship between skills, technology and managerialism at the turn of the century? How do managers "taylorize" the workplace today? How did Ford Taylorize the workplace?

Movie, *Modern Times*

WEEK 9 New Unions from the IWW to the CIO

October 24-27

“Unions for Outsiders: the IWW, Farmworkers and Race Matters”

Robin Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe*, PART I.; Bruce Nelson, *Divided We Stand, Part 1, ch. 1; Part 2, ch. 4*

Irving Bernstein, *The Turbulent Years: A History of the American Worker, 1933-1941*;

Discussion: Plan to bring in your ideas for paper topics. You need to read one secondary source before doing your oral history. Not all immigrants went into the factories, some left for the fields and worked in deplorable conditions. We will discuss the Steinbeck novel, the drive toward representation and the depression.

“Depression and the Industrial Unions”

Bruce Nelson, *Divided We Stand: American Workers and the Struggle for Black Equality, Part I and begin Part II.*

WEEK 10 Post War Prosperity

November 1-3

Civil Rights, Union Rights

Discussion: Labor Legislation, the original labor legislation before the Wagner Act was merely a clause in a greater demand for economic recovery, what was section 7a? How did it change things? How does the Wagner Act fit into the overall New Deal? Who was excluded? Why were they excluded from the act? Was it racist? What about Post War legislation, was the Taft Hartley act racist? How did it change the power of labor? What was the Little Wagner Act of 1960, who was the target? When did service workers first unionize? What about public employees?

Josh Freeman, *Working Class New York*; Bruce Nelson, *Divided We Stand, finish.*

WEEK 11 Fields into Factories

November 8-10

Josh Freeman, *Working Class New York*

Miriam Powell, *The Union of Their Dreams*

Aaron Brenner, *Rebel Rank and File: Labor Militancy and Revolt During the Long Seventies*

WEEK 12 November 15-17

Post Industrialism
Be prepared to report on you paper topic.

WEEK 13 **November 22**

New Workers, New Labor Movement
Guest Speaker

WEEK 14 **November 29-December 1**

Changes in Global Capitalism

WEEK 15 **December 6**

Summary and Exchange

Papers are Due December 14th at Noon.