

# US Labor History

Spring 2023, AMH 3500.26491

Tuesdays, 11:45-1:40pm

Thursdays, 12:50-1:40

Professor Paul Ortiz

Department of History, University of Florida

352-273-1545, [portiz@ufl.edu](mailto:portiz@ufl.edu)

"Who put this great gulf between the American captain and the American sailor? Or is the captain a creature of like passions with ourselves? Or is he an infallible archangel, incapable of the shadow of error? Or has a sailor no mark of humanity, no attribute of manhood, that, bound hand and foot, he is cast into an American frigate shorn of all rights and defenses, while the notorious lawlessness of the commander has passed into a proverb familiar to [sailors]: *The Law was not made for the captain!*"

–Herman Melville, White Jacket, (1850)

*"It is not needed, nor fitting here that a general argument should be made in favor of popular institutions; but there is one point, with its connections, not so hackneyed as most others to which I ask a brief attention. It is the effect to place capital on an equal footing with, if not above, labor, in the structure of government... Labor is prior to, and independent of, capital. Capital is only the fruit of labor, and could never have existed if labor had not first existed. Labor is the superior of capital, and deserves much the higher consideration."*

--President Abraham Lincoln,  
Message to U.S. Congress, December 3, 1861

**Course Description:** We will explore working class cultures and struggles in the development of the United States from the colonial period to the present. Emphasis is placed upon the diverse cultures and ideologies of working people as well as their efforts to organize in concert and to create free and independent labor organizations including trade unions, labor parties, and mutual aid societies.

**Course Objectives/Student Learning Outcomes:** Students will investigate major problems of labor and working-class history in the United States including struggles for economic security, democracy in the workplace, and grassroots efforts to reform American politics. We will explore the development of slavery, indentured servitude, free labor, Jim Crow, debt peonage, agriculture, deindustrialization the "Gig Economy" and other drivers of US development and institutions between the colonial period and present.

Class sessions will often feature music and discussions of contemporary labor issues using historical materials to base our discussion. We will study the centrality of working class history in the creation of what we now refer to as "American culture," via protagonists in a variety of genres including American literary classics such as Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, & Toni Morrison's *Beloved* among other novels. We will also learn about working-class experiences in the innovation of art forms such as jazz, blues, country and folk by listening to musical recordings and oral testimonies from workers themselves.

**Attendance Policy:** You are permitted two unexcused absences without penalty but on the third and each subsequent absence, your final grade for the course will be reduced by a third of a letter grade (i.e., from an A to an A- to a B+, etc.). A medical certificate is needed to excuse absences. If you miss class you are responsible for getting notes and/or assignment instructions from one of your peers or instructor during regular office hours.

**Academic Honesty:** UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of integrity by abiding by the [Honor Code](#).”

**Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:** Students requesting classroom accommodations should register with the [Disability Resource Center](#) (352-392-8565). Students will then receive an accommodation letter to present to the instructor when requesting accommodation as early as possible in the semester.

**Counseling and Mental Health Resources:** Students facing difficulties completing the course or who are in need of counseling or urgent help should call the on-campus [Counseling and Wellness Center](#) (352-392-1575);

**Current UF Grading Policy:** Review current UF Grading policy [here](#).

**Canvas Site:** Check our Canvas site regularly for course updates, reading assignments, essay prompts and study guides for papers & exams.

**Online Course Evaluations:** Your candid feedback on the quality of instruction in this course is greatly appreciated and integral to improving the structure and delivery of this course. Please be on the lookout for an email from [GatorEvals](#) for opportunities to provide course evaluation.

**COVID CARE:** Vaccines are readily available and have been demonstrated to be safe and effective against the COVID-19 virus. Visit [one.uf](#) for screening / testing and vaccination opportunities. If you are sick, stay home. Please call your primary care provider if you are ill and need immediate care or the UF Student Health Care Center at 352-392-1161 to be evaluated.

