

CSS 340-2
Spring 2016
Office hours: Thursday, 2-4 p.m.

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Labor's Lost Might

Why are labor unions so weak in the United States today? After World War II, America appeared to be becoming, in the words of the renowned Harvard economist Sumner Slichter, a "laboristic" nation in which unions would be the strongest single influence in society. Although unions lost momentum in the manufacturing and mining sectors of the economy after 1950, thousands of school teachers, police officers, firefighters, sanitation workers, hospital workers, retail clerks, and other kinds of previously unorganized workers flocked into organized labor in the mid-1960s. During the same period the building trades unions remained strong, and the International Brother of Teamsters became the largest union in America, with over two million members. Why have the unions lost so much power since the 1970s? And what have been the consequences for the union members, their families, other workers, consumers, stockholders, and, more broadly, for the U.S. economy and American politics? These are the questions addressed in this tutorial.

Reading:

The readings draw on much of the finest work on these issues by labor historians, journalists, political scientists, and economists. We will also be looking at key primary documents.

Seven books will be available at the Broad Street Bookstore. They will also be on reserve at Olin Library and can be purchased from on-line sellers.

Robert H. Zieger, Timothy Minchin, and Gilbert J. Gall, *American Workers, American Unions*, 4th ed. (2014)

Jack Metzgar, *Striking Steel: Solidarity Remembered* (2000)

Joshua B. Freeman, *Working-Class New York: Life and Labor since World War II* (2000)

David Vogel, *Fluctuating Fortunes: The Political Power of Business in America* (1989)

Benjamin C. Waterhouse, *Lobbying America: The Politics of Business from Nixon to NAFTA* (2014)

Joseph A. McCartin, *Collision Course: Ronald Reagan, the Air Traffic Controllers, and the Strike That Changed America* (2011)

Steven Greenhouse, *The Big Squeeze: Tough Times for the American Worker* (2008)

In addition, we will discuss many articles and documents. Most of these items will be accessible on line, as noted below. The others will be on reserve at Olin Library; the password for electronic reserve entries is CSS340.

Requirements and Ground Rules:

1. Each student is expected to attend every seminar having done all of the week's reading and ready for discussion.

2. Except for the seventh session, submit a list of 5-10 questions that you would like to explore on the basis of the assignment for each seminar. Include tentative responses--one or two paragraphs long--to three (or more) of those queries. Send the responses to me no later than 10 a.m. on that seminar date.
3. For the seventh session, write a 15-25-page analytical essay. The essay could answer the following questions: Did the power of workers and unions decline greatly in the U.S. between World War II and today? If so, how and why? If not, why not? If you prefer to address a different question, discuss that with me no later than the fourth week of the tutorial. The analytical essays are due at 2 p.m. on the day of the seventh session.
4. In addition, submit several questions about the seventh session's reading. No written responses are required. These will also be due by 2 p.m. that day.
5. Be sure to pay attention to and respond to other participants' observations.
6. Please turn off laptops, tablets, cell phones, and all other electronic equipment before class begins. Please don't bring food to class.
7. My office hours will be Thursdays, 2-4 p.m. If you have class or work that afternoon, send me an email or call and we can find another time.

Evaluation:

1. All of the written work will be graded on a check, check plus, or check minus basis. The lowest grade will be eliminated.
2. The analytical essay will be graded on an A-F basis.
3. The course grade will be based on the written work (65%) and contribution to discussion (35%).

Disability Resources

Wesleyan University is committed to ensuring that all qualified students with disabilities are afforded an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from its programs and services. To receive accommodations, a student must have a documented disability as defined by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and provide documentation of the disability. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact Disability Resources as soon as possible.

If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact Dean Patey in Disability Resources, located in North College, Room 021, or call 860/685-5581 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations.

Topics and Assignments

Session I: Was the U.S. Becoming a 'Laboristic' State?

Reading:

Franklin D. Roosevelt's acceptance speech of nomination for second term, June 27, 1936:

<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/acceptance-speech-for-the-renomination-for-the-presidency/>

Franklin D. Roosevelt, "State of the Union Address," January 11, 1944:

<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/state-of-the-union-address-3/>

Sumner H. Slichter, "Are We Becoming a 'Laboristic' State?" *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, May 16, 1948, pp. SM11ff:

<http://search.proquest.com/hnpnewyorktimes/docview/108102477/fulltextPDF/357A66E81E5548FFPQ/1?accountid=14963>

Zieger, *et al.*, *American Workers, American Unions*, chs. 3-5

Gary Gerstle, "The Working Class Goes to War," *Mid-America*, vol. 75, no. 3 (October 1993), pp. 303-322.

Claudia Goldin and Robert A. Margo, "The Great Compression: The Wage Structure in the United States at Mid-Century," *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, vol. 107, no. 1 (Feb. 1992), pp. 1-34: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/2118322.pdf?acceptTC=true&jpdConfirm=true>

Recommended:

Ronald W. Schatz, "'Industrial Peace through Arbitration': George Taylor and the Genius of the War Labor Board," *Labor*, vol. 11, no. 4 (Winter 2014), pp. 39-62:

<http://labor.dukejournals.org/content/11/4/39.full.pdf+html?sid=fc81ac9f-f7c0-4fca-9507-be58b56bd7f3>

Session II: Labor at Mid-Century

Reading:

Zieger, *et al.*, ch. 6

Metzgar, *Striking Steel*, introduction, prologue, chs. 1-3

Freeman, *Working-Class New York*, chs. 6-10 (pp. 99-176)

Kimberly Phillips-Fein, "American Counterrevolutionary: Lemuel Ricketts Boulware and General Electric, 1950-1960," *American Capitalism: Social Thought and Political Economy in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Nelson Lichtenstein (2006), pp. 249-70.

