

NYU Gallatin School of Individualized Study

FIRST-UG 424: Work, Freedom, and Social Change
First Year Writing Seminar
 Fall 2021

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[room]
 TTh 8:00-9:15

Description

How have workers created social and political change in the United States? What counts as work? What can workers do today to maintain and build power? This course explores these three thematic questions through an exploration of the history of workers and their organizations in American history after emancipation. We will explore the history and meaning of class and work and the relationship of work to the state through reading, discussion, and film. We will pay special attention to the ways in which these understandings of class are shaped by gender. Readings include David von Drehle, Bethany Moreton, and Beverly Gage.

Learning goals

The primary purpose of this course is to teach you how to write and think like college students. More specifically, the goals of this course are:

- To familiarize students with ideas about how people have worked, how they have imagined freedom, and how they have changed society in the United States.
- To think especially about how gender has shaped, and been shaped by, work.
- To sharpen students' analytic and critical thinking skills
- To practice students' academic writing

Required texts

In general, books in which we will be reading at least 100 pages are listed below, are available for purchase at the NYU Bookstore. Shorter readings are available for download from Brightspace and listed that way in the course schedule. If you are concerned about spending too much on books, I encourage you to (a) shop around for used books, and (b) consider relying on the library for books of which we are reading only excerpts. I encourage you to talk to me if you have concerns, but I strongly encourage you to read on paper.

- Beverly Gage, *The Day Wall Street Exploded: A Story of America in Its First Age of Terror* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). ISBN 978-0199759286
- David von Drehle, *Triangle: The Fire That Changed America* (New York: Grove, 2004). ISBN 978-0802141514
- Bethany Moreton, *To Serve God and Wal-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009). ISBN 978-0674057401

- Lane Windham, *Knocking on Labor's Door: Union Organizing in the 1970s and the Roots of a New Economic Divide* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017). ISBN 978-1-4696-5477-5
- Toni Gilpin, Gary Isaac, Dan Letwin, and Jack McKivigan, *On Strike for Respect: The Clerical and Technical Workers' Strike at Yale University, 1984-85* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994). ISBN 978-0252064548
- In addition to the books above, please buy a stapler. All assignments that are more than one page must be stapled together, so you should take an opportunity now to buy one. If you will print at a printing station, consider a small, light stapler you can keep in your bag.

Assignments and grading

Writing Assignment 1: How have workers made social and political change? – 20%

Using the readings in the class so far (that is, through to October 14), write a five-page essay about how workers in the United States have made social and political change. Make sure you talk about the themes we've discussed in class. Make your own argument, backed up by facts and arguments from the readings. You may, but need not, refer to readings from outside of class. Make sure cite your sources: that is, say where you know things from, and where you got your ideas.

- A first draft is due to the classmates in your workshopping group on Sunday, October 17.
- You may optionally submit a second draft to me (on paper) in class by Thursday, October 21. If you chose to submit a draft, you must have first made changes based on the comments you got from your classmates.
- A final version is due (on paper) in class on Thursday, October 28.

Writing Assignment 2: What counts as work, and why does it matter? – 20%

Using the readings in the class so far (that is, through November 9), write a five-page essay *either* about what counts and has counted as "work" and "skilled work," and why that matters *or* supporting or opposing wages for housework. Make sure you talk about the themes we've discussed in class. Make your own argument, backed up by facts and arguments from the readings. You may, but need not, refer to readings from outside of class. Make sure cite your sources: that is, say where you know things from, and where you got your ideas.

- A first draft is due to the classmates in your workshopping group on Tuesday, November 9.
- You may optionally submit a second draft to me (on paper) in class by Thursday, November 18. If you chose to submit a draft, you must have first made changes based on the comments you got from your classmates.
- A final version is due (on paper) in class on Tuesday, November 23.

