

History 410/510
Class Actions:
U. S. Labor and Working-Class History, 1865-1945

Spring 2020
 Tues/Th. 4:00-5:20 pm
 Fenton 105
 Office Hours: Wed. 3:30-5:00 pm

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Consider the following recent headlines:

“The Age of Working-Class Discontent”

“US Millennials Feel More Working Class Than Previous Generations”

“America’s Wealth Gap Is Bigger Than Ever”

“U.S. Income Inequality Surges to Highest Level in 50 Years”

“Should Billionaires Even Exist?”

As these headlines suggest, issues related to class and inequality have returned to our mainstream political vocabulary following an extended hibernation. Coinciding with this renewed focus on class, record levels of income and wealth inequality have generated much public discussion and emerged as a major issue in the closely watched 2020 U. S. presidential election.

Class can be an elusive concept, one that is variously defined on the basis of income, occupation, education, or cultural practice. Class can also be a controversial social term or label. As R. H. Tawney, a twentieth-century British economist, historian, and public intellectual once famously remarked, “the word ‘class’ is fraught with unpleasing associations, so that to linger upon it is apt to be interpreted as the symptom of a perverted mind and a jaundiced spirit.”

Tawney’s observation has special meaning in the U. S. context. In a society that has considered itself as predominately “middle class” and touted its success at encouraging economic mobility, the term class carries at least some of the social baggage described by Tawney. And over the past four decades, we have witnessed a hollowing out of the middle class due to a host of converging economic and political forces. This process has evoked widespread concern about the rise of inequality and fears that the U. S. is increasingly becoming a class society.

Matters of social class, inequality, the status of workers, and what came to be called the “labor question” occupied center stage during the stirring and pivotal period we will cover in this course: the eighty years between the end of the war against slavery (the Civil War) and the war

to defeat fascism (World War II). As the U. S. moved through a series of profound economic, political, and cultural transitions, workers and labor organizations raised important questions about the distribution of power in the workplace and the implications of these new social arrangements for American democracy. This course aims to enhance our understanding of the U. S. working class during this formative period by examining not only the experience and activities of workers but also their engagement with other influential social forces and social actors.

Here are some of the issues we will consider over the next ten weeks:

- The rise of the corporation, the union movement, and the emergence of modern management
- The challenges of attempting to organize one of the most heterogeneous working classes in the western industrial world (e.g., a working class increasingly comprised of immigrants, women, and people of color) and the various strategies used by workers to improve their economic and social status
- The implications of frequent and often violent social conflict among workers, business interests, other social focuses opposed to working-class organization
- Major reform initiatives inspired by social movements and implemented by government intervention that sought to protect workers and democratize the workplace
- The evolution of new business approaches to workplace governance in response to the actions of workers
- The role of law, culture, and ideology in shaping labor relations and the politics of work

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

Class Requirements

I. Essay I: 4-6 pages due April 16

II. Essay II: 5-7 pages due May 21

III. *Brief Reaction Papers (to be submitted each Thursday, except for weeks when exams are due). These are one-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. I will provide a separate sheet explaining my expectations for the reaction papers at the first class.*

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. I strongly encourage your active participation in discussions and welcome your asking questions or making comments during the lectures.

Grading

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

***Missing more than three classes will lower your participation grade by two letters.**

***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 510 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 16. 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*
- Erasmo Gamboa: *Mexican Labor and World War II*

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

Week 1: March 31, April 2: “The U. S. Working Class Following the Civil War”

Readings: “Booker T. Washington’s Atlanta Exposition Speech (1895),” accessed at <file:///G:/labor%20history%20nineteenth%20century/booker%20t%20washington%20atlanta%20exposition%20speech.pdf>

“W. E. B. DuBois Critiques Booker T. Washington,” accessed at <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/40>

Week 2: April 7, April 9: “The Politics of Labor in the Gilded Age: (I)”

Thomas G. Andrews: “The Miner’s Freedom” in Leon Fink (ed.), *Major Problems in the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era*, pp. 106-114.

Week 3: April 14, April 16: “The Politics of Labor in The Gilded Age (II)”

- Readings: William Graham Sumner, “What Classes Owe to Each Other” (1883)
- Walter Rauschenbusch, from “Christianity and the Social Crisis” (1907)
- **First essay due on April 16**

Week 4: April 21, April 23: “The Concern of All”: The Knights of Labor, the American Federation of Labor, and the Surge of Populism”

Susan Levine, “Labor’s True Woman: Domesticity and Equal Rights in the Knights of Labor,” *Journal of American History*, Vol 70, No. 2 (Sept. 1983), 323-339.

Week 5: April 28, April 30: “The River Ran Red: Labor Conflict in the Late Nineteenth Century”

James Green, “Remembering Haymarket: Chicago’s Labor Martyrs and Their Legacy,” in James Green, *Taking History to Heart: The Power of the Past in Building Social Movements*, pp. 120-144.

Week 6: May 5, May 7: “Reform 1.0”: The “Labor Question in the Progressive Era”

Mary Van Kleeck, “Working Hours of Women in Factories,” *Charities and Commons* 17 (1906-07), pp. 13-21, accessed at <http://tenant.net/Community/LES/hours10.html>

Robert Bussel, from *Business History Review* 71 (Autumn 1997): “Business Without a Boss: The Columbia Conserve Company and Workers Control,” pp. 417-443.

Week 7: May 12, May 14: “The Labor Question: Wobblies and War”

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

Week 8: May 19, May 21: The Empire Strikes Back: The 1920s

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

Second essay due on May 21

Week 9: May 26, May 28: Reform 2.0: The Great Depression, New Deal, and the Rise of Industrial Unionism

Reading: Erasmo Gamboa, *Mexican Labor and World War II*, pp. 1-73.

Week 10: June 2, June 4: “Back to the Future: World War II, The Waning of the New Deal, and the Cold War”

Gamboa, *Mexican Labor and World War II*, pp. 74-131.