

HIST1099: TWENTIETH-CENTURY US WORKING LIVES

Main Second Session (June 2, 2025 – July 3, 2025)

Monday through Thursday, 1pm-3pm

Location: TBD

Instructor: Joel Berger

Office: ICC 600

Office Hours: Monday – Thursday 3pm-4pm, and by appointment.

Email: jfb113@georgetown.edu

Course Description

This course examines the changing meaning of work and the changing lives of workers over the course of U.S. history, focusing specifically on the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Its purpose is to equip us to better grasp and grapple with the issues that define work and workers' lives in 2025 by providing deep historical context for understanding these issues. It is an adaptation of Professor Joseph A. McCartin's History 1099 course "U.S. Working Lives," which covers workers and work in the U.S. from the nation's beginning to the present.

The course provides an opportunity for students to use many different kinds of sources to explore some of the main issues concerning the history of work and working people in America: literature, film, oral history, government documents, newspapers, and more. It is offered in the format of HIST 1099, which fulfills a General Education requirement.

The general aim of the HIST 1099 Gen Ed is to introduce students to various elements of historical work and thinking, within the context of looking at a particular historical period, event, or theme in some depth. Though lectures and discussion will focus on particular topics, there will also be class exercises, assignments, and readings that allow us to explore how historians identify, define, and employ primary sources of all types, how we can analyze those sources and formulate questions based on them, how we engage with the work of other scholars, and how we reconstruct various elements of the human experience in particular times and places.

We will do that by focusing on the history of work in the United States, a time and place that invites us to examine the intersection of large historical forces and individual agency, to consider the ways in which change and continuity shape formative historical moments, and to think about the links between past and present.

Course Goals

The general learning goals of this course correspond to those of the Georgetown University Department of History, whose goals are that students:

- gain a better appreciation of the nature and practice of history as a discipline, and as the study, based on evidence, of human experiences, interactions, and relationships as they change over time;
- learn to appreciate that history does not consist of a simple succession of self-evident facts, and that evidence-based interpretation and analysis are central to all historical work;
- hone their reading, writing, and oral communication skills;
- develop their ability to think historically, that is to situate events and developments in their historical context for the purpose of critical analysis;
- expand their ability to engage with complex causal analysis, and to articulate arguments that integrate supporting evidence and analytical commentary;
- appreciate the differentness of the past and the distinctiveness and richness of diverse societies and cultures, and learn to view the world from perspectives other than their own.

The specific learning goals of this course flow from the purpose of the HIST 099 Gen Ed Requirement as outlined above.

Course Readings

This course has no textbook. All of the readings for this course will be available online through Canvas.

A good background resource for the course is Melvyn Dubofsky and Joseph A. McCartin's *Labor in America: A History*, [available online through Lauinger](#). [Links to an external site.](#)

Course Requirements and Grading

Each student will be expected to attend lectures and labs, complete labs in a timely manner, participate actively in class discussions on the assigned readings, and complete a range of writing assignments.

Weighting of Assignments

Final grades will be weighted as follows:

Participation in Discussions/Labs	25%	
Lab reports (four 500-word papers, and peer edits of a classmate's paper)		50%
One Final Paper (6-8 pp.)	25%	

Letter grades in this course will have the following numerical equivalents: A (94-100); A- (90-93); B+ (87-89); B (84-86); B- (80-83); C+ (77-79); C (74-76); C- (70-73); D+ (67-69); D (64-66); D- (60-63); and F (59 and below). Late assignments will be penalized one-third of a letter grade for every day that they are late.

Failure to complete any assigned paper will result in a failing grade for the course. Cases of [plagiarism](#) will be referred to [Georgetown University Honors Council](#) and could result in failure and expulsion.

And a note on class participation: your participation grade will be based on your contribution to classroom discussion and activities. It is important for everyone to attend all class sessions and demonstrate proficiency in oral discussion. Decent attendance and friendly silence during class will earn you a "B-." To earn a better grade requires careful listening and thoughtful verbal contributions that leave room for others to participate as well.

If you need to miss class for any reason, please give me a heads-up as soon as possible via email (jfb113@georgetown.edu). Ideally, given the compressed nature of the course, you won't need to miss any class sessions. However, life happens – especially during the age of COVID. We will work out how to make up missed class sessions on a case-by-case basis.

Assignment Descriptions

LAB REPORTS (four 500-word papers due by 1pm each Thursday; one set of peer edits)

You will work in lab groups of two-three students each to focus on the skills and tools of the historian.

Lab groups will complete brief reports together, and will be given time in class each Wednesday to grapple with different types of primary sources and write up a brief report, due the following day before class.

The lab on Wednesday, July 2 (the final lab of the semester) involves peer edits of the rough draft of a classmate's final paper. You will submit documentation of completing the peer edits for lab credit that week.

FINAL PAPER (6-8 pp. due Thursday, July 3)

Drawing upon any of the readings, lectures, labs, site visits and discussion materials we have considered over the course of this session, write a paper that focuses on a single theme regarding U.S. working lives and uses that theme to trace an arc of change and/or persistence over time from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century, developing an argument around the importance of that theme.

