

WORKERS ACROSS NORTH AMERICA
(CES/HIST. 426)
Mondays and Wednesday, 12-1:15pm
TODD HALL 303
(updated 8/24/05)

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GER Capstone Course: ("T")

Course Description:

This course examines the historical and contemporary development of the labor movement in Mexico, the United States and Canada. The recent trend toward increased economic integration of the three countries has brought together workers with different social, cultural, political and economic histories, but with similar stories of economic exploitation and struggles for better wages and working conditions. Since these nations are rarely studied together, this course will introduce students to working men and women from racial and ethnic backgrounds who crisscross geo-political borders, move from job to job, and join labor unions to improve their economic condition and ensure a better future for their families.

We will begin the course with the contemporary period, to examine the world of the working poor as we approach the Labor Day holiday. Then we will look at the history of the labor movement in the United States, from its militant beginnings through WWII to its decline in the 1970s and 1980s, and finally to its recent attempts to revitalize itself. Then we will examine the jobs lost and plant closings in the Midwest and Canada and the major contrasts between American and Canadian responses to de-industrialization. We will then shift to examine the impact of the global economy on the lives of three women, their companies and their communities in Patterson, New Jersey, rural Mississippi, and Matamoros, Mexico. Lastly, we will examine the human consequences of free trade agreements like NAFTA and worker struggles along the U.S.-Mexico border to alter the relations of power in their workplaces, communities and nations.

Learning Outcomes:

- Understand the historical and contemporary challenges facing North American workers and labor unions in the age of globalization
- Compare and contrast the development of labor movements and working class experiences in Mexico, Canada and United States
- Conduct research on a specific area related to the labor movement, labor unions, free trade agreements and worker struggles in the global economy

- Examine the necessity and importance of cross-border labor organizing in North America as a key component in the revitalization of the U.S. labor movement

Texts Required:

Barbara Ehrenreich, Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America (Henry Holt and Company, 2001)

<http://www.nickelanddimed.net/>

Nelson Lichtenstein, State of the Union: A Century of American Labor (Princeton University Press, 2002)

<http://www.pupress.princeton.edu/chapters/i7255.html>

Steven High, Industrial Sunset: The Making of North America's Rust Belt, 1969-1984 (University of Toronto Press, 2003)

<http://buffaloreport.com/articles/031113.manson.rustbelt.html>

William M. Adler, Mollie's Job : A Story of Life and Work on the Global Assembly Line (Scribner, 2001)

<http://www.nhi.org/online/issues/112/atlasreview.htm>

David Bacon, The Children of NAFTA: Labor Wars on the US/Mexico Border (University of California Press, 2004)

<http://www.monthlyreview.org/0304fletcher.htm>

Course Requirements:

• **Class Attendance/Participation (10%)/Participation (10%)**

Given the nature of this class, it is critical that everyone be involved in class discussions, whether raising questions from the readings and lectures or answering questions during class. I expect every student to stand up to engage each other in a productive dialogue agree to disagree when necessary. Attendance is required. Since this course relies heavily on class discussion, it is important for you to attend class and notify the instructor via e-mail if you have to miss class for a legitimate reason. Only institutional excuses will be accepted. If you have more than three unexcused absences your grade will be lowered at my discretion. Participation is important to this class. A few suggestions: come to class prepared; take notes on films and readings; bring questions; anticipate differing opinions; realize there is much to learn; appreciate other perspectives; be open to new ideas; treat everyone with respect.

• **Book Review (20%)**

You will be required to write a review of a book length study of a labor union, organizing struggle, workplace discrimination, or agricultural labor issues. You must choose from the following list below. You may suggest alternatives to the list but they must be approved by the instructor. Each response should be 4-5 pages in length, double-spaced, typed, and turned in at the beginning of class on Monday, 11/28. You need to address the following questions: 1) the key elements of the argument 2) key strengths and weaknesses of the book 3) lessons for the contemporary labor movement

1) Ralph Armbruster-Sandoval, Globalization and Cross-Border Labor Solidarity in the Americas: The Anti-Sweatshop Movement and the Struggle for Social Justice (New York: Routledge, 2005)

2) Liza Featherstone, Selling Women Short: The Landmark Battle for Workers' Rights at Wal-Mart (Basic Books, 2004)

3) Daniel Rothenberg, With These Hands: the Hidden World of Migrant Farmworkers Today (University of California Press, 2000)

4) Barbara Kingsolver, Holding the Line: Women in the Great Arizona Mine Strike of 1983 (Ithaca, NY: ILR Press, 1989)

● **Writing Assignments (30%)**

You will write a 3-4 page critical response to a question regarding the course material, required readings and videos covered for that section. I will distribute and discuss the question(s) in advance and will provide specific guidelines for this assignment.

● **Final Project Paper (40%)**

The purpose of the final project is to gain more in-depth knowledge on an issue relating to the labor movement in Mexico, the United States and Canada. Students are required to choose from the following options:

1) Labor Union History

Conduct an oral history interview of a labor union member and write a 12-15 page paper on the life history of your interviewee focusing on their role within the union, views toward the labor movement, participation in collective bargaining, strikes and other labor struggles, and their opinion on the main obstacles the labor movement faces today. You need to include interview excerpts and a bibliography. You must make connections to readings and other secondary sources. Specific guidelines will be posted on this website.

