

LIBERAL STUDIES DEGREE PROGRAM

Course Syllabus

Americans at Work: Evolving Attitudes to Work in the United States

LSHV-706-01
Spring 2008
Tuesdays, 6:30-8:30 pm
January 15-April 22, 2008
(No classes on January 29 and March 4, 2008)

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Course Description:

Why do we work? What motivates us to work hard? What are our workplace expectations? This course seeks to explore, through directed readings and class discussions, the changing meaning of work in American society over the last two centuries. Given the breadth of the subject matter, the course does not attempt to take a comprehensive approach but rather to introduce some key themes associated with American workers and study them in historical perspective.

The main text and the class's frame of reference for discussion will be Daniel Jacoby's *Laboring for Freedom*, an interdisciplinary study that places the workers' aspirations for freedom at the center of the history of work in America. Using Jacoby as a foil, the class will read and discuss works featuring contesting views, i.e., those that focus on issues of the underclass, racism, immigration, poverty and gender bias that have confronted in the work place. The class will explore together how these readings might affect our understanding of the American workers' historical experience and influence the values that we attach to work.

Class Format

The classes will take a seminar format with class discussion on assigned readings directed by a designated student. Everyone in class is expected to come prepared and contribute actively to the discussion.

Required Readings

Given the nature of the course, the readings will range over a wide variety of issues related to the history of work in America. In the interest of keeping the reading load manageable for the students, the bulk of the reading materials for class discussion are a single chapter or short excerpts from books.

Students will be asked to purchase the following five books (all available in paperback)

Daniel Jacoby, *Laboring for Freedom*. New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1998 (main text)

Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. New York: Signet Press, 1997.

Frank Tobias Higbie, *Indispensable Outcasts: Hobo Workers and Community in the American Midwest, 1880-1930*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003.

Jerry A. Jacobs and Kathleen Gerson, *The Time Divide: Work, Family, and Gender Inequality*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004

Jacob A. Riis, *How the Other Half Lives*. Stilwell, KS: Digireads.com Publishing, 2005.

Students will be able to download excerpts from the following works available on electronic reserve at the Georgetown University Lauinger Library:

David Brody, "Shaping a Labor Movement," *In Labor's Cause: Main Themes on the History of the American Worker*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Benita Eisler, *The Lowell Offering: Writings by New England Mill Women*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1977 (chapter 1, "Mill and Boardinghouse").

Benjamin Franklin, "1758 Poor Richard's Almanack," *Poor Richard: Almanacks for the Years 1733-1758*. New York: Paddington Press Ltd., 1976.

Ben Hamper, *Rivthead: Tales from the Assembly Line*. New York: Warner Books, 1991 (chapter 4)

Tom Lutz, *Doing Nothing: A History of Loafers, Loungers, Slackers, and Bums in America*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006. (chapter 1, "Cody on the Couch")

Katherine S. Newman, *Chutes and Ladders: Navigating the Low-Wage Labor Market*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006. (chapter 8, "Dreams Deferred: Aspirations and Obstacles in Work and Family Life.")

Howard B. Rock (ed) *The New York Artisan, 1789-1825: A Documentary History*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989. (Part 4, "Masters and Journeymen")

Studs Terkel, *Working People Talk about What They Do All Day and How They Feel about What They Do*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1974 (Book One "Working the Land," pp.3-14)

Course Requirements

Each student will be expected to lead the class discussion on one or more of the required readings, write a critical book review of Daniel Jacoby's *Laboring for Freedom*

(5 to 8 pages) and put together a 15-20 page research paper on the theme of work in America.

Grading

The grades will be based on class attendance and participation (35 percent), a review of Jacoby's book (20 percent) and 15-20 page research paper on the subject of work in America (45 percent).

Course Schedule, Topics and Readings

January 15	Introduction and class discussion on the principal arguments of Daniel Jacoby's <i>Laboring for Freedom</i> . (Students are asked to come to the first session having read this book.)
January 22	The American work ethic: how has it changed? Benjamin Franklin's "Poor Richard's Almanack, 1758"; "Cody on the Couch" from Tom Lutz's <i>Doing Nothing</i> .
February 5	Artisan workers and republican ideals of work "Masters and Journeymen" from Howard Rock (ed.) <i>The New York Artisan, 1789-1825</i> . A book review on Jacoby's <i>Laboring for Freedom</i> is due.
February 12	Slavery and unfree labor <i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass</i>
February 19	New England mill girls in mid-19 th century "Mill and boardinghouse" from Benita Eisler (ed) <i>The Lowell Offerings</i>
February 26	Immigrant workers and urban poverty in 19 th century New York Jacob A. Riis, <i>How the Other Half Lives</i>
March 11	Unionism, American-style "Shaping a Labor Movement" from David Brody's <i>In Labor's Cause</i> Research paper topic and tentative bibliography are due
March 18	Hobo workers in the American midwest, 1880-1930 Frank Tobias Higbie, <i>Indispensable Outcasts</i>
March 25	Work on the unionized assembly line Chapter 4 of Ben Hamper's <i>Rivethhead</i>

April 1	The plight of small farmers “Working the Land” from Studs Terkels’ <i>Working</i>
April 8	Overworked Americans Jacob and Gerson’s <i>Time Divide</i>
April 15	The urban working poor and upward mobility “Dreams Deferred” from Katherine Newman’s <i>Chutes and Ladders</i>
April 22	Class presentation of research papers and student evaluation

Disabilities Statement

If you believe you have a disability, then you should contact the Academic Resource Center (arc@georgetown.edu) for further information. The Center is located in the Leavey Center, Suite 335. The Academic Resource Center is the campus office responsible for reviewing documentation provided by students with disabilities and for determining reasonable accommodations in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and University policies.