

PS393 Labor Movements and Public Policy

Seminar Leader: Dave Braneck

Course Times: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:00-10:30

Email: d.branek@berlin.bard.edu

Office Hours: by appointment

Course Description

This course will look at the labor movement in the United States, using organized labor as a lens through which to analyze the convergence of the state, shifting institutional frameworks, and social movements. Students will be able to assess the role of organized labor within US politics generally, grappling with the opportunities and limits of labor as a means for enacting change, as well as how labor fits into, shapes, and is affected by institutional arrangements. A historic perspective will be taken in order to mark developments within the state and how this context has affected and been affected by organized labor. Students will be tasked with employing and sharpening existing understanding of state and policy structures while gaining critical knowledge and analytical skills that they will be able to apply to analysis of the state and other actors.

Requirements

Reading Material

Class Reader (available at library)

Class Preparation

Please come to class fully prepared. This means thoroughly reading and engaging with the assigned texts/content. Take notes and address any questions raised in class pertaining to the texts. Do your best to prepare questions of your own about the strength and validity of the author's argument, how they chose to make their case, and how their argumentation fits with what else we've read and discussed in class.

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the staunchest regard for academic integrity and expects good academic practice from students in their studies. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Attendance

Attendance at ALL classes is expected. There will be an attendance sheet for every session. Each absence beyond two (that is more than two absences from two sessions of 90 minutes) will lead to the subtraction of 1 point from the overall final grade. Late arrival counts as an absence. If you miss more than 30 percent of the class you cannot pass.

The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR SPRING 2021: Please contact me directly if you need to begin the semester remotely due to travel restrictions caused by the pandemic. Additionally, if you are feeling ill please refrain from attending class. Remote participation and asynchronous learning options will be offered as needed.

Assignments and Grading Breakdown

Classroom Participation: 30%

This course is built on thoughtful and engaged discussion from all participants. This includes coming prepared to class and actively participating in group and class-wide discussions and in-class projects. Students should feel comfortable voicing their views, but please be mindful and respectful of other course members while doing so. A respectful decorum is necessary, and if it feels like this is lacking at any point please do not hesitate to discuss this with the seminar leader.

Response Papers: 35%

Each student is required to write 7 single-page response papers (~400 words, 1.5-spaced, 12 pt., Times New Roman) on sessions of their choice. One paper must be written in the introduction block of the course (weeks 1-5), while 2 are to be written during weeks of the students choosing during each of the 3 main blocks of the course. Response papers should consist of an abstract on one of the primary texts' core components and arguments, as well as posing 2 critical questions of the text to be used in the following week's discussion.

Response papers MUST be submitted in print at the beginning of class.

Final Paper: 35%

There will be a final writing assignment (2,500-3,000 words) due at the end of the course. You will receive further information about this writing assignment during class.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Essays that are up to 24 hours late can be downgraded up to one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where an instructor agrees to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss essay assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.

Students receive mid- and end-of-semester grades for their seminar work. Students are entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

Schedule

INTRODUCTION (1 response paper due in this portion of course)

Class 1: What is Work (Tues 02.02)

- David Graeber: On the Phenomenon of Bullshit Jobs: A Work Rant, 2013.
<https://www.strike.coop/bullshit-jobs/>

- Andrea Komlosy: Work: The Last 1,000 Years, 2017 (Chapter 4)
- Celeste Murillo: Producing and Reproducing: Capitalism's Dual Oppression of Women, 2018.
<https://www.leftvoice.org/on-reproductive-labor-wage-slavery-and-the-new-working-class>

Class 2: What is Organized Labor (Thurs 04.01)

- Nelson Lichtenstein: State of the Union: A Century of American Labor, 2003. (Introduction)
- Eric Levitz: Democracy Dies When Labor Unions Do, 2019.
<http://nymag.com/intelligencer/2019/09/democracy-dies-when-labor-unions-do.html>

Class 3: American Exceptionalism (Tues 09.02)

- Eric Foner: Why is there no Socialism in the United States? 1984.
- Louis Hartz: Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought Since the Revolution, 1955. (Chapter 1).

Class 4: Institutional Regimes and the Working Class as Actor (Thurs 11.02)

- Carlota Perez: Techno-economic Paradigm Shifts, 2018.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dhNd3tVR1hl>
- Tamara Draut: Is this your Image of the Working Class? You Need to Update it, 2018
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/may/09/american-working-class-what-it-looks-like-today>
- Gabriel Winant: Hurrah for the Time Man! 2019
<https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/hurrah-for-the-time-man>

Class 5: States, Institutions and Power (Tues 16.02)

- Craig Calhoun: Dictionary of Social Sciences, 2002.
- Bob Jessop: Handbook of Politics: State and Society in Global Perspective, 2010.
- Michael Mann: The Autonomous Power of the State, 1984.

