

History 263: American Labor History

Professor Eric J. Morser
Fall Semester 2021
MWF – 10:10-11:05
Tisch 302



Course Description

This Bridge Experience course explores the rich history of work and workers in America from the pre-colonial era through the contemporary age. We will focus on a number of themes including the lasting legacies of slavery, the evolution of capitalism and its impact on working men and women, the emergence of worker consciousness and labor protest, racial and ethnic tensions that divided the shop floor and undermined working-class unity, and how workers have transformed American culture and politics. Ultimately, the course provides us with an opportunity to explore how contests over commercial and political power, worker struggles for economic and social justice, and competing identities played key roles in the tale of American labor history that continue to shape the contemporary United States.

Semester Goals

- * Become familiar with theories of class development in an American context.
- * Explore how slavery and capitalism worked as economic systems to alter worker lives.
- * Understand how race, gender, ethnicity, and other identities shaped worker experience.
- * Grasp how different laborers have battled for economic and political power over time.
- * Comprehend how international realities have transformed workers in the United States.
- * Locate contemporary labor struggles in a broader historical context.
- * Articulate and defend your own arguments using evidence from lectures and readings.
- * Learn how to gather and share historical evidence with a general audience.
- * Gain experience working with web design tools.

Course Requirements and Grading

All students will attend lectures, keep up with assigned readings, be prepared to participate in class, take a midterm and final examination, write one paper, and contribute a project to the Saratoga Labor History Digital Archive.

I will calculate your final grade as follows:

- Attendance and participation:	25%
- First Paper (3-4 pages):	15%
- Midterm exam:	15%
- Labor History Digital Archive Project:	25%
- Final exam:	20%

I will say much more about each of these assignments in coming weeks. Please note that improvement throughout the semester will help your final grade in the course. Moreover, I will not accept any late papers and assignments this term. There are no exceptions to this rule. Finally, I will take class attendance every day. You are allowed two unexcused absences with no questions asked. Each ensuing absence, however, will lower your attendance and participation grade one-half step.

The Saratoga Labor History Digital Project

This course fulfills the college's Bridge Experience requirement. For this reason, we will not only talk about how understanding the history of American workers can help us grasp vital lessons about power, justice, and identity in the United States today. We will also have a chance to share what we learn about these issues with an audience beyond the classroom. To this end, we will work together on a semester-long research project related to the Saratoga Labor History Digital Archive, an ever evolving website created to preserve the city's labor history for local residents and scholars. This semester, we will work with the archives at the Saratoga Room in the Saratoga Springs Public Library to gather images and primary sources related to local working-class organizing and activism in the late nineteenth century. We will meet with representatives from the Saratoga Room and the John B. Moore Documentary Studies Collaborative (MDOCS) to learn about primary sources, web design, and how to present on-line material in a clear and concise way. In the end, our work on this project will give us a chance to wrestle with how best to share tales about Saratoga's labor past in a way that helps us understand better issues of power, justice, and identity in modern America.

Important Archive Dates

We will have several special meetings during the semester to learn how to choose topics, find primary documents, and master the skills necessary to post them on-line and manage the archive website.

- Friday, September 24 – We will meet with an archivist from the Saratoga Room to talk about available primary sources.
- Friday, October 8 – We will visit MDOCS to learn the nuts and bolts of how to post images on-line and manage the archive.

- Friday, October 22 – We will reserve course time to discuss our projects and how best to transform our historical dreams into digital realities.
- Monday, November 10 – We will present project status reports and discuss the rewards and challenges of finding sources and preparing them for the web.
- Wednesday, December 1, and Friday, December 3 – We will share our final projects with the class, your friends, and other people in town.
- Friday, December 10 – We will talk about the course’s larger themes; how studying American labor history can help us understand power, justice, and identity in America; and ponder ways to improve the archive.

Required Readings

The following books are required for the course and are available at The Skidmore Shop on the first floor of the Case College Center. You should complete all of the weekly reading by the date listed on the syllabus. Also note that readings marked with a star (*) are available on theSpring.

