

**LER 458Y: History of Work in America**  
**Fall 2012**

**Professor Jill Jensen**

LER 458Y, “History of Work in America,” provides an overview of the key events that have shaped the process and experience of work in the United States since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As a class, we will discuss the ways in which both workers and employers have shaped work relationships in this country. The aim is to help students think about historical transformations in the concept of “work,” but also changing perceptions about workers/employees, labor unions, managers, and employers.

Major topics include the evolving demographics of the American workforce; organization and aims of labor unions and other collective enterprises relating to employment—whether composed of laborers or business people; a view of working conditions and their determinants; differences between private and public employment and a look at unionism in each case; the role of the state in shaping labor markets and regulating employment; and above all—quite simply—discussion of how people have worked and the opportunities work provides for viable livelihoods.

<b><u>Course Requirements:</u></b>	<b><u>percent of final grade</u></b>
1. Class participation (includes in-class discussion and group projects)	15 percent 100 pts.
2. Two midterms (worth 15 percent each)	30 percent 300 pts.
3. Preliminary paper assignments (3 short papers worth 10 percent each)	30 percent 300 pts.
4. Final Essay (12-15 page)	30 percent 250 pts.
Final essay, references	<u>50 pts.</u>
<b><i>TOTAL</i></b>	<b><i>100 percent 1000 pts.</i></b>

**Explanation of these requirements:**

Students are required to attend daily seminars. Each week we will read a section of a book and/or a brief article highlighting core topics in the history of labor, work, and employment. Class discussion will be devoted to the readings and their surrounding historical contexts. When possible, discussions will draw comparisons with current events. History, and especially the history of work and employment, offers more than mere stories about the past. It sheds light on important sociological, cultural, and economic relationships. It also exposes the rationale behind laws set in place to regulate work (perhaps best described as the output effort) and remunerative employment (in reference to resulting economic exchange).

Students will be required to write a final research paper, due at the end of the semester and worth 25 percent of the final grade. There will be three smaller essays, worth 10 percent of the final grade each, offering a chance to write parts of what will become the longer writing assignment.

The papers will address one of many available questions/ comparisons, to be announced the third week of instruction.

**Research paper stages (including graded writing assignments):**

- Paper assignment handout distributed on Tuesday, September 11
- First essay is due Thursday, September 20
- Second essay is due Thursday, October 18
- Third essay is due Thursday, November 29
- Final essay is due during final exam week.

You will receive significant feedback from the instructor on the three early paper assignments. The point is to revise and polish these separate sections and link them in a longer expository essay. By way of definition, this is an essay “that requires the student to investigate an idea, evaluate evidence, expound on the idea, and set forth an argument concerning that idea in a clear and concise manner.” If desired, the instructor will read and comment on multiple drafts, even of the final paper. The aim is to hone writing skills and learn how to utilize available data to develop a strong, comprehensive argument.

**Grading scale**

A	100-93.0%	C+	79.9-78.0%
A-	92.9-90.0%	C	77.9-70.0%
B+	89.9-88.0%	D	69.9-60.0%
B	87.9-83.0%	F	59.9-0%
B-	82.9-80.0%		

**Exam and assignment policy:** All students will be expected to take the two midterm exams at the dates and times assigned. The two midterms will be offered, one in class on Tuesday, October 9, and the second as a take home exam, distributed December 4 and due Thursday, December 6. There is no final exam, but final papers will be due during the final exam week.

Only illness, personal emergency, or documented university activity will be accepted as excuses for not taking the midterm exams when scheduled and handing in assignments when due. Students need to notify the instructor of any conflicts **prior** to the exam or the assignment dates **and accompanying documentation is required.** Unreported absences from an exam will be recorded as a zero for that exam or paper.

**Academic Integrity:** Any instance of academic dishonesty (as defined in the student handbook) will result in failure of the course. Violations will also be reported to the appropriate University authorities for further action.

**Attendance policy:** You are expected to be in attendance for each class throughout the semester. See University Faculty Senate Policy: (<http://www.psu.edu/ufs/policies/42-00.html>) for university-wide attendance policies.

**Note to students with disabilities:** Penn State welcomes students with disabilities into the University's educational programs. If you have a disability-related need for reasonable academic adjustments in this course, contact the Office for Disability Services (ODS) at 814-863-1807 (V/TTY). For further information regarding ODS, please visit the Office for Disability Services Web site at <http://equity.psu.edu/ods/>.

In order to receive consideration for course accommodations, you must contact ODS and provide documentation (see the documentation guidelines at <http://equity.psu.edu/ods/guidelines/documentation-guidelines>). If the documentation supports the need for academic adjustments, ODS will provide a letter identifying appropriate academic adjustments. Please share this letter and discuss the adjustments with your instructor as early in the course as possible. You must contact ODS and request academic adjustment letters at the beginning of each semester.

**Required texts:**

David Von Drehle, *Triangle: The Fire That Changed America*  
Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor*  
Jefferson Cowie, *Capital Moves: RCA's 70-Year Quest for Cheap Labor*

**In addition to these texts there will be brief articles posted on ANGEL.**

**WEEKLY READINGS AND DISCUSSION TOPICS**

**August 27-31**

**Week 1: Course introduction: free soil... and free men and free women!  
A nation of slaves, immigrants, and workers**

August 28

Tuesday: “Give Me Liberty in Free Labor”: The heartache of a country and the promise of forty acres and a mule

August 30

Thursday: Divided Societies: Post-Civil War capitalist production and national ideologies

**September 3- 7**

**Week 2: Gilded Age USA, 1865-1896: Industrialization and *the* “labor question” in American society**

Reading: See ANGEL, Hallgrimsdottir and Benoit, “From Wage Slaves to Wage Workers.”