### ***COURSE FORMAT***

**Synthesis Essays:** This is a Gordon Rule course. Students will write 3 synthesis essays this semester that compare and contrast readings across weeks. Each essay will be 4-5 pages in length. Your first essay will focus on Rediker’s, *The Slave Ship: A Human History* and will examine the impact of slavery on the lives of working people in colonial America. I am looking for serious engagement with the major themes and will give explicit instructions on each paper. Synthesis Essay due dates: January 30; March 27; April 14

**Exams:** We will write two essay exams in the form of 4–5-page essays. Both exams will be take-home format. The mid-term will be due February 20. The final exam will be due May 4

**Grading:** Class participation, including helping to lead a discussion (20%); Mid-Term exam (10%); Synthesis Essays (60%); Final exam (10%).

**Contemporary Thought Pieces (CTP):** Each week, we will weave *contemporary thought pieces* into our historical readings in order to learn how to understand contemporary issues through historical lenses. The idea

behind the CTP readings is to connect the past with the present and to gain a greater understanding of how historical processes impact the workplaces of today and the future.

**Leading Discussion** Part of Thursday's class will be generally reserved for group discussions. Each student will lead at least one discussion in tandem with a student team.

**Office Hours:** I will be holding office hours this semester, Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:00 to 3:30 pm. I am also available for phone meetings via appointment. My office number is 352-273-1545.

**Required Texts:** (Available @ Library West Circulation desk) and UF Bookstore: Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History*; Paul Krause, *The Battle for Homestead, 1880-1892: Politics, Culture, and Steel*; Lucy Parsons: *Freedom, Equality & Solidarity Writings & Speeches, 1878-1937*; Thomas Bell, *Out of this Furnace: A Novel of Immigrant Labor in America*; Michael Honey, *Black Workers Remember: An Oral History of Segregation; The Fight in the Fields: Cesar Chavez and the Farmworkers*; Barbara Kingsolver, *Holding the Line: Women in the Great Arizona Mine Strike of 1983*

## Syllabus & Reading List

### **WEEK OF JANUARY 10: WORKING CLASS NATION: INTRODUCTION TO CLASS**

**Tuesday:** Introduction to course themes; *What is labor? What role does labor play in a democratic society?*  
*Syllabus review*

**Thursday:** *Syllabus review; Introduction to US Labor History, cont.*

*Free write exercise: Abraham Lincoln on labor's role in the republic.*

Abraham Lincoln, [\*On Labor and Capital: A Message to the U.S. Congress, December 3 1861\*](#)

Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History*, Introduction and Chapter 1

**Contemporary Thought Pieces (CTP)** [Revealed: 6,500 migrant workers have died in Qatar since World Cup awarded](#), *The Guardian*, February 2021 and, [Inequality and the World Cup](#), *Counterpunch*, 2014

### **WEEK OF JANUARY 17: SLAVERY AND THE MAKING OF THE AMERICAS**

**Tuesday:** Lecture: Transatlantic Slavery and the Making of the American Working Class

**Contemporary Thought Piece (CTP):** Caitlin Rosenthal, "[Plantations Practiced Modern Management](#)," *Harvard Business Review*, Sept. 2013

**Thursday: Readings Discussion:** Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History*, chapters 2-6

Paul Ortiz, "Bound Labor, Indentured Servitude and "Concerted Action Among Workers" in Richard B. Morris's *Colonial America*" (*CANVAS=CAN*)

CTP: Coalition of Immokalee Workers, "[Anti-Slavery Program](#)," 2012.

Gustavus Myers, *History of the Supreme Court of the United States* (1912) (CANVAS=CAN)

**Suggested Reading:**

*Gustavus Myers History of the Great American Fortunes* (1909), 9-42 (CANVAS=CAN)

**WEEK OF JANUARY 24: STRUGGLES AGAINST SLAVERY AND FORCED LABOR**

**Tuesday:** Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History*, chapters 7-8

*Multi-Media presentation: The Many-Headed Hydra: Cultures of Resistance*

CTP: "[Life and Death in Apple's Forbidden City](#)," *The Guardian*, June 18, 2017.