We will employ a number of checkpoints throughout the session to ensure you're on the right track with the paper:

- Choose topic by **Thursday, June 19**
- Develop thesis statement and introduction by **Thursday, June 26** (bring to class)
- Bring full rough draft to class on **Wednesday, July 2**
- Final draft due **Thursday, July 3 at 5pm**

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities should contact me as soon as possible, partly so we make all arrangements right from the outset, and partly so you know how glad I am that you are here.

-

Title IX Syllabus Statement (endorsed by Faculty Senate)

Georgetown University and its faculty are committed to supporting survivors and those impacted by sexual misconduct, which includes sexual assault, sexual harassment, relationship violence, and stalking. Georgetown requires faculty members, unless otherwise designated as confidential, to report all disclosures of sexual misconduct to the University Title IX Coordinator or a Deputy Title IX Coordinator. If you disclose an incident of sexual misconduct to a professor in or outside of the classroom (with the exception of disclosures in papers), that faculty member must report the incident to the Title IX Coordinator, or Deputy Title IX Coordinator. The coordinator will, in turn, reach out to the student to provide support, resources, and the option to meet. [Please note that the student is not required to meet with the Title IX coordinator.]. More information about reporting options and resources can be found on the Sexual Misconduct Website: <https://sexualassault.georgetown.edu/resourcecenter>Links to an external site.

If you would prefer to speak to someone confidentially, Georgetown has a number of fully confidential professional resources that can provide support and assistance. These resources include:

Health Education Services for Sexual Assault Response and Prevention: confidential email sarp@georgetown.edu

Counseling and Psychiatric Services (CAPS): 202.687.6985 or after hours, call (833) 960-3006 to reach Fonemed, a telehealth service; individuals may ask for the on-call CAPS clinician

More information about reporting options and resources can be found on the [Sexual Misconduct Website](#)

(Above statement and TIX faculty resources found at: <https://sexualassault.georgetown.edu/get-help/guidance-for-faculty-and-staff-on-how-to-support-students/>)

Title IX Pregnancy Modifications and Adjustments

Georgetown University is committed to creating an accessible and inclusive environment for pregnant students. At any point throughout their pregnancy students may request adjustments/modifications based on general pregnancy needs or accommodations based on a pregnancy-related complication or medical need. Students may also request accommodations following labor and delivery based on a complication or medical need.

SCS students must complete the [Pregnancy Adjustment Request Form](#) [Links to an external site.](#) (<https://titleix.georgetown.edu/title-ix-pregnancy/student-pregnancy/> and submit it to the SCS Deputy Title IX Coordinator at titleixscs@georgetown.edu. Upon receiving the completed form, the Deputy Title IX Coordinator will schedule a meeting with the student to discuss the requested adjustments and implementation process.

More information about pregnancy modifications can be found on the [Title IX at Georgetown University Website](#)

CLASS SCHEDULE:

NOTE: THIS IS A TENTATIVE SCHEDULE AND SUBJECT TO CHANGE

Monday, June 2) – Course Introduction and Instructor/Student Introductions/Go Over Syllabus

Lecture 1 – Why We Study Working Lives/Setting the Scene for 20th-Century Working Lives

Tuesday, June 3 – Lecture 2 – Work and Workers in the Progressive Era and World War I/Work and Workers in the 1920s

Wednesday, June 4 – Lab 1 – Labor and the Law

Analyzing early twentieth-century Supreme Court cases affecting work and workers ([Lochner v. New York \(Links to an external site.](#)1905); [Muller v. OregonLinks to an external site.](#) (1908); [Adair v. United StatesLinks to an external site.](#) (1908); [Duplex Printing Press v. DeeringLinks to an external site.](#) (1921); [Truax v. CorriganLinks to an external site.](#) (1921); [Adkins v. Children’s HospitalLinks to an external site.](#) (1923))

Thursday, June 5 – Discussion 1 – Workers and their Lives at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

Readings:

Talitha LeFlouria, [“The Hand that Rocks the Cradle Cuts the Cordwood: Exploring Black Women’s Lives and Labor in Georgia’s Convict Camps, 1865 –1917,”](#) Download “The Hand that Rocks the Cradle Cuts the 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.