Writing Assignment 3: What can we learn from 1984-86? – 25%

The Yale strike in *On Strike for Respect* and the Hormel strike in "American Dream" both happened at about the same time, and both these works contain arguments by labor

intellectuals about what the labor movement should do in the face of Reagan and what we now call the neoliberal assault on labor. Write an argumentative essay answering the question, “What can we learn from the Yale and Hormel strikes, and the works coming out of them, after 37 years?” You can choose to answer that question in one of a variety of ways, including (but not limited to) focusing on the labor market, on feminism and the role of women in unions and the workforce, on the status of the labor movement, or on the role of intellectuals in working-class politics. Most importantly, you will make an argument and defend it with evidence. Make reference not only to *On Strike for Respect* and “American Dream” but also the other books we’ve read; you will also need to do some outside research for this paper. Your paper should be about 1500 words and include footnotes to show me your sources.

- A first draft is due to the classmates in your workshopping group on Sunday, December 12.
- A final version is due to me by email and on paper by noon on Thursday, December 16.

Workshopping your classmates’ papers – 9%

Each paper you write will be workshopped with other students. Then, when you turn in your final drafts, you’ll also give a grade to the students who helped you with your paper. How helpful were their comments? Your work helping your classmates will be worth 3% for each paper, for a total of 9%.

Reading responses – 10%

Each day for which you have a reading assignment, you will also bring to class a short (approximately 250 words, or one page) reading response. This *isn’t* a paper, and it won’t be graded as a paper. It’s a way to make you think about the reading before you come to class, to get your intellectual juices flowing, and to practice writing. In each reading response, you should think about the argument of what you have just read and assess its success. These papers will be graded check-plus (10/10), check (9/10), or check-minus (8/10). This means that the only way you can get less than an 8 out of the 10 possible points in this section is by failing to turn in your reading responses.

Class participation and discussion – 16%

The purpose of class participation is not only to show that you have done the reading assigned, but also to help yourself and your classmates better understand the readings and the issues discussed in them. In addition, class participation provides practice for the skill of engaging in honest, respectful, and thoughtful intellectual discussion. The point of discussion is quality, not quantity; you don’t get points each time you open your mouth, and the person who talks once but says something brilliant that moves the discussion forward is more appreciated than the person who talks every five minutes but never says anything useful. That said, you can’t participate well if you never participate, so you can’t be silent; if I don’t know the sound of your voice by the end of the term, you’re unlikely to get a good class participation grade. Likewise, you can’t participate if you’re not in class, so please prioritize attendance. (See the “course policies” section below for more on the attendance policy.)

Course schedule

Each day below is listed with readings and assignments. In each class session, we will talk about the readings listed for that day, which means it is essential that you have completed that day's reading before class. On days marked "Workshopping" your reading assignment is the papers by your classmates for which you are responsible. On days with no reading listed, we will continue the discussion of the reading of the previous session.

Introduction – Thinking about work, class, and freedom

Thurs., Sept. 2 – No reading before class. In class we'll talk about:

- National Labor Relations Act, "Findings and Policies" section (29 U.S.C. §151) [on Brightspace]
- "Solidarity Forever," by Ralph Chapin (1915) [on Brightspace]

Tues., Sept. 7 – No class (Rosh Hashanah)

Thurs., Sept. 9 – Different ideas about work

- Genesis 1-4 (Creation, Eden, and Cain and Abel) on work [on Brightspace]
- Karl Marx, "Wage Labour and Capital" (1847, edited 1891), in Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: Norton, 1978), 203-217. [on Brightspace]

Tues., Sept. 14 – Emancipation

- Eric Foner, *Nothing but Freedom: Emancipation and its Legacy* (1983; Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 74-110. [on Brightspace]
- Tera W. Hunter, *To Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 21-43, 74-97. [on Brightspace]
- Talitha LeFlouria, "'The Hand that Rocks the Cradle Cuts Cordwood': Exploring Black Women's Lives and Labor in Georgia's Convict Camps, 1865-1917," *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 8 no. 3 (2011): 47-63. [on Brightspace]

Please note that there is a graphic description of a sexual assault on page 51 of the LeFlouria article. You can skip this page without decreasing your comprehension of the article.

