

AMST_OX 201W 10J: Introduction to American Studies
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10:00–11:40 a.m., Language Hall 102

America Works and Working America

Instructor: Dr. Christopher Lirette

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Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9–10 a.m. and by appointment

Course Description

How we imagine work shapes much of America's mythology. We transform certain jobs into metaphors for what it means to be an American: the hardscrabble and self-sufficient yeoman farmer, the breadwinning and stable factory worker, the innovative scientist, the charismatic and individualistic entertainer. But these images cover darker truths about American labor: the gentleman planter who ran his farm with enslaved human chattel, the dehumanized factory worker whose industry abandoned him for cheaper labor abroad, the racial and gender inequalities in prestigious skilled professions, the rarity of making it out of poverty. **This class will introduce American Studies through examining American conceptions of labor. We will explore how America industrialized and deindustrialized in historically and geographically unequal ways, how positions of race, gender, and class privilege influence access to certain jobs, how policy decisions favor some industries and classes of laborers over others, how workers have organized to resist exploitation, and how workers cope with a global economy that threatens to dissolve national borders and local industries.** In addition to scholarly writing on labor in the American context, we will also look at popular depictions of labor in film and television, literature, advertisements, and political campaigns. Students will unpack contested notions of labor through discussion, workshops, and a variety of writing assignments in core methods of American Studies.

Writing-Rich (W) Designation

This class fulfills requirements for students to take a writing-rich course beyond first-year writing. As such, students in this class will focus particular attention on writing in the discipline of American Studies. Assignments will present opportunities to hone skills by writing essays that employ textual, historical, personal, and ethnographic analyses. In addition, assignments are scaffolded and students will have ample chance to receive feedback on their work and to revise it.

Student Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, students will develop their ability to:

- Read more closely and critically primary source texts
- Use scholarly sources to contextualize texts in American history and join critical debates about American culture
- Reflect on how their own experiences contribute to their larger, philosophical preconceptions about core issues in contemporary American culture
- Conduct interviews, collect stories, and respectfully scrutinize ethnographic data to make sophisticated arguments
- Think more critically about the political, economic, cultural, and social issues that shape individual and group experience of living and working in the United States
- Articulate ways in which identity categories and social institutions—including, but not limited to, race/ethnicity, class, gender, religious or political affiliation, sexual orientation—contribute to how individuals and groups have experienced life in the United States at various points in history
- Produce sophisticated essays in the core genres in the academic field of American Studies, including literary analysis, research paper, memoir/personal essay, ethnography
- Revise written work rigorously according to responses to it
- Assess and respond to a variety of texts, include peer essays
- Imagine work as a central component to American life and critique its manifestation in a variety of scenarios

Course Requirements

<i>Participation</i>	15%
<i>Quizzes</i>	10%
<i>Close Reading</i>	5%
<i>Contextual reading</i>	15%
<i>Personal writing</i>	15%
<i>Ethnographic writing</i>	15%
<i>Portfolio</i>	25%
<i>Grading Scale</i>	A 100–94, A- 94–90, B+ 90–87, B 87–84, B- 84–80, C+ 80–77, C 77–74, C- 74–70, D+ 70–67, D 67–60, F <60.

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory, though I will allow you two absences for any reason. Each subsequent absence will lower your final grade by one third (A to A-, A- to B+, etc). If you reach six absences, you will fail this course. Please contact me in the next two weeks for religious holiday accommodations. If you have a situation, medical or otherwise, that requires you to miss multiple classes, please contact the Office of Academic Affairs and/or the Office of Accessibility Services.

Participation

This is a seminar-style class, and its success depends on us coming together to create a shared world of critical thinking, creativity, and community. You are this class, more than the readings or assignments. We begin creating this small world from a foundation of respect: show up on time having completed any assigned reading, actively listen to one another, offer thoughtful comments, and refrain from attacking or disparaging someone—even if you disagree with that person. Do not be afraid to join discussion! If you are less vocal, send me comments and questions by email, meet with me during office hours, demonstrate that you are engaged with the class.

The consequence to disrupting the seminar (talking while someone else is talking, snoozing, texting your buddies, playing with your phone or laptop) is that I will eject you from class and you will be marked absent.

Quizzes

At least once a week, you will have a quiz on the assigned reading. There will be a mixture of “fact” questions and discussion questions that we will use to guide discussion in class. Generally, if you keep up with the reading, you will have no problem with the quizzes.