[Camella Teoli testifies about the 1912 Lawrence Textile StrikeLinks to an external site.](#)

Joseph A. McCartin, [“Preserving the ‘Working Class’ Identity,”Links to an external site.](#) *Huffington Post* April 29, 2014

Lewis Hine [child labor photographs \(read "Background" and look through the photographs\)Links to an external site.](#)

Photos from Kevin Boyle and Victoria Getis, *Muddy Boots and Ragged Aprons: Images of Working-Class Detroit, 1900-1930* ([Links to an external site.excerpts available on Google BooksLinks to an external site.](#)) (pick 4 or 5 images to look at - and be sure to read the associated captions (sometimes the captions are on the page before/after the photo))

Monday, June 9 – Lecture 3 – Origins and Impact of the Great Depression on Workers/Workers' Responses to the Great Depression/New Deal and Birth of Industrial Unionism

Tuesday, June 10 – Lab 2 - Oral Histories of the Great Depression – Studs Terkel's *Hard Times*

Wednesday, June 11– Discussion 2 - Workers' Experiences in the Great Depression/Introducing the final paper

Readings:

- Genora Dollinger, [History is a Weapon](#)[Links to an external site.](#)
- [Links to an external site.](#) View this documentary effort: [With Babies and](#)



[Banners](#)[Links to an external site.](#)



- [Links to an external site.](#) Shelton Tappes, Black autoworker and union organizer, [oral history](#) [Download oral history](#) (read pp 17-29 of PDF only - the pages about the Great Depression)
- Stephenson, ["Deporting Jesús"](#)[Download "Deporting Jesús"](#)
- [Depression-era musical selections](#)[Download Depression-era musical selections](#)

Thursday, June 12 – Class visit to Booth Special Collections (meet outside Lauinger at 10:50am)

Monday, June 16 – Lecture 4 – Work and Workers in World War II and Postwar America/Civil Rights, Women's Rights and the Workplace

Tuesday, June 17 – Film – [Struggles in Steel](#) [Links to an external site.](#)

After brief intermission: discussion about film in lab groups; discussion about film in whole group

Wednesday, June 18 – Lab 3 – Analyzing Multimedia Sources and Finding Primary Sources – The Memphis Sanitation Workers Strike of 1968

Analyzing [multimedia primary sources from Memphis Sanitation Workers Strike of 1968](#) [Links to an external site.](#)

Thursday, June 19 – Discussion 3 – Work and Workers in Postwar America: A Panoramic View/Check-in re: final paper topic

Readings:

Jack Metzgar, *Striking Steel: Solidarity Remembered* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), [Excerpt](#) [Download Excerpt](#)

Zeline Richard, Black Detroit schoolteacher and union activist, [oral history \(read pp 1-10 closely, and skim the rest\)](#) [Links to an external site.](#)

Ngai, Mae M. [“Hart-Celler at Fifty: Lessons for Immigration Reform in Our Time.”](#) [Download “Hart-Celler at Fifty: Lessons for Immigration Reform in Our Time.”](#) *Labor* (Durham, N.C.), vol. 12, no. 3, 2015, pp. 19–22

Skim through at least 2-3 issues of [“El Malcriado,”](#) [Links to an external site.](#) the unofficial newspaper of United Farmworkers (UFW) in the 1960s

Monday, June 23 – Lecture 5 – “Turnabout Years” – 1968-1988/U.S. Labor at the End of the Twentieth Century

Tuesday, June 24 – Film - *Roger and Me* (dir Michael Moore, 1989)

Wednesday, June 25 – Lab 4 - Using Quantitative Data in Maps to Illustrate US Workers’ “Turnabout Years”, 1970-2000

Thursday, June 26 – Discussion 4 – “Turnabout Years”/Check-in re: final paper thesis statement and introduction

Readings/Items to Discuss:

Joseph A. McCartin, "[A Wagner Act for Public Employees: Labor's Deferred Dream and the Rise of Conservatism, 1970-1976](#)" Download "[A Wagner Act for Public Employees: Labor's Deferred Dream and the Rise of Conservatism, 1970-1976](#)" *Journal of American History* 2008, vol. 95, no. 1, pp 123-148.

Kim Phillips-Fein, "[How the 1977 blackout unleashed New York City's tough-on-crime politics](#),"[Links to an external site.](#) *Washington Post* July 13, 2017 (if the article is pay-walled, you can download a PDF of it [here](#) [Download here](#))

Browse around the [Justice for Janitors DC: A Digital History website](#)[Links to an external site.](#) produced by Georgetown's Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor. Be sure to watch the short video clip on the homepage, and find at least one thing on the website - a design element, a primary source, an interview clip, a photograph - it can be whatever - that you found interesting and be able to share about it during discussion.

Monday, June 30 – Lecture 6 – Labor Enters the 21st Century/The Past and Future of Workers

Tuesday, July 1 – Museum Visit (on your own -- see assignment description [here](#))

Wednesday, July 2 – Lab 5 – Peer editing of final papers

Thursday, July 3 – Discussion 5 - Essential and Expendable Workers/Course Wrap-up and Reflection

Documents to Discuss:

Wells, [The Uber Workplace in Washington, DC](#)[Links to an external site.](#)

[Video - "Chris Smalls: The Man Who Took on Amazon and Won," on The Daily Show with Trevor Noah, April 21, 2022](#)[Links to an external site.](#)

E. Tammy Kim, "[The Upstart Union Challenging Starbucks](#),"[Links to an external site.](#) *The New Yorker* August 2, 2022

[Marge Piercy poem, "To Be of Use"](#)[Links to an external site.](#)