Unit 1: Workers, Power, and the State

Thurs., Sept. 16 – No class (Yom Kippur)

Tues., Sept. 21 – "Legislation"

- Jeremy Brecher, *Strike!* (Boston: South End Press, 1997), 13-37. [on Brightspace]
- David Montgomery, "Workers' Control of Machine Production in the 19th Century," in *Workers Control in America: Studies in the History of Work, Technology, and Labor Struggles* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 9-31. [on Brightspace]

- Julie Greene, *Pure and Simple Politics: The American Federation of Labor and Political Activism, 1881-1917* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 71-104. [on Brightspace]

Thurs., Sept. 23 – State and Labor

- William E. Forbath, *Law and the Shaping of the American Labor Movement* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 59-97. [on Brightspace]
- Nancy Woloch, *Muller v. Oregon: a Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's Press, 1996), 5-57. [on Brightspace]

Tues., Sept. 28 – Violence

- Beverly Gage, *The Day Wall Street Exploded: A Story of America in Its First Age of Terror* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1-122. If you have time and interest, you should read or at least skim the remainder of the book.

Thurs., Sept 30 –

- Discussion of Gage continued

Tues., Oct. 5 – Who has access to what sort of politics?

* Unless it's raining, we'll meet at the corner of Washington Place and Greene Street.

- David von Drehle, *Triangle: The Fire That Changed America* (New York: Grove, 2004). Read as much of the book as you can get through, but pay special attention to pages 1-86 and 194-268.

Thurs., Oct. 7 –

- Discussion of von Drehle continued

Tues., Oct. 12 – No class (legislative day; attend your Monday classes)

Thurs., Oct. 14 – The 1930s

- Robert H. Zieger and Gilbert J. Gall, *American Workers, American Unions*, 3rd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 66-103. [on Brightspace]
- Bruce Nelson, "'Pentecost' on the Pacific': Maritime Workers and Working-Class Consciousness in the 1930's," *Political Power and Social Theory* 4 (1984): 141-182. [on Brightspace]
- Melvyn Dubofsky, "Not So 'Turbulent Years': Another Look at America in the 1930s" in *Hard Work: The Making of Labor History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 130-150. [on Brightspace]

Tues., Oct. 19 – Workshopping

** Email your draft paper to your group by Sunday, October 17. You and your group can decide the time by which you need to receive each other's papers in order to have read and commented on them by class on Tuesday. **

Weds., Oct. 20 – Optional screening of *The Pajama Game*. Details to come.

Thurs., Oct. 21 – Gender and Fordism

*** Optional second draft due to me if you want comments. ***

- George Abbott and Stanley Donen, directors and producers, *The Pajama Game* (1957). [Film linked on Brightspace.]

Unit 2: Gender, Skill, and Work

Mon., Oct. 25 – Optional screening of *Salt of the Earth*. Details to come.

Tues., Oct. 26 – Salt of the Earth

- Herbert Biberman, director, *Salt of the Earth* (1954). [Film linked on Brightspace.]

Thurs. Oct. 28 – Work and Gender in the 19th Century

*** First paper due in class. ***

- Jeanne Boydston, *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 120-163. [on Brightspace.]
- Christina Burr, “That Coming Curse – The Incompetent Compositress’: Class and Gender Relations in the Toronto Typographical Union during the Late Nineteenth Century,” *Canadian Historical Review* 74, no. 3 (September 1993): 344-366. [on Brightspace]
- Ava Baron, “An ‘Other’ Side of Gender Antagonism at Work: Men, Boys, and the Remasculinization of Printers’ Work, 1830-1920,” in Ava Baron, ed., *Work Engendered: Toward a New History of American Labor* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), 47-69. [on Brightspace]

Tues. Nov. 2 – Care Work

- Selma James, “The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community” (1972), “The Family Allowance Campaign: Tactics and Strategy” (1973), “Women’s Unwaged Work: The Heart of the Informal Sector” (1991), “The Milk of Human Kindness” (2002), in *Sex, Race and Class—The Perspective of Winning: A Selection of Writings 1952-2011* (Oakland, Calif.: PM Press, 2012), 43-59, 86-91, 218-229. [on Brightspace]
- Silvia Federici, “Wages Against Housework” (1975), in *Revolution at Zero Point: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (Oakland, Calif.: PM Press, 2012), 15-27. [on Brightspace]

Thurs. Nov. 4 – Family at Work

- Bethany Moreton, *To Serve God and Wal-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009), 1-144.