Close Reading

You will write a short paper that performs a close reading of—at maximum four lines, at minimum a single line—song lyrics or a poem that we have not discussed in class (but was assigned) of about 600 words.

Contextual Essay

You will combine textual analysis with historical context in a paper between 4 and 5 pages long. You will identify a primary source dealing with work from American history until 1980, identify two scholarly sources to help you contextualize it, and make an argument about how that primary source reflects or influences a certain conception of work in the American imagination using both textual

and historical/social analysis to support your claims. This essay will be scaffolded and have due dates for different components of it, marked on the syllabus.

Personal Essay

You will write a first-person account between 4 and 5 pages of some kind of work experience you have had and extrapolate how this experience has shaped your own understanding of work.

Ethnographic Essay

You will conduct an interview with someone who you identify as having a work experience the conceptual opposite of the one you wrote about in your personal essay. Using this person's testimony, you will write an essay between 4 and 5 pages that tells their story and critiques or complicates your own narrative.

Portfolio

After a session workshopping one of your assigned essays, you will substantively revise each of your essays based on my and your classmates' critiques, adding at least a page of new material to each. You will notice that this course's grading is weighted towards the portfolio because it is more important that you grow as writers over the course of the semester. One of your essays must be put up for an in-class workshop, where everyone will have the chance to comment on your work while you listen silently. Another essay must be taken to the Writing Center, although you are encouraged to take advantage of the Writing Center for each essay. You can choose to boost your lowest essay grade by one letter grade if your entry for that essay is substantially better than the original, but you must identify which essay you would like to me to consider for boosting.

Materials

This class will pair scholarly work with literature, film, television, and music. Much of the material is freely available through eReserves. We will listen to some podcast episodes that would normally be behind a paywall, but can be accessed on a two-week trial.

Some of the material in this class will feature disturbing imagery or explicit sexuality or impolite language. You are free to decide whether or not you want to take this kind of class. I will make every effort to prep you for upcoming material in general and will note if something might be upsetting.

Books

Agee, James, and Walker Evans. *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men: Three Tenant Families*. New York: Mariner, 2001.

Ehrenreich, Barbara. *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting by in America*. New York: Picador, 2011.

Terkel, Studs. *Working: People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do*. New York: New Press, 1997.

Film

Wignot, Jamila. "Triangle Fire." *American Experience*. Season 23, episode 8. PBS: 2011.

Abbott, George, and Stanley Donen. *The Pajama Game*. Warner Bros.: 1957.

Higgins, Colin. *9 to 5*. Twentieth Century Fox: 1980.

Lee, Spike. *Do the Right Thing*. Universal Pictures: 1989.

Kopple, Barbara. *Harlan County U.S.A.* Cinema 5: 1976.

Moore, Michael. *Roger & Me*. Warner Bros.: 1989.

Conferences

I am available on Mondays and Wednesdays from 1 until 2 p.m. in my office (Modular Unit 3, Room 5). Please feel free to come speak to me about class, organizing labor, the postwork economy, poetry, shrimp fishing, improv comedy, floodwater, elevated Louisiana cuisine, ghost stories, movie magic, or rare and luxurious maps. Also, feel free to email me at christopher dot lrette at emory dot edu.

Public Writing

Student writing (but never grades) may be shared with the class when the opportunity (such as workshopping) presents itself. Your work may also be reviewed by Oxford College faculty and staff to improve instruction.

University Policies

I uphold Emory's policies and regulations, including ones pertaining to religious holidays, disability accommodations, plagiarism, sexual harassment, and discrimination. You should acquaint yourself with these policies. Requests for appropriate disability accommodation must be made at the

beginning of the semester, except in extraordinary circumstances, to ensure proper accommodation. You are encouraged to register with the Office of Accessibility Services to verify your eligibility.

Academic Integrity

All the work you submit in this course must be entirely your own work or your work with another classmate according to assignment guidelines. Make yourself familiar with Oxford's Honor Code (<https://inside.oxford.emory.edu/academics/student-services/student-honor-code/>). Neither Emory University nor I will tolerate plagiarism. If you plagiarize, you can expect an F among other repercussions, such as a long, drawn-out hearing procedure, embarrassment, and ugly scribbles on your permanent record.