BLOCK 1: INDUSTRIALISM: 1870 - 1920 (2 response papers due in this portion of course)

Class 6: Regulating Industrialism: The Transforming American State (Thurs 18.02)

- Stephen Skowronek: Building a New American State: The Expansion of National Administrative Capacities, 1877-1920, 1982. (Chapter 5)

Class 7: Industrialism's Impact on Workers (Tues 23.02)

- Melvyn Dubofsky: We Shall be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World, 1969. (Chapter 1)
- Alice Kessler-Harris: Women Have Always Worked, 2018. (Chapter 3)

Class 8: Industrial Flashpoints on the National Scale: Rail and Coal (Thurs 25.02)

- Jeremy Brecher: Strike! Revised and Expanded, 2014. (Chapter 1)
- Timothy Mitchell: Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil, 2011. (Chapter 1)

Class 9: Ideology and Action: The IWW (Tues 02.03)

- Melvyn Dubofsky: We Shall be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World, 1969. (Chapters 4 and 7)

Class 10: State Repression (Thurs 04.03)

- James Green: *Death at the Haymarket: A Story of Chicago, the First Labor Movement, and the Bombing that Divided Gilded Age America*, 2006. (Prologue)
- Olivia Waxman: *A Century Before Trump's ICE Raids, the U.S. Government Rounded Up Thousands of Immigrants. Here's What Happened*, 2019: <https://time.com/5625012/palmer-raids/>
- Olivia Waxman: *Sacco and Vanzetti Were Executed 90 Years Ago. Their Deaths Made History*, 2017: <https://time.com/4895701/sacco-vanzetti-90th-anniversary/>
- Irene Hsu: *The Echoes of Chinese Exclusion*, 2018: <https://newrepublic.com/article/149437/echoes-chinese-exclusion>

Class 11: Progressive Reform and its Limits (Tues 09.03)

- Elizabeth Cobbs-Hoffman, et. al: *Major Problems in American History, Volume II*, 2012. (Chapter 5)
- Melvyn Dubofsky: *When Socialism was Popular in the United States*, 2016: <https://www.viewpointmag.com/2016/03/29/when-socialism-was-popular-in-the-united-states/>

BLOCK 2: FORDISM 1920 - 1970 (2 response papers due in this portion of course)

Class 12: Embedding Liberalism: the State's Response to the Great Depression (Thurs 11.03)

- Mark Blyth: *Great Transformations: Economic Ideas and Institutional Change in the 20th Century*, 2002. (Chapter 3)

Class 13: Labor in the Great Depression (Tues 16.03)

- Howard Kester: *Revolt Among the Sharecroppers*, 1997. (Introduction)
- Julian Guerrero: *The Flint Militants*, 2018: <https://jacobinmag.com/2017/10/flint-sit-down-strike-anniversary-autoworkers>

Class 14: Workplace Democracy: Unions in Relative Power (Thurs 18.03)

- Nelson Lichtenstein: *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor*, 2003. (Chapter 2)

Class 15: Post WW2: A Labor and Capital Accord? (Tues 23.03)

- Timothy Mitchell: *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil*, 2011. (Chapter 1)
- Robert Reich: *Supercapitalism: the transformation of business, democracy, and everyday life*, 2007. (Chapter 1)

Class 16: Red Scare Repression and Institutional Constraints on Labor (Thurs 25.03)

- Colin Gordon: *The Legacy of Taft-Hartley*, 2017. <https://jacobinmag.com/2017/12/taft-hartley-unions-right-to-work>
- Susan Roth Breitzer: *Loved Labor's Losses: The CIO and the Effects of McCarthyism*, 2009. https://www.academia.edu/25655662/Loved_Labor_s_Losses_The_Congress_of_Industrial_Organizations_and_the_Effects_of_McCarthyism

No class on 30.03 and 01.04 due to Spring Break (Mon, 29.03 – Mon, 05.04)

Class 17: Social Movements and an Evolving Left (Tues 06.04)

- The Black Panther Party Platform, 1966.
- Bayard Rustin: The Failure of Black Separatism, 1970.
- The Combahee River Collective Statement, 1979.
- Joseph Nevins: Lessons of the Chicano Movement Today, 2018.
<https://nacla.org/blog/2018/09/07/lessons-chicano-movement-today>

BLOCK 3: POSTINDUSTRIALISM 1970 - Present (2 response papers due in this portion of course)

Class 18: Fordist Dreams and Postfordist Realities (Thurs 08.04)