Tues., Nov. 9 –

- Discussion of Moreton continued

Thurs., Nov. 11 – Workshopping

** Email your draft paper to your group by Tuesday, November 9. You and your group can decide the time by which you need to receive each other's papers in order to have read and commented on them by class on Thursday. **

Unit 3: The Labor Movement under Neoliberalism

Tues., Nov. 16 – Neoliberalism I

- David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1990), 125-172. [on Brightspace]

Thurs., Nov. 18 – Neoliberalism II

*** Optional second draft of second paper due to me if you want comments. ***

- Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Zone Books, 2015), 17-46. [on Brightspace]

Tues., Nov 23 – What happened to the labor movement?

*** Second paper due in class. ***

- Lane Windham, *Knocking on Labor's Door: Union Organizing in the 1970s and the Roots of a New Economic Divide* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 15-81, 128-151, 178-192, 195-197.

Thurs., Nov. 26 – No class – Thanksgiving Day

Tues., Nov. 30 – The Yale/Local 34 Strike

Toni Gilpin, Gary Isaac, Dan Letwin, and Jack McKivigan, *On Strike for Respect: The Clerical and Technical Workers' Strike at Yale University, 1984-85* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

Weds., Dec. 1 – Optional screening of *American Dream*. Details to come.

Thurs., Dec. 2 – The Hormel/Local P-9 Strike

- Barbara Kopple, director, *American Dream* (1990). [Film on Brightspace.]

Tues., Dec. 7 – Whither the Labor Movement?

- Joe Burns, *Reviving the Strike* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Ig Publishing, 2011), 11-28, 71-93, 151-170. [on Brightspace]
- Ruth Milkman, "Immigrant Workers and Labor's Future," in Daniel Katz and Richard Greenwald, eds., *Labor Rising: The Past and Future of Working People in America* (New York: New Press, 2012): 240-252. [on Brightspace]
- Rich Yeselson, "Fortress Unionism," *Democracy* no. 29 (Summer 2013), 68-81. [on Brightspace]
- Response to Yeselson: Douglas Williams, "A Fortress with No Soldiers: The Limited Effectiveness of "Fortress Unionism" in the South," *TCF Blog*, 24 June 2013. [on Brightspace]

- Gabriel Winant, “Who Works for the Workers?” *n+1* no. 26 (Fall 2016), 91-104. [on Brightspace]

Thurs., Dec. 9 –

- Continued discussion of Burns, Milkman, Yeselson, Williams, and Winant.

Tues., Dec 14 – Workshopping

** Email your draft paper to your group by Sunday, December 12. You and your group can decide the time by which you need to receive each other’s papers in order to have read and commented on them by class on Tuesday. **

Thurs., Dec. 16 – Papers due by email *and* on paper to my fifth-floor mailbox by 5pm.

Course policies

Attendance. As described elsewhere in this syllabus, participation in class discussion is a key thing we do in this class. You can’t participate if you’re not in class. Therefore, attendance is required. Frequent absences will be factored into your participation grade. That said, some absences are legitimate and unavoidable, and it is up to you to decide what those are. It is always better to come than not to come, but if an absence is unavoidable, please email me ahead of time and I will excuse your absence. In ordinary circumstances, I don’t need to see a doctor’s note; an email that you are sick will suffice. Absences for religious observance are always permissible, but you should let me know what days you’ll be out. No matter why you miss a class, it’s your responsibility to find out what happened during it, so you should ask a classmate for notes.

