

**LER 120-B “Contemporary Labor Problems”
 Spring 2023. Three Credits. Online Seminar taught on Canvas
 Second Eight Weeks Class. Monday, March 20 to Wednesday, May 3**

INSTRUCTOR CONTACT INFORMATION

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ABOUT THE COURSE

LER 120 focuses on major problems facing working people in the United States today, including: the state of American workers today; the impact of the Pandemic on workers; workers and health care; workers and retirement; workers and the gig economy; and organizing efforts to win workers’ rights. There are no texts. All reading is accessible on Canvas.

Naturally, this course cannot go into depth on every major issue facing working people. Moreover, LER 100 “Introduction to Labor Studies” tackles racism and sexism in the workplace, and looks closely at the weaknesses of US employment laws, so LER 120 does not duplicate those topics. As well, LER 110 “Labor and Social Movements” looks at conditions facing immigrant workers, public sector workers, and fast food restaurant workers.

<u>Segment</u>	<u>Days</u>	<u>Opens</u>	<u>Closes</u>	<u>Topic</u>
1	9	March 20	March 28	The State of the U.S. Working Class
2	9	March 29	April 6	The Disposable Workforce and the Gig Economy
3	9	April 7	April 15	Health Care
4	9	April 16	April 24	Retirement
5	9	April 25	May 3	Organizing

ASSIGNMENTS

There are 203 possible points in this course. Please read the Class Process file for details on exams, extra credit papers, forum participation requirements, and forum grading.

<u>Segment</u>	<u>Assignment</u>	<u>Date Opens</u>	<u>Date Closes</u>	<u>Points</u>
All	5 Discussion Forums	First day of segment	Last day of segment	75
3	Midterm Exam	April 16	April 16	50
5	Extra Credit Paper	March 20	May 3	(10)
5	Final Exam	May 9	May 9	80

Course Grade Scale:

A+	98%	201-205	B+	88%	181-183	C+	78%	160-163	D+	68%	139-142
A	93%	190-200	B	83%	170-180	C	73%	149-159	D	63%	129-138
A-	90%	184-189	B-	80%	164-169	C-	70%	143-148	D-	60%	123-128
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COURSE SCHEDULE AND READING

SEGMENT 1: THE STATE OF THE U.S. WORKING CLASS

Segment 1 runs 9 days from Monday, March 20 to Tuesday, March 28

Reading

- Class Process file on course and discussion forum participation requirements
- “The Rise and Fall of the Social Contract,” pages 71-94 in The Big Squeeze: Tough Times for the American Worker, by Steven Greenhouse, 2008 (pdf)
- “Losing Our Voice,” pages 3-20 in Beaten Down, Worked Up: The Past, Present, and Future of American Labor, by Steven Greenhouse, 2019 (pdf)
- “Don’t Blame Econ 101 for the Plight of Essential Workers: They’ve been systematically devalued for years. But they don’t have to be,” May 13, 2020 *Atlantic* magazine
- “Is it great to be a worker in the U.S.? Not compared with the rest of the developed world,” July 4, 2018 *Washington Post*
- “Eleven Ways American Workers Are Falling Behind the Rest of the World,” September 7, 2018 The Century Foundation
- “American Dream collapsing for young adults, study says, as odds plunge that children will earn more than their parents,” March 8, 2016 *Washington Post*
- “Millennials Didn’t Kill the Economy. The Economy Killed Millennials,” December 16 2018 *The Atlantic*
- “Young Adults, Burdened With Debt, Are Now Facing an Economic Crisis,” April 6, 2020 *New York Times*
- “Inequality and Covid-19 in 13 Charts,” September 24, 2020 *Inequality.org*

Videos

- “News Anchor Shows Americans Real Size of Wealth Gap Using American Pie” (4½ minutes)
- “America’s Pandemic Workers,” June 17, 2020 Al Jazeera Faultline (25 minutes)

Assignments

- Post to the Introductions forum early in the segment.
- Make a first substantial post in Forum 1 by the sixth day of the segment on Saturday, March 25 to earn the full 3 “timing” points in forum grading. Posting later will lead to a reduction in points. Post at least three substantial posts, on three separate days, during the segment.

SEGMENT 2: THE DISPOSABLE WORKFORCE and the GIG ECONOMY

Segment 2 runs 9 days from Wednesday, March 29 to Thursday, April 6

Reading

- “Here Today, Gone Tomorrow,” pages 117-134 in The Big Squeeze, Steven Greenhouse (pdf)
- “The Sharing – the Scraps – Economy,” pages 217-231 in Beaten Down, Worked Up by Steven Greenhouse (pdf)
- “App-Based Workers Speak: Studies Reveal Anxiety, Frustration, and a Desire for Good Jobs,” October 2021, National Employment Law Project
- “Low Wages And No Stability: How Amazon’s Use of Perma-Temps Is Hurting Workers” August 29, 2018 *In These Times*
- “One in Four Temp Workers Reports Wage Theft,” February 10, 2022 *In These Times*

Assignments

- Make a first substantial post in Forum 2 by the sixth day of the segment on Monday, April 3 to earn the full 3 “timing” points in forum grading. Posting later will lead to a reduction in points. Post at least three substantial posts, on three separate days, during the segment.

