New Brookwood Labor College

Working Class History

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On Zoom

The quest to reshape American society so that working people experience economic security, a political voice, and respect at work and in the community, has been ongoing for more than 400 years (2019 marked the 400th anniversary of the arrival of the first boatload of enslaved people in Jamestown, Virginia.). Yet, this struggle has received little attention in our country's dominant narrative, our schools' textbooks, and our popular cultural phenomena. As a result, generation after generation has come to maturity uninformed not only about working people's struggles and achievements, but also about how our society has been impacted by these struggles. Without historical knowledge or historical consciousness, we face each challenge as if it has appeared on a blank whiteboard. Working women and men – and our organizations – start from scratch over and over again.

This course is designed not only to fill in the blanks of historical information – to tell the untold stories – but also to encourage forms of thinking that are *historical* and *critical*. We will explore such questions as: How was the past shaped by the organizations and actions of working people? What choices, decisions, and actions did working people take at key points in history, and with what consequences? How have those past struggles shaped our present situations? How can we use our deepening knowledge of the past to help us think about bringing about the future in which we want to live?

We will rely on Priscilla Murolo and A.B. Chitty's **From the Folks Who Brought You the Weekend: A Short, Illustrated History of Labor in the United States**. We encourage you to purchase a copy, preferably from an independent bookstore. We will also be making available a weekly movie for you to watch on your own time, even with friends and family, as you prepare for each class. While part of our work will be uncovering historical information which is new to us, our focus will be on working collaboratively to build our thinking muscles. We expect to challenge ourselves and each other even as we support and encourage each other. We are excited that our turn to online learning makes it possible for you to participate, wherever you are, and we want you to bring your experience as well as your questions into our discussions.

We expect you to keep up with the weekly reading assignments, to bring questions to class, and, on a rotating basis, to lead class discussions. Occasionally, we will add current articles, via email, to our reading, and there will be additional learning opportunities through both NBLC and ESFL. We hope you will take advantage of these opportunities and that they will become of the material with which we will be working in class.

The questions which concern us also concern our sisters and brothers in the labor movement. Therefore, we want to prepare you to share your new knowledge with your brothers and sisters. Your final assignment will ask you to make a presentation to our class and invited guests. You will prepare and make this presentation in a small group so that you can also develop your collaborative skills.

- **Time commitment**: This class will meet for 2 hours each week. In addition to class time, students will engage with readings and materials ahead of each class, and will submit regular assignments. Aside from class time, you should anticipate spending an average of 3-5 hours per week on class work.
- **Additional learning opportunities**. We hope to provide you with diverse additional learning opportunities, inside and outside our classroom. Information and insights gained from these opportunities may well be incorporated into class discussions. We hope you will be able to take advantage of these opportunities as your busy lives allow.
- **Late work and Absences**: Please email the instructors as early as possible if you are going to miss class or if you will not complete your work ahead of class.
- **Respectful Dialogue and Debate**: Our intention is to facilitate deep and thoughtful inter-organizational dialogue. Dialogue and strong debate are encouraged and we expect our class community to be respectful and assume good intentions with one another. Our hope is that community members will take what they learn in the classroom back to their organizing work. That being said, we ask each person to be mindful of how, when, where, and with whom they share what is said in our class space and to ask permission from individuals if they believe sharing could be in any way detrimental to the other person.

Grades and Credit

New Brookwood Labor College does not offer credit nor diplomas. Class work will not be "graded" in a traditional sense. We are currently developing a partnership with Metro State to offer credit to students who would like to apply New Brookwood classes toward earning a degree. Students who are interested in learning more about this option should email newbrookwood@gmail.com.

Assignments

While you will not receive traditional grades, Working Class History has weekly assignments that you are expected to complete between classes. Our assignments are intended to serve our learning, not as a way for you to "prove" yourself. Each assignment for Working Class History is designed with two expectations in mind: 1) that it will build your power and organizing capacity; 2) that it will be used as a tool in the classroom. Late or incomplete work will hinder your ability to participate fully in class conversations and activities.

Communications and relationships are essential to leadership and indeed to our movement. You will find that this class emphasizes discussions – both leadership and participation. This will include an oral, collaboratively created, final presentation. While we are not requiring written work, we do invite you to write short essays connecting the reading assignments, class discussions, and ongoing issues in the labor movement. Both New Brookwood Labor College and the East Side Freedom Library will be interested in posting/publishing your essays as a way of sharing your knowledge with a wider circle of labor activists.

WEEKLY SYLLABUS

Week	Reading	Movie
Week 1 **April 4**	6 Kincaid In History	Watch Who Do You Think You Are? Episode: Zachary Quinto - NBC.com
Week 2 **April 11**	Chapter 1 Labor in Colonial America Chapter 2 The American Revolution	Tea Party Etiquette on Vimeo
Week 3 **April 18**	Chapter 3 Slavery and Freedom in the New Republic Chapter 4 Civil War and Reconstruction	Doing As They Can: Slave Life in the American South on Vimeo
Week 4 **April 25**	Chapter 5 Labor Versus Monopoly in the Gilded Age	1877: The Grand Army of Starvation on Vimeo
Week 5 **May 2**	Chapter 6 Labor and Empire Chapter 7 America Inc.	Savage Acts: Wars, Fairs, and Empire 1898-1904 on Vimeo
Week 6 **May 9**	Chapter 8 Labor on the March	Labor's Turning Point History Revealed: The Farmer-Labor Movement: A Minnesota Story
Week 7 **May 16**	Chapter 9 Hot War Cold War Chapter 10 The Sixties	Salt Of The Earth (1954)
Week 8 **May 23**	Chapter 11 Hard Times Chapter 12 One Step Forward, Two Steps Back	Finally Got The News

Week 9 **May 30**	Chapter 13 Workers of the World Chapter 14 Rising Tide Chapter 15 Tipping Points	
Week 10 **June 6**	Final Presentations	Final Presentations