

Labor Studies 605, Fall 2023
rmilkman@gc.cuny.edu
Wednesdays 6:15 - 8:45 pm

Professor Ruth Milkman.
Office: Room 1808
(office hours by appointment)

Perspectives on the Labor Movement

This course is an introduction to the field of Labor Studies. It examines the structure and dynamics of organized labor in the United States, in theory and practice. We begin with an overview of the current state of the nation's labor movement, and then turn to explore a selection of key classical and contemporary theoretical texts. The rest of the course explores the possibilities and limits of labor organizing in the United States, past and present, as well as the ways in which unions deal with divisions among workers by gender, race, and immigration status. We will explore such questions as: Under what conditions can workers successfully organize to pursue their collective interests? What do unions do, and what should they do? Are unions still viable in a high-technology, global economy? To what extent are unions part of the solution to the challenges workers face, and to what extent are they part of the problem?

Since 1935 U.S. workers have had the legal right to organize into labor unions and engage in collective bargaining. Unions are one of the few means through which workers can win better pay, working conditions, and job security; they also provide a voice for workers both on the job and in the political arena. Yet today only 10 percent of U.S. workers are union members (down from 35 percent in the 1950s), and unions represent only 6 percent of workers in the private sector. Strikes also have declined in frequency since the 1970s. Employer resistance to unionism has grown in the past half-century and has proven highly effective. Yet the labor movement refuses to die: organizing efforts continue, and public approval of unions has been growing.

Drawing on texts from a variety of academic disciplines, the course will familiarize students with foundational theories and contemporary debates in the labor studies field. The course is reading and writing intensive, aiming to help students develop the skills to excel at the graduate level.

Course Expectations and Requirements.

The most important requirement for this course is to carefully read the assigned texts *prior to* each class meeting. Come to class prepared to discuss what you have read and to participate actively in discussion. Please bring copies (paper or electronic) of the readings to class along with your notes, comments, and questions.

This is one of the few four-credit classes in SLU's Labor Studies M.A. program, which is the basis for the expectation that you will spend one hour a week in on-line discussions. We will use a dedicated Slack channel (with access limited to students enrolled in the class and the instructor) for this purpose. Each week you should log on to Slack once between Thursday and Sunday, and then again between Monday and our Wednesday evening class, posting at least twice. One of the posts should be a longer (300-500 words) contribution sharing your reactions to the week's assigned reading, and at least one should engage in discussion with your classmates. More details will be shared in class.

This course strongly emphasizes writing skills. Students will be required to write one 5-page paper (due October 13) and a 10-page final paper (due at the end of the semester). Both papers will address questions based on the required course readings; no additional research is required.

Finally, students (individually or in pairs) will facilitate discussion for one class meeting.

Grading will be based on the following:

Class participation/attendance:	15%	Paper #1 (4 - 5 pages)	25%
Online (Slack) discussion:	15%	Paper: #2 (8 -10 pages)	35%
Class facilitation:	10%		

Required Texts: All required readings are available on line, either via links in the schedule below or (for readings marked with a * below) in the course dropbox at:

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/v4stbdvrmvnmvrjkhmk4l/h?rlkey=ee1pgf8xv4nybf4pua69ql9kz&dl=0>

A NOTE ON PLAGIARISM: Plagiarism means presenting as one's own the words, opinions, or work of someone else (whether human authors or AI engines like ChatGPT). It is one of the most serious forms of cheating and can lead to expulsion from CUNY. **The penalty for plagiarism in this course will be a grade of "0" (failure).** You are encouraged to discuss your ideas with your fellow students; however, it is *not* acceptable to write your papers in collaboration with anyone else. Your papers should include your own ideas, should be written and organized by you alone, and presented in your own words.

Learning Goals and Outcomes:

- Improving critical thinking, reading, writing, oral presentation and analytical skills.
- Mastering basic concepts in the field of labor studies.

COURSE OUTLINE AND SCHEDULE OF READINGS

Aug. 30, 2023 *Course Introduction*

Ruth Milkman and Joseph van der Naald, *The State of the Unions 2022: A Profile of Organized Labor in New York City, New York State, and the United States* (SLU, 2022)
https://www.ruthmilkman.info/files/ugd/90d188_393177d7d6d94d2f90e7a11753e459ba.pdf

Eric Blanc, “The Momentum is on Labor’s Side Right Now,” *Jacobin*, 5/16/23
<https://jacobin.com/2023/05/us-labor-organizing-momentum-rank-and-file-fortune-500-unions>

Also recommended (especially for those with little background on labor):
Michael Yates, *Why Unions Matter* (2009), especially chapters 1-4.