SEGMENT 3: HEALTH CARE

Segment 3 runs 9 days from Friday, April 7 to Saturday, April 15

Reading

- “A Brief History: Universal Health Care Efforts in the U.S.” (prior to the 2010 Affordable Care Act) by the Physicians for a National Health Care Program
- “Debating the Next 50 Years in Medicare and Medicaid” July 30, 2015 *New York Times* including “Medicare and Medicaid Are Unsustainable Without Quick Action,” “Medicare and Medicaid Need to Be Transformed,” “Groundless Fears About Medicaid and Medicare,” and “Affordable Care Act Health Care Has Already Helped Sustain Medicaid and Medicare
- “What would the 2020 candidates’ proposals mean for health care coverage?” October 2019 Brookings Institute
- “Frequently asked questions on single payer health care,” Physicians for a National Health Program
- “The media is badly botching the Medicare-for-all debate,” January 30, 2019 Washington Post (opinion piece)
- “The Health Care Scare: I sold Americans a lie about Canadian medicine, and now we’re paying the price,” by a former Aetna health insurance company vice-president, August 6, 2020 *Washington Post*
- “Even Insured Can Face Crushing Medical Debt, Study Finds,” January 5, 2016 *New York Times*
- Gallup polls on health care over the past decade

Videos:

- “Sick Around America” (PBS Frontline, 2009, 54 minutes)
- Recommended but optional: “Sick Around the World” (PBS, Frontline, 2008, 56 minutes)

Assignments

- Make a first substantial post in Forum 3 by the sixth day of the segment on Wednesday, April 12. Posting later will lead to a reduction in points. Post at least three substantial posts, on three separate days, during the segment.
- The Midterm Exam is accessible from 6:00 a.m. to 11:59 p.m. on Sunday, April 16. This is a five-question short essay exam taken on Canvas. The exam is open for 50 minutes. You must begin the exam by 11:09 p.m. on April 16 to have the full time to finish the exam. Read the Midterm Exam directions before taking the exam.

SEGMENT 4: RETIREMENT

Segment 4 runs 9 days from Sunday, April 16 to Monday, April 24

Reading

- “The Not-So-Golden Years,” pages 276-288 in The Big Squeeze by Steven Greenhouse (pdf)
- “Policy Basics: Top Ten Facts about Social Security,” March 4, 2022 Center on Budget and Policy Priorities
- “Seven Hard Truths Americans Should Know About Social Security in 2021 -- and Five Ways to Strengthen Social Security,” July 2021 Heritage Foundation
- “‘I can’t live on \$709 a month’: Americans on social security push for its expansion,” July 4, 2021 *Guardian*
- “Steady contributions, affordability, and lifetime income are the building blocks of a retirement system that works for working families,” December 2019 Economic Policy Institute
- “House Leadership Delays Social Security Expansion While Crafting Tax Breaks for Rich Retirees,” August 24, 2022 *American Prospect*

- “House GOP eyes Social Security, Medicare amid spending battle,” January 24, 2023 Washington Post (pdf)
- Polls on Retirement and Social Security, March 21, 2019 PEW Research Center

Assignments

- Make a first substantial post in Forum 4 by the sixth day of the segment on Friday, April 21. Posting later will lead to a reduction in points. Post at least three substantial posts, on three separate days, during the segment.
- The optional Extra Credit paper on “Young Workers” is due by 11:59 p.m. on Wednesday, May 3. See the lecture (which explains the paper topic) and reading in the extra credit folder.

SEGMENT 5: ORGANIZING

Segment 5 runs 9 days from Tuesday, April 25 to Wednesday, May 3

Reading

- “Corporations Turn Up the Heat,” pages 153-165 in Beaten Down, Worked Up by Steven Greenhouse (pdf)
- “Millennials Are Keeping Unions Alive,” February 15, 2018 *The Nation* magazine
- “The Faces of a New Union Movement,” by Steven Greenhouse, February 28, 2020 *New Yorker*
- “Young workers are organizing. Can their fervor save unions?,” by Steven Greenhouse, September 2, 2022 *Washington Post* (pdf)
- “Dollar Store Workers Organizing for Justice,” July 23, 2022 *American Prospect*
- “Amazon warehouses aren’t just unionizing -- they’re upending labor organizing in the process,” July 13, 2022 Quartz
- “Unionizing Chipotle: ‘If we could do it, anybody can’,” September 9, 2022 Labor Politics (interview with 3 Chipotle workers)
- “Amazon Workers Who Won a Union Their Way Open Labor Leaders’ Eyes,” April 7, 2022 *New York Times*, by Noam Scheiber (pdf)
- “Why Unions Matter in America,” 2023, by LER faculty and Interfaith Worker Justice

Video

- “Why Unions Are Having a Moment: Why Starbucks, Apple And Google Are Unionizing Now For The First Time,” 13 minutes, August 2022 CNBC

Assignments

- Make a first substantial post to Forum 5 by the sixth day of the segment on Sunday, April 30. Posting later will lead to a reduction in points. Post at least three substantial posts, on three separate days, during the segment.
- The Final Exam is accessible from 6:00 a.m. to 11:59 p.m. on Tuesday, May 9. This is an eight-question short essay exam taken on Canvas. The exam is open for 80 minutes. Read the Final Exam directions before accessing the exam.
- The optional Extra Credit paper on “Young Workers” is due by 11:59 p.m. on Wednesday, May 3. See the lecture (which explains the paper topic) and reading in the extra credit folder.

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