- Priscilla Murolo & A.B. Chitty, *From the Folks Who Brought You the Weekend: An Illustrated History of Labor in the United States* (New York: The New Press, 2018)
- Sophie White, *Voices of the Enslaved: Love, Labor, and Longing in French Louisiana* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019)
- Seth Rockman, *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009)
- James Green, *Death in the Haymarket: A Story of Chicago, the First Labor Movement, and the Bombing that Divided Gilded Age America* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2006)
- Kate Moore, *The Radium Girls: The Dark Story of America’s Shining Women* (Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, 2017)
- David Paul Kuhn, *The Hardhat Riot: Nixon, New York City, and the Dawn of the White Working-Class Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020)

Class Conduct

I expect you to be polite and attentive in class. I encourage you to ask questions at any time, but please raise your hand. Please do not talk to your friends, answer your cell phones, or text during our meetings. If you need to leave early for any reason, please take a seat near the door. If you disrupt the class in any way, I will ask you to leave. Following these short and sweet rules will make for a great semester.

Diversity and Inclusion

Skidmore College is committed to fostering a diverse and inclusive community in which members develop their abilities to live in a complex and interconnected world. Consistent with our educational mission, we recognize ourselves as a community that respects individual identities based on varying sociocultural characteristics such as race, ethnicity, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, national origin, first language, religious and spiritual tradition, age, ability, socioeconomic status and learning style. We strive to create a socially just world that honors the dignity and worth of each individual, and we seek to build a community centered on mutual respect and openness to ideas—one in which individuals value cultural and intellectual diversity and share the responsibility for creating a welcoming, safe and inclusive environment. We recognize that our community is most inclusive when all members participate to their full capacity in the spirited and sometimes challenging conversations that are at the center of the college's educational mission.

Accommodating Students with Disabilities and Providing Accessibility

If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need academic accommodation, you must formally request accommodation from Meg Hegener, Coordinator of Student Access Services (mhegener@skidmore.edu). You will also need to provide documentation which verifies the existence of a disability and supports your request. For further information, please call 580-8150 to contact Student Academic Services in Starbuck Center.

Sexual and Gender Based Misconduct: Title IX Statement

Skidmore College considers sexual and gender-based misconduct to be one of the most serious violations of the values and standards of the College. Unwelcome sexual contact of any form is a violation of students' personal integrity and their right to a safe environment and therefore violates Skidmore's values. Sexual and gender-based misconduct is also prohibited by federal and state regulations. Skidmore College faculty are committed to supporting our students and upholding gender equity laws as outlined by Title IX. If a student chooses to confide in a member of Skidmore's faculty or staff regarding an issue of sexual or gender-based misconduct, that faculty or staff member is obligated to tell Skidmore's Title IX Coordinator or Title IX Deputy Coordinator. The Title IX Coordinator or Deputy Coordinator will assist the student in connecting with all possible resources for support and options for reporting both on and off campus. Identities and details will be shared only with those who need to know to support the student and to address the situation through the college's processes. If the student wishes to confide in a confidential resource, the Counseling Center Staff, Health Services, and Victim Advocates (anonymous) are all options available. More information can be found at the Sexual and Gender-Based Misconduct website or by contacting the Title IX Coordinator, Joel Aure (jaure@skidmore.edu), 580-5708, or Deputy Coordinator for Student Affairs, Gabriela Melillo (gmelillo@skidmore.edu), 580-5022

Conscientious Religious Observance Policy

If religious observances cause absence from class, campus employment, athletic practice, and/or game days or necessitates accommodations, students should notify their faculty, coaches, or supervisors prior to the date(s) of their absence. New York State policy and Skidmore College policy mandates that students be allowed to make up academic work

and/or campus employment requirements without penalty. These accommodations should not reduce the overall expectations of a course nor unduly burden the student requesting accommodation. Faculty must permit students to take a makeup examination without any penalty if they have to miss an examination due to religious observances. Similarly, faculty must permit students to submit missed assignments by an agreed upon due date, without penalty. Although not required, the College highly recommends that students submit written notification of the pending religious observances at the start of the semester or at least one week before the date. As an option, students may use this form. Distributing the written notification during the first week of classes, campus employment, or the start of the athletic season gives students, faculty, coaches, or supervisors time to prepare for the absence. If a student, supervisor, coach, or faculty member feels the policy is being violated, they should contact the Dean of Faculty Office at 518-580-5705 (Palamountain 416), the Dean of Students Office at 518-580-5760 (Case Center 313), or Human Resources at 518-580-5800 (Barrett Center first floor).