CTP: Griselda Nevarez, "[Latino Workers Helped Rebuild New Orleans](#), But Many Weren't Paid," *NBC News*, August 28, 2015,

**Thursday: Reading Discussion:** Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History*, finish book.

**WEEK OF JAN 31: THE CRISIS OF THE "MANY AND THE FEW" IN ANTEBELLUM AMERICA**

*And, whereas, we believe that those who have preceded us have been, we know that ourselves are, and that our successors are liable to be, assailed in various ways by the wicked and unprincipled, and cheated out of just, legal and constitutional dues, by ungenerous, illiberal and avaricious capitalists,—and convinced that "union is power," and that as the unprincipled consult and advise, that they may the more easily decoy and seduce—and the capitalists that they may the more effectually defraud—we (being the weaker,) claim it to be our undeniable right, to associate and concentrate our power, that we may the more successfully repel their equally base and iniquitous aggressions.*

*--Lowell Factory Girls Association Constitution (1836)*

**\*Monday, January 30 1st synthesis essay due: 10 P.M., ([portiz@ufl.edu](mailto:portiz@ufl.edu))**

**Tuesday:** Lecture: Early Labor Parties, Women's Organizing, and Struggles for the Ten-Hour Day

Joshua R. Greenberg, "Trade Unions," and "Working Men's Party," in: *Advocating the Man: Masculinity, Organized Labor, and the Household in New York, 1800-1840* (CAN)

Thomas Skidmore, "A Plan to Equalize the Wealth," (1829) (CAN)

Jamelle Bouis, "[A 200-Year-Old Argument](#) on Behalf of the Many Against the Few," *New York Times*, December 20, 2022 (Analysis of Thomas Skidmore's plan.) Also available via [The Bradford Era](#)

[Working Men's Declaration of Independence](#) (1829)

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[Constitution of the Lowell Factory Girls Association](#) text (1836)

Study: “[Organized Resistance](#),” “Grievances,” of Lowell Factory Girls Association (1836) and “Conditions” and section of *Mill Girls in Nineteenth-Century Print*.

Boston Circular, [The Demand for a 10 Hour Day](#) (1835)

[The Movement for a Ten-Hour Day](#), *Digital History*

CTP, “[Bangladesh Factory Collapse Toll Passes 1,000](#),” *BBC News*, May 10, 2013 and International Labour Organization, “[The Rana Plaza Accident and its Aftermath](#),”

### **Thursday: Lecture and Reading Discussion:**

Frederick Douglass [in support of Chinese immigration](#) “Composite Nation,” (1869),

Ortiz, review of Karren Orren, *Labor, the Law, and Liberal Development in the United States*. (CAN)

### **Suggested Reading:**

Thomas Paine, “Agrarian Justice, Opposed to Agrarian Law, and to Agrarian Monopoly,” (1795) [CAN]

## **FEBRUARY 7: STANDING AT ARMAGEDDON: THE EMBATTLED REPUBLIC OF LABOR**

*As a matter of fact the industrial supremacy of the south before the war would not have been possible without the Negro, and the south of today would totally collapse without his labor. Cotton culture has been and is the great staple and it will not be denied that the fineness and superiority of the fiber that makes the export of the southern states the greatest in the world is due in large measure to the genius of the Negroes charged with its cultivation.*

*The whole world is under obligation to the Negro, and that the white heel is still upon the black neck is simply proof that the world is not yet civilized.*

*--Eugene Victor Debs, “The Negro in the Class Struggle” (1903)*

**Tuesday:** Paul Krause, *The Battle for Homestead, 1880-1892: Politics, Culture, and Steel* (preface: introduction; chapters 1-3)

“August Spies [Defends the Eight-Hour Movement](#), 1886,”

*Massacre of Workers: 1887 Thibodaux Massacre* (CAN)

CTP: “Justice in the factory: how [Black Lives Matter](#) breathed new life into unions, *The Guardian*, 2018

**CTP:** UFF Letter Urging Saint Leo University to Recognize Union, November 12, 2020 (CAN)

**Thursday:** Paul Krause, *The Battle for Homestead* (chapters 4-7)

Eugene V. Debs, “The Negro in the Class Struggle,” 1903) (Canvas)