Office of Accessibility Services (OAS)

The Office of Accessibility Services (OAS) works with students who have disabilities to provide reasonable accommodations. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, students must contact OAS and complete the registration process. Faculty may not provide disability accommodations until an accommodation letter has been processed; accommodations are not retroactive. Students registered with OAS who receive a letter outlining specific academic accommodations are strongly encouraged to coordinate a meeting time with their professor to discuss a protocol to implement the accommodations as needed throughout the semester. This meeting should occur as early in the semester as possible. Contact OAS for more information at (770) 784-4690 or oas_oxford@emory.edu. Additional information is available at the OAS website at <http://equityandinclusion.emory.edu/access/students/index.html>.

Schedule

<i>August 24</i>	Introduction to this class, syllabus, and close reading.
<i>August 29</i>	Spotify playlist of work songs.
<i>August 31</i>	Melvyn Dubofsky and Foster Rhea Dulles, <i>Labor in America: a History</i> , chapters 1 and 2 (eReserves).
<i>September 5</i>	<i>The History of American Slavery</i> , episode 1, " Anthony Johnson ," and episode 6, " Charles Ball ." Jamelle Bouie and Rebecca Onion, " Slavery Myths Debunked " and Edward E. Baptist, " Picking Cotton Under the Pushing System ." Close reading due.

September 7	<i>The History of American Slavery</i> , episode 9, " Rose Herera " and Charles Hardy's interview with Minnie S. Whitney , March 6, 1984. Read " ‘We Are Literally Slaves’: An Early Twentieth-Century Black Nanny Sets the Record Straight ," by a Negro Nurse.
September 12	Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut, " The Three Phases of U.S.-Bound Immigration " (eReserves).
September 14	Library visit.
September 19	Melvyn Dubofsky and Foster Rhea Dulles, <i>Labor in America: a History</i> , chapters 7, 9, and 10 (eReserves). Primary source for paper due.
September 21	<i>Triangle Fire</i> (eReserves).
September 26	<i>The Pajama Game</i> (eReserves). Annotated bibliography for paper due.
September 28	Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott, "Introduction" in <i>Beyond the Ruins: The Meanings of Deindustrialization</i> and Maurizio Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labour" (eReserves).
October 3	9 to 5 (eReserves). Bonnie Tsui, " The Undress Code ." Thesis sentence for paper due.
October 5	<i>Do the Right Thing</i> (eReserves).
October 10	Fall break.
October 12	Preface I–III, Roberto Acuna, Beryl Simpson, Roberta Victor, Barbara Herrick in <i>Working</i> . Contextual essay draft due.
October 17	Booker Page, Frank Decker, Hots Michaels, Babe Secoli, Dolores Dante, Therese Carter, Charlie Blossom, Rose Hoffman in <i>Working</i> . Contextual essay due.
October 19	Amy Rose Spiegel, " Oversharing at Work ," Robert Markowitz, " Abandoning the Work I Hated ," and Ta-Nehisi Coates, " I Didn't Think about Being Ripped Off, I Thought about Whipping Ass ."
October 24	"Introduction: Getting Ready" and "Serving in Florida" in <i>Nickel and Dimed</i> .
October 26	"Scrubbing in Maine" and "Selling in Minnesota" in <i>Nickel and Dimed</i> .
October 31	"Evaluation" in <i>Nickel and Dimed</i> , "Intermission: Conversations in the Lobby" in <i>Let Us Now Praise Famous Men</i> . Personal writing due.

<i>November 2</i>	4–42 and “Money,” “Clothing,” and “Education,” in <i>Let Us Now Praise Famous Men</i> .
<i>November 7</i>	“Work” in <i>Let Us Now Praise Famous Men</i> . Identify and have permission for informant.
<i>November 9</i>	<i>Harlan County, USA</i> (eReserves).
<i>November 14</i>	<i>Roger & Me</i> (eReserves). Interview audio due.
<i>November 16</i>	Derek Thompson, “ A World without Work .”
<i>November 21</i>	Workshop. Ethnographic essay due.
<i>November 23</i>	Thanksgiving.
<i>November 28</i>	Workshop.
<i>November 30</i>	Workshop.
<i>December 5</i>	Workshop. Final Day.
<i>December 7</i>	Portfolio due by 12 p.m.