Jennifer Klein, "The Politics of Economic Security: Employee Benefits and the Privatization of New Deal Liberalism," *Journal of Policy History*, vol. 16, no. 1 (2004), pp. 34-65.

Session III: Labor and Rights Consciousness in the 1960s-70s

Readings:

Pages from a Black Radical's Notebook: A James Boggs Reader (2011), Part II, chs. 1, 7 – E-Reserve
Vogel, *Fluctuating Fortunes*, preface, chs. 3-5
Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor* (2002), ch. 5
Freeman, *Working-Class New York*, chs.11-13
Dorothy Sue Cobble, “‘A Spontaneous Loss of Enthusiasm’: Workplace Feminism and the Transformation of Women’s Service Jobs in the 1970s,” *Rebel Rank and File: Labor Militancy and Revolt from Below in the Long 1970s*, ed. Aaron Brenner, et al. (2010), pp. 335-54.
Paul Moreno, *Black Americans and Organized Labor: A New History* (2006), ch. 7
Lawrence Richards, *Union-Free America: Workers and Antiunion Culture* (2008), introduction, ch. 3

Recommended: David Vogel, “The New Political Science of Corporate Power,” *National Interest*, no. 87 (Spring 1987):

http://www.nationalaffairs.com/doclib/20080708_1987875thenewpoliticalscienceofcorporatepowerdavidvogel.pdf

Session IV: The 1970s Crunch

Reading:

Cal Winslow, “The Rebellion from Below, 1965-1981,” *Rebel Rank and File: Labor Militancy and Revolt from Below in the Long 1970s*, ed. Aaron Brenner, et al. (2010), pp. 1-35.
Freeman, *Working-Class New York*, chs. 14-15
Lichtenstein, *State of the Union*, ch. 6
Jefferson Cowie, “‘Vigorously Left, Right, and Center’: The Crosscurrents of Working-Class America in the 1970s,” *America in the Seventies*, ed. Beth Bailey and David Farber (2004), pp. 75-106.
Vogel, *Fluctuating Fortunes*, ch. 6
Metzgar, *Striking Steel*, ch. 4

Recommended: Metzgar, *Striking Steel*, ch. 5

Session V: New Corporate Aggressiveness

Reading:

Lewis F. Powell, “Confidential Memorandum: Attack on the American Free Enterprise System, August 23, 1971”: http://reclaimdemocracy.org/corporate_accountability/powell_memo_lewis.html.
Waterhouse, introduction, chs. 1-7
Vogel, *Fluctuating Fortunes*, chs. 7-8

Session VI: The Air Traffic Controllers' Strike

Reading:

McCartin, entire book

Vogel, *Fluctuating Fortunes*, pp. 283-89

Session VII: Labor's Lost Might

Reading:

Freeman, chs. 16-18, conclusion

Greenhouse, *The Big Squeeze*, chs. 1-4, 8-16

Vogel, *Fluctuating Fortunes*, conclusion

Jess Bravin and Melanie Trottman, "Mandatory Union Fee Face Test," *Wall Street Journal*, January 11, 2016, p. A3:

<http://www.wsj.com/articles/supreme-court-to-weigh-public-sector-union-dues-1452461400>

Patrick McGeehan, "New York Plans \$15-an-Hour Minimum Wage for Fast Food Workers,"

New York Times, July 22, 2015: <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/23/nyregion/new-york-minimum-wage-fast-food-workers.html?emmc=eta1&r=0>

Craig Becker, "What Should Unions Do Now," *Dissent*, vol. 62, no. 4 (Fall 2015):

<http://web.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.wesleyan.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=6&sid=f3a22e00-8d75-4fd0-a0e0-b2689fd576ec%40sessionmgr4004&hid=4112>

Erica Smith, "Our Best Weapon to Combat Wealth Inequality Is Still A Strong Union Contract,"

Dissent, vol. 62, no. 4 (Fall 2015):

<http://web.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.wesleyan.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=9&sid=f3a22e00-8d75-4fd0-a0e0-b2689fd576ec%40sessionmgr4004&hid=4112>

E. Tammy Kim, "Organizing the Unorganizable," *Dissent*, vol. 62, no. 23 (spring 2015):

<http://web.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.wesleyan.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=20&sid=f3a22e00-8d75-4fd0-a0e0-b2689fd576ec%40sessionmgr4004&hid=4112>

Recommended:

Metzgar, *Striking Steel*, ch. 6

Thomas Geoghegan, *Only One Thing Can Save Us: Why America Needs a New Kind of Labor Movement* (2014)

"Labor history was pornography of a sort in those days, and even more so in these days. In public schools and in the homes of nice people it was and remains pretty much taboo to tell tales of labor's suffering and derring-do." – Kurt Vonnegut