

Sociology of American Labor: Unions & Strikes in the 20th Century

SOC446/546

Professor Caleb Southworth, Department of Sociology

caleb@uoregon.edu

Office Hours: Tuesdays, 11:30-13:30

Electronic Office Hour: Wednesday 19:00-20:00

Labor unions and their strategies have returned to the forefront of political struggles around work in the United States. In 2005, the Change to Win Coalition of five large labor unions split with the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations in an attempt to revitalize unions in American. This course will take a historical view of unions, working-class social movement and their tactics in the 20th century. Major assignments will include a paper on a labor union and a historical review of changes in tactics in response to globalization within a specific industry.

Blackboard

We will use blackboard to distribute some course materials.

Texts

Dine, Philip M. 2008. *State of the Unions: How Labor Can Strengthen the Middle Class, Improve Our Economy, and Regain Political Influence*. New York. McGraw Hill.

Levitt MJ. 1993. *Confessions of a Union Buster*. New York: Crown.

Chaison, Gary. 2006. *Unions in America*. New York: Sage.

Gordon, Suzanne. 2005. *Nursing Against the Odds: How Health Care Cost Cutting, Media Stereotypes, and Medical Hubris Undermine Nurses and Patient Care*. Ithaca, NY: ILR Press.

Grading & Requirements

Exams (40 points): Exams will be short answer and essay and will be in class as noted on the schedule below.

Final Paper (20 points): The final paper will address a specific topic in labor studies. Topics will be discussed in class. 10 pages. You must get your paper topic approved in office hours.

Participation (20 points): Lively, active and informed participation is required and will be rewarded.

Exercises (20 points): We will do periodic analytical exercises in class.

Additional Requirements for Graduate Students in SOC546

Graduate students must also read: Freeman, Richard B. and James L. Medoff. 1984. *What do unions do?* New York: Basic Books. This will be covered on the midterm.

In addition to the final paper, graduate student will be expected to complete a historical case study of one particular union. This will be due at the end of week 6.

The graduate student paper will be more empirical and 20 pages in length.

Schedule

The schedule below gives you a rough idea of where we are headed and what reading you need to do each day. You need to finish the assigned reading before class. Exams can cover any and all material to date; this means all of the reading for the week, including any material assigned for Thursday. We will modify, redirect and update this syllabus as needed. It's your responsibility to stay up to date with the current version on Blackboard.

Topic & Readings	
Week 1 March 31	Introduction: Why Unions Matter for American Workers Film Clip & Discussion: "The Big One"
April 2	Historical Growth & Decline of American Unions Chaison, Chapters 1 & 2
Week 2 April 7	The Wobblies "The Preamble"
April 9	The Wobblies (cont.) Film & Discussion: "The Wobblies"

- Week 3**
April 14 **The Wobblies (cont.)**
Guest Speaker from Lane County IWW
- April 16 **Labor Law & Collective Bargaining**
Chaison, Chapters 3 & 4
- Week 4**
April 21 **Union Politics**
Film Clip & Discussion: "The Uprising of '34"
Chaison, Chapters 5-7
- April 23 **Union Busting**
Levitt MJ. 1993. *Confessions of a Union Buster*. New York: Crown.
pp. 1-80
- Week 5**
April 28 **Union Busting (cont.)**
Film & Discussion, "American Dream"
Levitt, pp. 81-200
- April 30 **Union Busting (cont.)**
"American Dream" (cont.)
Levitt, pp. 201-292
- Week 6**
May 5 **Midterm Examination**
Please bring a green book to class.
- May 7 **Discuss Research Paper Topics**
Reading TBA.
- Week 7**
May 12 **Contemporary Case Studies**
Dine, Philip M. 2008. *State of the Unions: How Labor Can Strengthen the Middle Class, Improve Our Economy, and Regain Political Influence*. New York. McGraw Hill. pp. 1-106

- May 14 **Contemporary Case Studies (cont.)**
Dine, pp. 107-248.
- Week 8** **Health Care & Nursing Unions**
May 19
Gordon, Suzanne. 2005. *Nursing Against the Odds: How Health Care Cost Cutting, Media Stereotypes, and Medical Hubris Undermine Nurses and Patient Care*. Ithaca, NY: ILR Press. Introduction & Chapters 1-2.
- May 21 **Health Care & Nursing Unions (cont.)**
Gordon, Chapters 9-11
- Week 9** **Strikes & Workplace Conflict**
May 26
Rosenfeld, Jake. 2006. "Strikes and Wages in Post-Accord America." *Social Forces* 85(1):236-65.
- May 28 **Strikes & Workplace Conflict (cont.)**
Film & Discussion: "Hoffa"
- Week 10** **The Employer Free Choice Act**
June 2
Employee Free Choice Act.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Employee_Free_Choice_Act
- June 4 **Final Examination**
Please bring a green book to class.
- June 12 **Research Paper Due by 5pm**
Turn in a hard copy to:
Sociology Dept. Office
7th Floor PLC Building