### **WEEK OF FEBRUARY 14: A REVOLUTION IN STEEL AND AMERICAN POLITICS**

**Take-Home Mid-Term exam distributed on Tuesday. Theme: “Labor and the Making of the Republic, Due Monday, February 20, 10 pm. ([portiz@ufl.edu](mailto:portiz@ufl.edu))**

**Tuesday:** *The Battle for Homestead* (chapters 8-11)

**CTP:** “As Our Jobs Are Automated, Some Say We’ll Need a Guaranteed Basic Income,” National Public Radio, September 24, 2016, <http://www.npr.org/2016/09/24/495186758/as-our-jobs-are-automated-some-say-well-need-a-guaranteed-basic-income> (Radio program)

**Thursday** *The Battle for Homestead* (chapters, 12-13)

**CTP:** “[Hellfire from Above, Tampa Electric](#),” *Tampa Bay Times*, August 17, 2017 (Worker Safety)

**Film:** “Matewan” West Virginia Coal Miners’ Unionism, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6pDgeALaAu8>

### **WEEK OF FEBRUARY 21: VOTER SUPPRESSION & THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF LABOR**

**Midterm due, February 20: 10 pm, [portiz@ufl.edu](mailto:portiz@ufl.edu)**

**Tuesday:** *The Battle for Homestead* (chapters 14-22)

Luisa Capetillo, “To My Daughter, Manuela Ledesma Capetillo,” *Mi opinion acerca de las libertades, derechos y deberes de la mujer* (CAN)

**CTP:** Zoe West and Sanjay Pinto, [Sweeping Change: Building Survivor and Worker Leadership to Confront Sexual Harassment in the Janitorial Industry](#), ILR Worker Institute, 1-13.

Eugene V. Debs., “The Homestead Horrors,” *Locomotive Fireman’s Magazine*, (1892) (Canvas)

**Thursday:** *The Battle for Homestead* (wrap up book)

**CTP:** “[The Deadly 1991 Hamlet Fire](#) Exposed the High Cost of “Cheap,”” *Smithsonian Magazine*, September, 2017.

### **WEEK OF FEB 28: DYNAMITE! THE ERA OF THE TRIANGLE SHIRTWAIST FIRE**

**Tuesday:** Lucy Parsons: *Freedom, Equality & Solidarity Writings & Speeches, 1878-1937;*

[Remembering the 1911 Triangle Factory Fire](#), Cornell University, ILR School, 2018.

Hubert Harrison, *The Nation and the Negro* (1917) [CAN]

[“On Labor Day, Remembering the Ludlow Massacre.”](#)

**Thursday:** Thomas Bell, *Out of This Furnace: A Novel of Immigrant Labor in America* (Kracha’s story)

CTP: “In Historic Vote, [St. Paul Starbucks is Minnesota’s First to Unionize](#),” *Twin Cities Eater*, April 27, 2022

CTP: “[Elon Musk’s Takeover Through the Eyes of Twitter’s Janitors](#),” *In These Times*, December 12, 2022

### **WEEK OF MARCH 7: WHOSE PROGRESSIVE ERA?**

**Tuesday:** Thomas Bell, *Out of this Furnace: A Novel of Immigrant Labor in America* (TBD)

Julia Wright and Paul Ortiz, How [The Elaine Massacre of 1919](#) Influenced Richard Wright, Acclaimed Author of “Black Boy” & “Native Son” *Democracy Now*, October 04, 2022

Sonia Hernandez, “A Profile of [Two Radical Women Anarchists](#) in the making of Revolutionary Mexico,” LAWCHA, July 21, 2022

**Thursday:** Thomas Bell, *Out of this Furnace*, cont.

A. Phillip Randolph, Chandler Owen, et. al., *The Messenger* (January, 1918), 1-24

Devra Weber, Keeping Community, Challenging Boundaries: Indigenous Migrants, Internationalist Workers, and Mexican Revolutionaries, 1900-1920,” (CAN)

Eugene Victor Debs, “[Statement to the Court](#) Upon Being Convicted of Violating the Sedition Act”

CTP Nick Hanauer, “A [report that analyzed every minimum-wage hike](#) since 1938 should put a bunch of nonsense ideas to rest,” *Business Insider: Markets*, May 6, 2016.