Sept. 6, 2023 *Current Challenges Facing the U.S. Labor Movement*

*John Logan, “Crushing Unions, by Any Means Necessary: How Amazon’s Blistering Anti-Union Campaign Won in Bessemer, Alabama,” *New Labor Forum* 30:3 (2021): 38-45.

Megan K. Stack, “Inside Starbucks’ Dirty War Against Organized Labor,” *New York Times*, July 23, 2023 (op-ed): https://www.nytimes.com/2023/07/21/opinion/starbucks-union-strikes-labor-movement.html?utm_source=pocket_saves

*Suresh Naidu, “Is There Any Future for a US Labor Movement?” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 36:4 (Fall 2022): 3-28.

Sept. 13, 2023 *Classical Theories of “Human Nature,” Labor and Capitalism*

*Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651) Chapter 13

John Locke, “Property” (1689). Excerpted from Locke’s *Second Treatise*
<https://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/v1ch16s3.html>

*Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), Book I, Ch. 1 “On the Division of Labor”

*Karl Marx, “Wage Labor and Capital” (1891 [1849]).

Sept. 20, 2023 *Late 20th Century NeoLiberalism and Its Critics*

*Excerpts from Milton and Rose Friedman, *Free to Choose: A Personal Statement* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980), pp. 65-67, 91-97, 101-02, 189-94, 228-47.

*David Harvey, “Neoliberalism as Creative Destruction,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 610 (March 2007): 22-44.

Sept. 27, 2023 *What Unions Do, How They Vary, Their Internal Dynamics – Classic Texts*

*Richard B. Freeman and James L. Medoff, “The Two Faces of Unionism,” *The Public Interest*, 57 (Fall 1979): 69-93.

*Robert F. Hoxie, “Trade Unionism in the United States” *The Journal of Political Economy* 22:3 (1914): 201-17.

*A. J. Muste, “Factional Fights in Trade Unions,” in J.B.S. Hardman, ed., *American Labor Dynamics in the Light of Post-War Developments* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1928), pp. 332-48.

October 4, 2023 *Historical Perspectives Part I: The AFL and Its Legacy*

*Howard Kimeldorf, "Worker Replacement Costs and Unionization: Origins of the U.S Labor Movement," *American Sociological Review* 78:6 (2013): 1033-62.

*Dorothy Sue Cobble, "Organizing the Postindustrial Work Force: Lessons from the History of Waitress Unionism," *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 44:3 (1991): 419-36.

*Christopher Tomlins, "AFL Unions in the 1930s: Their Performance in Historical Perspective," *Journal of American History* 65:4 (1979): 1021-42

October 11, 2023 *Historical Perspectives Part II: The New Deal and the CIO*

*Melvyn Dubofsky and Joseph A. McCartin, Chapters 15 and 16 of *Labor in America: A History* (Malden, MA John Wiley & Sons, 2017)

*Walter Linder, "The Great Flint Sit-Down Strike Against GM, 1936-37" (Solidarity Pamphlet no. 31, 1965)

FIRST PAPER DUE (via email) by 2 pm on Friday Oct. 13

October 18, 2023 *The Postwar "Accord" and Labor's Decline*

*Nelson Lichtenstein, "A Labor-Management Accord?" chapter 3 of his *State of the Union* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), pp. 98-140.

*Ellen Schrecker, "Labor and the Cold War: The Legacy of McCarthyism," in Robert W. Cherney, William Issel and Kieran Walsh Taylor, eds., *American Labor and the Cold War: Grassroots Politics and Postwar Political Culture* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004), pp. 7-24.

*Ruth Milkman, "Back to the Future? US Labour in the New Gilded Age," *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 51:4 (2013): 645-65.

October 25, 2023 *The Arc of Public Sector Unionism*

*Alexis Walker, "Labor's Enduring Divide: The Distinct Path of Public Sector Unions in the United States." *Studies in American Political Development*, 28:2 (2014): 175-200.

*Alexander Hertel-Fernandez, "Policy Feedback as Political Weapon: Conservative Advocacy and the Demobilization of the Public Sector Labor Movement," *Perspectives on Politics*, 16:2 (2018): 364-379.