2) Family Labor History

The purpose of this paper is to tell in your own words the story of your family's labor history. In 12 to 15 pages, discuss the role of unions in your family, and examine the various jobs held by family members, the various definitions of "class" and "class mobility" in your family, and the collective views towards unions and labor movement in general. Your best information will be family members who have and are still union members. You must make connections to readings and other secondary sources. If you are not familiar with doing a family oral history interview, there will be guidelines posted on this website.

3) Labor Website Project

You may design a website on cross-border labor struggles or labor movement issues. As part of the website you must include photos and a written narrative (12-15 pages) about the topic. The website topic is due by the fifth week of the semester. Specific guidelines and a model will be posted on this website.

NOTE: You must choose the final project option by the fifth week, so that you can plan ahead and get assistance from me and understand the expectations of the assignments well in advance.

● **Grade Calculation**

Class Participation/Attendance	10%
Book Review	20%
Writing Assignments (5)	30%
Final Project	40%

● **Special Note:**

PLAGARISM OR CHEATING OF ANY KIND ON ANY ASSIGNMENT OR EXAM WILL NOT BE TOLLERATED AND WILL RESULT IN A FAILING GRADE IN THE COURSE. (Consult the WSU Student Handbook for further details). In other words, do your own work. If using the ideas, work or wording of another in written assignments, please acknowledge the source.

Disability Accommodation: Reasonable accommodations are available for students with documented disabilities. Please let me know about any disabilities at the start of the term. Contact the Disability Resource Center in 205 Administration Annex 335-1566 for testing, documentation, or additional information.

● **Course Schedule:**

THE WORKING POOR IN AMERICA

WEEK 1:

Mon. 8/22: Introductions and Discussion of Course Goals

Wed. 8/24: Introduction & Ch.1: Serving in Florida
in Nickel and Dimed

WEEK 2:

Mon. 8/29: ch. 2, Scrubbing in Maine in Nickel and Dimed

Wed.: 8/31: ch. 3, Selling in Minnesota & Evaluation
in Nickel and Dimed

WEEK 3:

Mon.9/5: LABOR DAY

HISTORY OF THE U.S. LABOR MOVEMENT

Wed. 9/7: Introduction & Ch. 1, Reconstructing the 1930s in State of the Union
Assignment #1 DUE

VIDEO: Uprising of 1934

WEEK 4:

Mon. 9/12: Ch. 2, Citizenship at Work in State of the Union

Wed. 9/14: Ch. 3, A Labor-Management Accord? in State of the Union

WEEK 5:

Mon. 9/19: Ch 4, Erosion of the Union Idea in State of the Union

Wed. 9/21: Ch. 5, Rights Consciousness in the Workplace in State of the Union
Final Project Option DUE

WEEK 6:

Mon.9/26: Ch 6, A Time of Troubles in State of the Union

Wed. 9/28: Ch 7, What is to be Done? in State of the Union

INDUSTRIAL WORKERS IN U.S. & CANADA

WEEK 7:

Mon. 10/3: History of Canadian Labor Movement

Intro. in Industrial Sunset

Assignment #2 DUE

Wed. 10/5: Ch. 1: Gold Doesn't Rust in Industrial Sunset

VIDEO: American Dream

WEEK 8:

Mon. 10/10: Ch.2, Transplanted Identities in Industrial Sunset

Wed. 10/12: Ch.3, Back to the Garden &Ch.4, The Deindustrialized Heartland in Industrial Sunset

WEEK 9:

Mon. 10/17: Ch.5, In Defense of Local Community in Industrial Sunset

Wed. 10/19: Ch.6, "I'll Wrap the Fucking Canadian Flag around Me"

Conclusion in Industrial Sunset

WORKERS IN A GLOBAL ECONOMY

WEEK 10:

Mon. 10/24: Introduction in Mollie's Job
VIDEO: The Global Assembly Line
Assignment #3 DUE

Wed. 10/27: Part 1: Patterson in Mollie's Job

WEEK 11:

Mon. 10/31: Part 2: Mississippi in Mollie's Job

Wed. 11/2: Part 3: Mexico in Mollie's Job

WORKER STRUGGLES ALONG THE U.S.-MEXICO BORDER

WEEK 12:

Mon.11/7: History of Mexican Labor Movement
Intro. & Ch. 1, Grapes and Green Unions in The Children of NAFTA
Assignment #4 DUE

Wed. 11/9: Ch.2, Putting Solidarity on the Table &
Ch.3, Tijuana's Maquiladora Workers in The Children of NAFTA
VIDEO: Maquila: A Tale of Two Mexicos

WEEK 13:

Mon.11/14: Ch. 4, Han Young in The Children of NAFTA

Wed.11/16: Ch. 5, Build a House, Go To Jail &
Ch. 6, The Strategic Alliance in The Children of NAFTA

THANKSGIVING BREAK (Nov. 21-27)

WEEK 14:

Mon, 11/28: Ch. 7, Duro Means Hard & Ch. 8, Mexico's Wars Over
Privatization in The Children of NAFTA
Book Review DUE

Wed, 11.30: Ch. 9, Transplanted Expectations
in The Children of NAFTA

WEEK 15:

Mon. 12/5: Ch. 10, The World of the Border has Changed
in The Children of NAFTA

Wed. 12/7: Epilogue: The Confrontation to Come in
Class Evaluations
Assignment #5 DUE

Final Project DUE

Wednesday, December 14th by 5pm

In Mailbox, Wilson Hall Room 111