### **WEEK OF MARCH 14: SPRING BREAK**

*Spring Break is from 03/11/2023 – 03/18/2023.*

### **WEEK OF MARCH 21: WORKERS MAKE A NEW DEAL IN AMERICAN POLITICS**

**Tuesday:** Thomas Bell, *Out of this Furnace*, cont.

Paul Ortiz, *An African American and Latinx History of the United States*, chapter 6 (CAN)

“[We Are Americans!](#)” *The 1936 Steelworkers Declaration of Independence*: (CAN)

C.L.R. James, "With the Sharecroppers," (1941) (CAN)

**Thursday**, Thomas Bell, *Out of This Furnace*, concluded

James Green, "Democracy Comes to Little Siberia: Steel Worker Organizing in Aliquippa, Pennsylvania, 1933-1937," *Labor's Heritage*. 5:3 (August 1993). (CAN)

Film: "[With Babies and Banners](#)" (*Women and the Organization of the CIO*)

CTP: "[How to Crush a Movement](#) for Racial Justice," *The Nation*, November 1, 2022

**Suggested Readings:** (*Extra Credit Opportunity*)

Staughton Lynd, Introduction, in Staughton Lynd, *We are All Leaders*, The Alternative Unionism of the early 1930s, 1-26 (CAN)

Peter Rachleff, "Organizing 'Wall to Wall': The Independent Union of All Workers, 1933-37," in Staughton Lynd, *We are All Leaders*, The Alternative Unionism of the early 1930s." 51-71 (CAN)

## **MARCH 28: BLACK WORKERS AND THE STRUGGLE AGAINST RACISM**

**Monday, March 27: Synthesis essay due: "Workers Make a New Deal" 10 pm.** [portiz@ufl.edu](mailto:portiz@ufl.edu)

**Tuesday:** Michael Honey, *Black Workers Remember: An Oral History of Segregation* (TBD)

CTP Michael Pierce, "[The Origins of Right to Work: Vance Muse, Anti-Semitism](#), and the Maintenance of Jim Crow Labor Relations,"

**Thursday**, Michael Honey, *Black Workers Remember, cont.*

Philip F. Rubio, "Organizing a Wildcat: Organizing the United States Postal Strike of 1970," (CAN)

**Film:** "**At the River I Stand**" Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Memphis Sanitation Workers Strike (Available, Smathers Libraries Streaming)

## **WEEK OF APRIL 4: MOVEMENT UNIONISM: THE UNITED FARM WORKERS**

**Tuesday:** Reading discussion: *The Fight in the Fields: Cesar Chavez and the Farmworkers* (TBD)

Film: "[Fight in the Fields](#)" (Available, Smathers Libraries, Streaming Film)

Cesar Chavez, "*Huelga: [The Organizer's Tale](#)*," *Ramparts* (July 1966) (Available, PDF)

**Thursday:**



Chris Zepeda-Millán, “[There’s No Way to Teach About Labor Studies](#) without Dealing with Intersectional issues,” *UCLA Newsroom*, October 5, 2022

CTP: [The State of Gig Work in 2021](#), *The Pew Research Center*, December 2021

### **WEEK OF APRIL 11: THE GREAT ARIZONA MINE STRIKE OF 1983**

**Tuesday:** Barbara Kingsolver, *Holding the Line: Women in the Great Arizona Mine Strike of 1983*, TBD

“EEOC Files [Seven More Suits Against Harassment](#),” *U.S. Equal Employment Opp. Commission*, (2018),

**Thursday:** “[How Amazon’s Immigrant Workers Organized](#) to Win a Union on Staten Island: An interview with Brima Sylla, *Jacobin*, April 4, 2022

Gabriel Winant, “[The New Working Class](#),” *Dissent*, June 27, 2017,

Katie Wells, et. al., “[The Work Lives of Uber Drivers](#),” *Labor Online*, August 8, 2017,

“Tofu Politics in Berkeley,” *The Nation*, 1991) (CAN)