Electronic devices. Electronic devices can sometimes help and sometimes hinder active participation. They can be resources for looking things up; they might have your text on them; and they can be essential to students with disabilities. But they can also be distracting to you and to your classmates (and your professor!). Texting, IMing, or otherwise playing on your devices shows a lack of respect for the others in the room. (So too, for that matter, do things that do not require electronics, like reading the newspaper or sitting at the table reading a novel.) While you are welcome to have your computer or other device for class related work while in class, please refrain from checking your email, IMing, texting, playing games, tweeting, or otherwise using your screens for non-class purposes. The general rule is, Don’t be rude.

Academic integrity. As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the university. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website (<http://gallatin.nyu.edu/about/bulletin/undergrad/policies/integrity.html>).

Beyond the above boilerplate warning, the best rule is: When in doubt, cite. This admonition is not just about following the rules. To be convincing, arguments must be based in fact, and in order to assess facts the reader must know from whence they came. Academic dishonesty also robs you of the education you're here for; if you don't do the work you're supposed to do, you don't get the educational experiences you're supposed to get. If you have questions about what constitutes academic dishonesty or plagiarism, ask.

Deadlines and extensions. Written work must be turned in on time. Reading responses will not be accepted late under any circumstances; all other work that is turned in late will be marked down a third of a grade per day; that is, a paper turned in a day late that would otherwise have gotten an A- will get a B+. If a legitimate delay is unavoidable, you can ask for an extension, but you must ask for one no less than 24 hours before the deadline. Practically, what this means is that you should try to get your work done on time, and if you can't you should ask me for an extension and we'll work something out. But if you don't ask me for an extension first, you'll be in trouble.

Office hours and help. I encourage you to join my office hours to chat about labor history, the class, or anything else. My office hours are drop-in and first-come, first-served; that means you do not need an appointment during office hours. If you need to meet outside my office hours, feel free to email me for an appointment and we'll make something work. You're also welcome to email me about anything else at jacob.remes@nyu.edu (but please don't expect a fast response on weekends). Always, the rule is, if you don't understand something, or if you're having trouble, ask for help, whether in class, by email, or in office hours.

Academic assistance. This is a first-year course, so everybody in this class is reading, writing, thinking at the college level for the first time. It's hard! If it weren't you wouldn't need to take this special first year course on writing. Teaching writing is my job. But I'm not the only one you can turn to for help. I strongly encourage you to make use of the Gallatin Writing Center at every stage of your writing, from conceiving of your paper to your final revisions. See <http://gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/undergraduate/writing/writingcenterappointments.html> for more details. The general rule, whether for reading or writing, is, *If you're having trouble, ask for help.* That's what I'm here for. If for whatever reason you don't want to talk to me, reach out to your academic advisor or to your class advisor. The most important thing is not to suffer in silence and to make use of the many NYU and Gallatin resources that exist to help you.

General support. The first semester of college can be difficult, but Gallatin has resources for you if you need help. There are many entry points: you can turn to your academic advisor; to your class advisor, Yevgeniya Traps (yevgeniya.traps@nyu.edu, xxx-xxx-xxxxms13390, room 773); to Richard Jung, the assistant director of student affairs (richard.jung@nyu.edu, xxx-xxx-xxxx(c)); to the NYU Wellness Exchange (212-443-9999, 24 hours a day); or to me. If you're having difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or if you lack a safe and stable place to live, and you think it's affecting your performance in the course, I urge you to contact Richard Jung or Acting Dean of Students Greg Erickson

(gte1@nyu.edu) for support. If you feel comfortable speaking to me, I will advocate on your behalf. If you are having academic, emotional, or financial difficulties, I urge you not to suffer in silence but to ask for help.

Disabilities. New York University is committed to providing equal educational opportunity and participation for students with disabilities. It is the University's policy that no qualified student with a disability be excluded from participating in any University program or activity, denied the benefits of any University program or activity, or otherwise subjected to discrimination with regard to any University program or activity. If you have a disability and need accommodation, the first step is to talk to the Moses Center for Students for Disabilities. You can contact them at 212-998- 4980 or email mosescsd@nyu.edu; see <http://www.nyu.edu/life/safety-health-wellness/students-with-disabilities.html> for more information. Before or after you speak with the Moses Center, I am happy to talk to you about accommodating you.