*Jarrett Skorup, "The Janus Effect: The Impact of the 2018 Supreme Court Decision on Public Sector Unions" (Mackinac Center for Public Policy, 2023)

November 1, 2023 *Labor, Gender, and Sexuality*

*Ruth Milkman, "Gender and Trade Unionism in Historical Perspective," in Louise A. Tilly and Patricia Gurin, eds. *Women, Politics and Change*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1990), pp. 87-107.

*Dorothy Sue Cobble, "Labor Feminists and President Kennedy's Commission on Women," in Nancy Hewitt, ed., *No Permanent Waves: Recasting Histories of U.S. Feminism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010), pp.144-167.

*Kristen Schilt, "Just One of the Guys? How Transmen Make Gender Visible at Work," *Gender & Society* 20:4 (2006): 465-90.

Kim Kelly, "How LGBTQ Activists Transformed the Labor Movement," *Teen Vogue*, June 7, 2019 <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/lgbtq-union-activists-transformed-the-labor-movement>

E. Tammy Kim, "The Upstart Union Challenging Starbucks," *The New Yorker*, Aug. 2, 2022 <https://www.newyorker.com/news/dispatch/the-upstart-union-challenging-starbucks>

November 8, 2023 *Labor, Race and Immigration*

*Eric Arnesen, "Following the Color Line of Labor: Black Workers and the Labor Movement before 1930," *Radical History Review* 55 (1993): 53-87.

*Michael Goldfield, "Race and the CIO: The Possibilities for Racial Egalitarianism during the 1930s and 1940s," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 44 (1993): 1-32.

*Ruth Milkman, "Immigrant Workers and the Future of American Labor," *American Bar Association Journal of Labor and Employment Law* 26: 2 (2011): 295-310.

*Els de Graauw and Shannon Gleeson, "Labor Unions and Undocumented Immigrants: Local Perspectives on Transversal Solidarity during DACA and DAPA," *Critical Sociology* 47:6 (2020): 941-955.

November 15, 2023 *"Alt-Labor" Organizing*

*Steve Jenkins, "Organizing, Advocacy and Member Power: A Critical Reflection," *Working USA* 6:2 (2002): 56-89.

*Janice Fine, "A Marriage Made in Heaven? Mismatches and Misunderstandings between Worker Centers and Unions," *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 45:2 (2007): 335-60.

Josh Dzieza, "Revolt of the Delivery Workers," *New York* magazine and *The Verge*, Sept. 13, 2021, available at: <https://www.theverge.com/22667600/delivery-workers-seamless-uber-relay-new-york-electric-bikes-apps>

HAPPY THANKSGIVING! (no class Nov. 22)

November 29, 2023 *Rebuilding Unions: Debating The Path Forward*

Stephen Lerner, “An Immodest Proposal: Remodeling the House of Labor” (2003)
<https://newlaborforum.cuny.edu/2017/11/21/an-immodest-proposal-remodeling-the-house-of-labor/>

*Richard Sullivan, “Why the Labor Movement is Not a Movement,” *New Labor Forum* 19:2 (2010): 45-50.

*Micah Uetricht and Barry Eidlin, “U.S. Union Revitalization and the Missing “Militant Minority,” *Labor Studies Journal* 44:1 (2019): 36-59.

*Jane McAlevey, “Forging New Class Solidarities: Organizing Hospital Workers,” *Socialist Register* 2015, pp. 318-35.

Larry Cohen and Eric Blanc, “Should the Labor Movement Prioritize the Push for Sectoral Bargaining?” *The Nation*, March 3, 2023 <https://www.thenation.com/article/activism/sectoral-bargaining-labor-unions/>

December 6, 2023 *A New Political Generation*

*Eric Blanc, “Breaking the Law: Strike Bans and Labor Revitalization in the Red State Revolt,” *Labor Studies Journal* 45:1 (2020): 74-96.

Noam Scheiber, “The Revolt of the College-Educated Working Class,” *New York Times*, April 29, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/28/business/college-workers-starbucks-amazon-unions.html?searchResultPosition=2>

Harold Meyerson, “In 2023, Everyone Who Can Go Union Is Doing Just That,” *The American Prospect*, May 1, 2023 <https://prospect.org/labor/05-01-2023-starbucks-amazon-teamsters-uaw-union-movement/>

FINAL PAPER DUE (via email) by 2 pm on Friday Dec. 15