“[Testimony of Fatima Goss Graves](#) Vice President for Education and Employment National Women's Law Center,” *U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission* (Workplace Harassment) (2015),

*Film: “Made in L.A.”* (Available via Smathers Libraries Livestream)

**Friday, April 14; Synthesis essay, “Race, Labor & Immigration” due 10 pm, [portiz@ufl.edu](mailto:portiz@ufl.edu)**

### **APRIL 18: EL GRAN PARO ESTADOUNIDENSE: THE LARGEST GENERAL STRIKE IN US HISTORY**

**Tuesday:** Barbara Kingsolver, *Holding the Line: Women in the Great Arizona Mine Strike of 1983*, cont.

**Thursday:** Paul Ortiz, *An African American and Latinx History of the United States*, Chapter 8 (CAN)

Paul Ortiz, *A Return to the Grassroots: 2016-2022*. Forthcoming epilogue essay for the American Social History Project’s *Who Built America?* US history textbook (4<sup>th</sup> edition). (CAN)

UCLA Newsroom, “[Latinos in Labor Unions were Better Protected from Job Losses During Pandemic.](#)”

### **WEEK OF APRIL 25: LABOR’S FUTURE IN THE PRESENT & PAST**

**Tuesday** Finish Barbara Kingsolver, *Holding the Line: Women in the Great Arizona Mine Strike of 1983*

### **FINAL EXAM WEEK**

Final essay exam due Thursday, May 4, 10 am, [portiz@ufl.edu](mailto:portiz@ufl.edu)

### **More information on This Course:**

US Labor History is a course that fulfills the University of Florida's Diversity and Humanities Requirements

This designation is always in conjunction with another program area.

In **Diversity courses**, students examine the historical processes and contemporary experiences characterizing social and cultural differences within the United States. Students engage with diversity as a dynamic concept related to human differences and their intersections, such as (but not limited to) race, gender identity, class, ethnicity, religion, age, sexual orientation, and (dis)abilities. Students critically analyze and evaluate how social inequities are constructed and affect the opportunities and constraints across the US population. Students analyze and reflect on the ways in which cultures and beliefs mediate their own and other people's understandings of themselves and an increasingly diverse U.S. society.

**Humanities courses** provide instruction in the history, key themes, principles, terminology, and theory or methodologies used within a humanities discipline or the humanities in general. Students will learn to identify and to analyze the key elements, biases and influences that shape thought. These courses emphasize clear and effective analysis and approach issues and problems from multiple perspectives

**UF Writing Requirement Guideline** [Applicable](#) to this Course:

The writing course grade assigned by the instructor has two components: the writing component and a course grade. Therefore, to receive writing credit, students must satisfactorily complete the writing component and receive a minimum grade of C (2.0) for the course. It is possible to not meet the writing requirement and still earn a minimum grade of C in a class, so students should review their degree audit after receiving their grade to verify receipt of credit for the writing component.

The writing must be evaluated on content, organization and coherence, effectiveness, style, grammar, and punctuation. Assignments must be returned to students with a grade and comments that address the students' writing skills. Consequently, feedback on all assignments should be provided by the last day of class, or if provided electronically, by the end of finals. Evaluation of writing is based on individual work.

### **About the Instructor:**

Paul Ortiz is professor of history and director of the Samuel Proctor Oral History Program at the University of Florida. He earned his PhD at Duke University in 2000. Ortiz's book *An African American and Latinx History of the United States*, was identified by *Fortune Magazine* as one of the "10 books on American history that actually reflect the United States." In 2013, Paul received the *César E. Chávez Action and Commitment Award*, from the Florida Education Association, AFL-CIO for "Outstanding leadership through engaging in activities which dignify workers and by making notable contributions to the labor movement & demonstrating resilience in organizing workers, especially those who have been traditionally disadvantaged." He is president of the United Faculty of Florida-UF (FEA-AFL-CIO), the union that represents tenured and non-tenure track faculty at UF. He is a former president of the Oral History Association. He is a National Archives Distinguished Fellow in

Latinx History. Ortiz is a first-generation college student and a third-generation US military veteran. He served in the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division and 7<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Group in Central America in the mid-1980s.