

History 463/563

American Dreaming: The Politics of Work in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries

Spring 2014
Tues/Th. 4:00-5:20 pm
175 Lillis
Office Hours: Wed. 3:30-5:00 pm
or by appointment

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Consider the following items drawn from recent headlines:

- Pope Francis urges Catholics to say “thou shalt not” to an economy of exclusion and inequality,” and President Obama describes inequality as “the defining challenge of our time.”
- Over twenty states line up to vie for jobs that Boeing says it will send away from Seattle unless its union accepts the company’s final contract offer.
- “Fed-up interns are suing their former employers for back pay, sending shock waves across the business world and leading some companies to scrap their programs. Will this bring fairness to job training — or doom a legion of unemployed college students?”
- Wal-Mart announces it will start a \$10 million fund to encourage American manufacturing and spend \$50 billion over next decade on goods made in the United States.

In different ways each of these news items underscores the critical importance of work in our economic, political, and social lives. They also confirm the controversy that often accompanies our discussion of economic matters and the circumstances under which work is conducted.

Americans have long celebrated the personal and social virtues of work, with attainment of the American Dream through hard work ranking as one of our most powerful cultural aspirations. However, as the U. S. struggles to emerge from the worst economic recession since the Great Depression, important questions have emerged about the future of work and the viability of the American Dream. These questions surfaced dramatically during the brief tenure of the Occupy Wall Street movement and remain an integral part of our public discourse.

This course will examine the multiple forces that have shaped work and workplace relations in the United States over the past century. We will consider the varied strategies and tactics used by workers to enhance their bargaining power and exert social influence, with a

special emphasis on the role of labor unions. We will assess the impact of race, gender, and ethnic identity on working-class consciousness and probe the complex considerations that frame our thinking about social class. At the same time, we will explore the evolution of business approaches to workplace governance in response to the actions of workers, the involvement of government in overseeing labor relations, and the competitive demands of both the domestic and world economy. And we will review the ideological arguments that key social actors have made about the distribution of power and the exercise of authority in the workplace.

During the latter part of the course, we will assess how the advent of globalization has affected the politics of work. With the shift from a manufacturing to a service economy, a surge of immigration, and the flow of jobs and capital overseas, workers face new if not wholly unfamiliar challenges in their efforts to fulfill the promise of the American Dream.

We will use a variety of primary and secondary sources to assist us in our exploration of work, including historical monographs, fiction, film, iconography, and oral histories. These sources will enable us to consider work from a variety of perspectives and allow students to evaluate the relative merits of different kinds of historical materials.

Class Requirements

- I. 4-6 page essay due April 17***
- II. 5-7 page essay due May 15***
- III. Brief Reaction Papers (to be submitted each Thursday, except for weeks when exams are due). These are 1-page reactions to our weekly readings in which you will describe the major themes or arguments you found most significant in that week's assignment.***
- IV. Take-home final exam***

Academic Honesty

Academic honesty is essential to one's personal integrity and the integrity of the class. Plagiarism or other forms of cheating are serious offenses and are unacceptable.

Class Format

Tuesday's class will be largely done in a lecture style. However, I welcome your questions and comments and will often provide documents for us to review during class. A segment of Thursday's class will be reserved specifically for discussion. Film clips and videos will be used extensively throughout the term. I strongly encourage your active participation in discussions and encourage you to ask questions during the lectures.

Grading

1. 4-6 page essay	20%
2. 5-7 page essay	25%
3. Final paper	40%
4. Class participation and reaction essays	15%

*Late work will be penalized by one half-letter grade for each day it is overdue.

Graduate Students

Graduate students taking this course for credit as History 563 will write a 15-20 page paper due at the end of the term as their major class assignment. A prospectus outlining your topic will due by April 17. Graduate students will also meet separately with the instructor on several occasions during the term to discuss the weekly readings.

Readings

Course readings are available in a class packet that can be purchased at the UO Bookstore.

Books for the course are available at the UO Bookstore. They are:

- Thomas Bell: *Out of This Furnace*
- Jefferson Cowie: *Capital Moves: RCA's 70-Year Quest for Cheap Labor*
- Richard Sennett: *The Culture of the New Capitalism*

All class materials will also be placed on reserve at the Knight Library.

Class Schedule

Week 1: April 1, 3: The Politics of Work in the Progressive Era

Sanford Jacoby, from *Modern Manors: Introduction*, pp. 3-10, and "Changing Styles: Sears Roebuck," pp. 95-142.

Robert Bussel, "Business Without a Boss: The Columbia Conserve Company and Workers Control," pp. 417-443.

Week 2: April 8, 10: From the Progressive Era to the New Deal

Thomas Bell, *Out of This Furnace*, pp. 3-208.

Week 3: April 15, 17: Glory Days: Depression, New Deal, and the Rise of Industrial Unionism

Thomas Bell, *Out of This Furnace*, pp. 209-413.

First Essay Due: April 17**Week 4: April 22, 24: The Waning of the New Deal and World War II**

James Wolfinger, from *Philadelphia Divided: Race and Politics in the City of Brotherly Love*, pp. 113–173.

Amy Kesselman, from *Fleeting Opportunities*, pp. 33-63, 105-133.

Week 5: April 29, May 1: Mature Labor Relations and Cold War (I)

Thomas W. Evans, from *The Education of Ronald Reagan: The General Electric Years and the Untold Story of His Conversion to Conservatism*, pp. 37-56, 126-153, 224-236.

Elizabeth Fones-Wolf, from *Selling Free Enterprise: The Business Assault on Labor and Liberalism*, pp. 189-254.

Week 6: May 6, May 8: Mature Labor Relations and Cold War (II)

Jefferson Cowie, from *Capital Moves*, 1-99.

Week 7: May 13, May 15: New Faces, New Challenges, New Circumstances: The Sixties and Beyond (I)

John Hoerr: "Solidaritas at Harvard," from *American Prospect* (December 2001), "29 pages.

Leon Fink: "Union Power, Soul Power: The Story of 1199B and Labor's Search for a Southern Strategy," from "*Southern Changes*," (1983), 18 pages.

Marshall Ganz, "The Great Delano Grape Strike (1965-1966)," from *Sometimes David Wins*, 119-166.

May 15: Second essay due

Week 8: May 20, May 22: New Faces, New Challenges, New Circumstances (II)

Cowie, *Capital Moves*, 100-201.

Week 9: May 27, May 29: The Transformation of Work

Richard Sennett, *The Culture of the New Capitalism*, 1-82.

Week 10: June 2, June 4: Back to the Future: The Politics of Work in the Twenty-First Century

Sennett, *Culture of the New Capitalism*, 83-197.