- John Maynard Keynes: Economic Possibilities for our Grandchildren, 1930.
- Documentary Film: Harlan County, USA, 1976.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q2aPy_XVZ4

Class 19: Work and the Working Class in Deindustrialization (Tues 13.04)

- Kim Moody: On New Terrain: How Capital is Reshaping the Battleground of Class War, 2017.
(Chapters 1 and 2)

Class 20: Neoliberalism and Expanding Scales of Production and Circulation through Dispossession
(Thurs 15.04)

- David Harvey: A Brief History of Neoliberalism, 2005. (Introduction and chapter 6)

Class 21: The Economic Geography of Globalization (Tues 20.04)

- Bonacich and Wilson: Getting the Goods: Ports, Labor, and the Logistics Revolution, 2008.
(Chapter 1)
- Deborah Cowen: Deadly Life of Logistics: Mapping Violence in Global Trade, 2014. (Chapter 1)

Class 22: The Crisis of Care and Surplus Labor (Thurs 22.04)

- Loïc Wacquant: From Slavery to Mass Incarceration, Rethinking the 'race question' in the US, 2002.
- Nancy Fraser: Contradictions of Capital and Care, 2016.
- Recommended Additional Reading: Ruth Wilson Gilmore on Prisons and Class Warfare, 2018.
<http://www.historicalmaterialism.org/index.php/interviews/prisons-and-class-warfare>

Class 23: Labor's Self Preservation and New Deal Legal Framework as Double-Edged Sword (Tues 27.04)

- Steve Fraser: Age of Acquiescence: The Life and Death of Organized Resistance to American Wealth and Power, 2015. (Chapter 12)
- Stanley Aronowitz: Death and Life of American Labor: Towards a New Workers Movement, 2014. (Chapter 3)
- Dylan Matthews: The Supreme Court decision gutting public sector unions, explained, 2018.
<https://www.vox.com/2018/6/14/17437832/janus-afscme-supreme-court-union-teacher-police-public-sector>

LABOR'S PRESENT AND (POTENTIAL) FUTURE

Class 24: Automation, Big Tech, and the Future of Work (Thurs 29.04)

- Eric Levitz, America Has Central Planners. We Just Call Them ‘Venture Capitalists,’ 2020. <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2020/12/wework-venture-capital-central-planning.html>
- Sarah Jaffe, Nationalize Amazon, 2018. <https://theoutline.com/post/6587/nationalize-amazon-make-bezos-our-bitch?zd=3&zi=o3zh6wp3>
- Data & Society: Why Are Good Jobs Disappearing if Robots Aren’t Taking Them? 2020. (two parts!): <https://points.datasociety.net/why-are-good-jobs-disappearing-if-robots-arent-taking-them-9f8d4845302a>, <https://points.datasociety.net/the-robots-are-just-automated-management-tools-b9bf28c4434>
- Neil Irwin: Maybe We’re Not All Going to be Gig Economy Workers After All, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/15/upshot/gig-economy-limits-labor-market-uber-california.html>
- Bureau of Labor Statistics, Fastest Growing Occupations, 2019-2029. <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/fastest-growing.htm>

Class 25: Today’s Union Movement (Tues 04.05)

- Eric Blanc: The Red for Ed Movement, Two Years In, 2020: <https://newlaborforum.cuny.edu/2020/10/03/the-red-for-ed-movement-two-years-in/>
- Katrina vanden Heuvel: The Fight for 15 has created a Roadmap for Change, 2019. <https://www.thenation.com/article/the-fight-for-15-has-created-a-road-map-for-change/>
- Lauren Gambino: ‘We’re Here to Win’: US Democratic Socialists Move to Center Stage, 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/aug/06/democratic-socialists-us-alexandria-ocasio-cortez-bernie-sanders>.
- Coppola and Wallender: VW Tennessee Workers Reject Union, Dealing Blow to UAW, 2019. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-06-15/volkswagen-tennessee-workers-reject-union-dealing-blow-to-uaw>
- Nitasha Tiku, Google workers launch unconventional union with help of Communications Workers of America, 2021: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2021/01/04/google-union-cwa/>
- Mindy Isser: The Union Members Who Voted for Trump Have to Be Organized—Not Ignored, 2020: <https://inthesetimes.com/article/trump-voters-labor-unions-election-2020>

Class 26: Labor Policy Case Study (to be picked by class) (Thurs 06.05)

- Options for final case study on labor policy include:
- Labor Policy under Trump
- Labor Policy (so far) under Biden
- US Covid-19 Response and Labor

Class 27: Final Wrap Up Discussion (Tues 11.05)

- No reading

No class due to Federal Holiday (Thurs 13.05)