September 4

Tuesday: Labor’s Wars and Labor’s Radicalisms: Defining workers’ collective goals—the Knights of Labor of America and “producerist” versus “consumerist” labor politics

September 6

Thursday: Gender, Work, and the Burdens of Manliness

**September 10- 14**

**Week 3: The Progressive Era: A revolt of conscience—the poverty of working Americans**

Reading: Von Drehle, *Triangle: The Fire That Changed America*, p. 1-115

September 11

Tuesday: The Fire that Changed America—Part I: Work, struggle, and civic reform

**Hand out on guidelines for writing assignments**

September 13

Thursday: “A Strike at the Ballot Box”: Business reaction to labor standoff and AFL push back

**September 17- 21**

**Week 4: Expanding U.S. reform efforts/ perfecting U.S. management**

Reading: Von Drehle, *Triangle: The Fire That Changed America*, p. 116-258

September 18

Tuesday: The Fire that Changed America—Part II: Decent Work: Equality, Justice, and Work

September 20

Thursday: U.S. Business and the Science of Management: Training workers, and organizing work itself through planning

**FIRST 3 PAGE ESSAY DUE by the end of the day (11:59 pm)**

**September 24 - 28**

**Week 5: WWI, wartime work, and organized labor confronts 1920s “Americanism”**

Reading: See ANGEL, Clayton Sinyai, “Schools of Democracy: A Political History of the American Labor Movement,” (selection)

September 25

Tuesday: Defining Industrial Democracy: WWI

September 27

Thursday: Post-war Welfare Capitalism: Work, employment, and the poor and the rich in 1920s America

**October 1 - 5**

**Week 6: The onset of the Great Depression (1929), the early New Deal (1933–1935), and the rise of the CIO**

Reading: Lichtenstein, *State of the Union*, p. 1-92

October 2

Tuesday: The Great Financial Crash: What to do about it?

October 4

Thursday: Life in an Era of Joblessness: New Deal works programs and recovery goals

**October 8 – 12**

**Week 7: Early New Deal only**

**October 9**

**Tuesday: FIRST MIDTERM**

October 11

Thursday: “Sit Down for Your Rights!”: Flint Sit-Down Strikes, the Automobile Workers of America (UAW), and the CIO

**October 15 - 19**

**Week 8: The postwar labor settlement: Taft-Hartley Act, full employment, and business support for “right to work” laws**

Reading: Lichtenstein, *State of the Union*, p. 98-177

October 16

Tuesday: Work, Equality, and War: WW II, the Bracero (guestworker) Program, and “American” Labor

October 18

Thursday: Post-war, Taft Hartley, and the National Right to Work Committee

**October 22 - 26**

**Week 9: The early Cold War: 1950s capital migration, union power, and social change**

Reading: Cowie, *Capital Moves*, p. 1-72

October 23

Tuesday: *Capital Moves*, from “Industrial Camden” to Bloomington, IN— Radio Corporation of America and plant relocation

Things to think about reading *Capital Moves*

1. From the U.S. regional division of labor to the international division of labor: unending labor competition
2. The incredible influence of U.S. corporations, RCA and the “Color Television Capital of the World”

SECOND 3 PAGE ESSAY DUE by the end of the day (11:59 pm)

October 25

Thursday: Union Corruption: *On the Waterfront*

**October 29 – November 2**

**Week 10: Organized and unorganized workers, the 1960s**

Reading: Cowie, *Capital Moves*, p. 73-151

October 30

Tuesday: Memphis, TN and labor in the American South: Civil Rights and Economic Justice

November 1

Thursday: Public unions, equal pay, and equal work rights in the 1960s

**November 5 - 9**

**Week 11: Workers, the Civil Rights movement, and “identity politics”**

Reading: Lichtenstein, *State of the Union*, p. 178-211

November 6

Monday: “Too Glamorous to Be Considered Workers,” pink collar activism in 1960s America

November 8

Friday: The Struggle in the Fields: The United Farmworkers, civil rights, and workers’ justice

**November 12- 16**

**Week 12: A new U.S. employment geography: racial and gender integration**

Reading: Cowie, *Capital Moves*, p. 152-209

November 13

Tuesday: Rights consciousness and the American workplace

November 15

Thursday: A “collective sadness”—the 1970s and the end of the working-class

**November 19 -23 Thanksgiving Break**

**November 26 - 30**

**Week 14: Hard Times for unions, yet new frontiers for workers in the 1980s**

Reading for the week: Lichtenstein, *State of the Union*, p. 212-276

November 27

Tuesday: The Distance Between You and Me: Business and Jobs in the 1980s

November 29

Thursday: Workers Health and Safety: *Silkwood*

**THIRD 3 PAGE ESSAY DUE by the end of the day (11:59 pm)**

**December 3- 7**

**Week 15: New workers, new managers, and high technology America**

December 4

Tuesday: The Intelligent Worker: The thinker, technology, and the work Americans do

**TAKE HOME MIDTERM, DUE BY THURSDAY, DECEMBER 6 (11:59 pm)**

December 6

Thursday: NO CLASS

**December 10 - 14**

**Week 16: U.S. Workers and the global labor market**

December 11

Tuesday: Rethinking Hand, Brain, and the Work People Do: Skill, wages, and the “transformational junctures in the history of work in America”

December 13

Thursday: The past and future of work in America: Labor as national and international

**Week 17: Final Exams Week—**

**FINAL PAPERS DUE Wednesday, December 19**