Lecture and Reading Schedule

Week 1

Wednesday, September 8 Bridge Experience Introductions

Friday, September 10 The Power of Labor History

Weekly Reading

- None

Week 2

Monday, September 13 The World of Pre-Colonial Work

Wednesday, September 15 Indentured Dreams (and Nightmares)

Friday, September 17 The Origins of American Slavery

Weekly Reading

- Murolo and Chitty, *From the Folks Who Brought You the Weekend*, vii-18

Week 3

Monday, September 20 Discuss White, *Voices of the Enslaved*

Wednesday, September 22 The Meaning of Revolution for Workers

Friday, September 24 A Meeting with an Archivist

Weekly Reading

- Murolo and Chitty, *From the Folks Who Brought You the Weekend*, 19-42

- White, *Voices of the Enslaved*, all

Week 4

Monday, September 27 Discuss Rockman, *Scraping By*

Wednesday, September 29 Worker Parties and Slave Uprisings

Friday, October 1 A Short History of Saratoga Springs

Weekly Reading

- Murolo and Chitty, *From the Folks Who Brought You the Weekend*, 43-69

Week 5

Monday, October 4 The Work of Civil War

Wednesday, October 6 Slavery in All But Name

Friday, October 8 A Visit with MDOCS

Weekly Reading

- Murolo and Chitty, *From the Folks Who Brought You the Weekend*, 70-89

Week 6

Monday, October 11 NO CLASS (STUDY DAY)
Wednesday, October 13 Monopoly and Mayhem in Gilded Age America
Friday, October 15 Discuss Green, *Death in the Haymarket*

Weekly Reading

- Murolo and Chitty, *From the Folks Who Brought You the Weekend*, 90-112

Week 7

Monday, October 18 Populists and Radicals
Wednesday, October 20 The Labor of Empire
Friday, October 22 Sharing Project Ideas

Weekly Reading

- Murolo and Chitty, *From the Folks Who Brought You the Weekend*, 113-143
- Green, *Death in the Haymarket*, all

Week 8

Monday, October 25 Industrial Women at Work
Wednesday, October 27 Discuss Moore, *The Radium Girls*
Friday, October 29 MIDTERM EXAM

Weekly Reading

- Moore, *The Radium Girls*, all

Week 9

Monday, November 1 Depression and Desperation
Wednesday, November 3 The Labor of World War
Friday, November 5 Searching for Red Workers

Weekly Reading

- Murolo and Chitty, *From the Folks Who Brought You the Weekend*, 144-210

Week 10

Monday, November 8 Research Progress Reports
Wednesday, November 10 Civil Rights and Worker Rights
Friday, November 12 Labor and Liberation in the 1960s

Weekly Reading

- Murolo and Chitty, *From the Folks Who Brought You the Weekend*, 211-242

Week 11

Monday, November 15 Discuss Kuhn, *The Hardhat Riot*
Wednesday, November 17 A Conservative Crackdown on Labor
Friday, November 19 Immigrant Workers in America

Weekly Reading

- Murolo and Chitty, *From the Folks Who Brought You the Weekend*, 243-271

Week 12

Monday, November 22 Workers of the World (Finally) Unite!
Wednesday, November 24 NO CLASS (THANKSGIVING BREAK)
Friday, November 26 NO CLASS (THANKSGIVING BREAK)

Weekly Reading

- Murolo and Chitty, *From the Folks Who Brought You the Weekend*, 272-322

Week 13

Monday, November 29 Uneasy Allies in Deindustrial America
Wednesday, December 1 Presenting Your Work
Friday, December 3 Presenting Your Work

Weekly Reading

- Murolo and Chitty, *From the Folks Who Brought You the Weekend*, 323-353

Week 14

Monday, December 6 The Irony of Donald Trump
Wednesday, December 8 Imagining a Jobless World
Friday, December 10 Conclusions and Reflection

Weekly Reading

- Murolo and Chitty, *From the Folks Who Brought You the Weekend*, 354-365
- Andy Beckett, "Post-Work: The Radical Idea of a World Without Jobs" (2020)
(*)

Final Exam – TBA