

# **The Problem of Work**

**Social Studies 98 RD  
Mondays, 12:45-2:45  
CGIS K450**

**Professor Katrina Forrester  
Office Hours: Mondays 3-5  
CGIS K437**

**Course Description:** We are often told that the nature of work is changing. But how should we think about it? From the work ethic to emotional labor, housework to service work, welfare to unions, this tutorial will explore the history of political ideas about work in the twentieth century. We will combine readings in classic texts in the history of social and political theory, intellectual history and feminism to provide students with the major conceptual tools for understanding the transformation of work in the twentieth century, and in our own.

In this class, we will explore a series of debates about the changing nature of work. We will begin in the late nineteenth century and end today. We will read a range of influential and challenging texts from different intellectual traditions; interpret and critique these texts as primary sources; and compare, analyze and evaluate a range of arguments, ideas and justifications for particular views of work. As we go, we will discuss research methods and interpretive approaches in social and political theory, the history of political thought and intellectual history: how do we understand a set of ideas in relation to their context? How do we then critically engage with these ideas, interpret them and advance our own?

## **Requirements and Grading:**

### **1. Class Participation (20%):**

This involves (a) making consistent and well-informed contributions to seminar discussion, which requires careful reading and regular attendance. This also includes (b) engaging with and providing constructive feedback to other students in class on their presentations and prospectuses.

### **2. Class Presentation (10%):**

Each week (beginning in week 3) a student will introduce the week's authors along with key themes and questions for discussion. Successful presentations will be roughly 10-12 minutes. The presentations should provide contextual information and provide an overview of the readings that week. Rather than providing long descriptions of individual texts, students should begin with short summaries (3-4 mins) of the major themes and arguments of the readings and then demonstrate a critical engagement with the texts. The best presentations will have a coherent argument, advance interpretations, engage critically and ask demanding questions. They will make connections and comparisons with other authors and arguments we have read,

and draw out important questions to motivate classroom discussion and engage the rest of the class. You may find that engaging with the supplementary readings in the appendix is helpful. Students doing presentations should not do a reading response for that week, and should email Prof. Forrester and each other the accompanying text of their presentation **24 hours before class** to allow everyone to read it before class.

### 3. Research Memos and Prospectus (30%):

Most of your grade will be based on a research paper examining a topic related to the tutorial in depth. The process of writing your research paper will be divided into parts.

- (a) Research Memo 1 (1-2 pages) due via email to Prof. Forrester by 5pm on **February 25**. (5%)  
You will produce a memo that outlines one or two possible research areas that you would be interested to pursue in the final paper. This will designate a topic, thinker or problem that you want to investigate and how you plan to approach the topic (what methodology you will use—historical or theoretical—and what kind of interpretive approach you will take—contextual, analytical etc: i.e. will your final project be primarily historical research? Will you interpret a particular thinker, debate or tradition, or analyze and reconstruct a concept or argument? Do you plan to consult relevant archival materials at the Schlesinger Library? Etc.) You will identify clear topics that you would be interested to explore in your paper, and explain the research questions that motivate you. When developing a topic, you are welcome to suggest topics not covered by the readings but related to the themes of the class. The week after submitting your memos, each of you will have your **first required meeting** with me to discuss them.
- (b) Research Memo 2 (1-2 pages) and an annotated bibliography due via email to Prof. Forrester by 5pm on **March 11**. This memo will present a refined research *question*. It will connect the question to a conceptual puzzle or problem and make clear the scholarly stakes of resolving this problem. The bibliography will list 6-10 sources, explaining what scholarly or other conversation your research intervenes in and explaining briefly how each will contribute to your argument. We will then have **another required meeting before Spring Break** to discuss your research.
- (c) Research Prospectus: (2-3 page prospectus) of an achievable research project is due to Prof. Forrester and each other on **29 March** to present at the **prospectus workshop on April 1** (15%). This should focus on one research topic. This will include: (1) a clear statement of your research question; (2) the problem or puzzle it addresses (why it is interesting and significant as a line of scholarly inquiry (as well as personal, political or ethical inquiry), what the stakes are, what primary source base it uses, and what secondary literature it addresses and engages with); (3) your preliminary argument; (4) the steps your paper will follow to develop your argument. Class on **April 1** will be replaced by a prospectus workshop. You will discuss and offer constructive criticisms on each other's prospectuses.

### 4. Research Paper (40%):

Your final paper (40%) is due **Monday, May 7** before 5pm via email. The final paper should be 20-25 pages (double-spaced; 12-font; 1-inch margins) and must include a full bibliography. You may use any citation format you like, but be consistent (my preference is for footnotes in Chicago style).

**Office Hours:**

My office hours are Mondays 3-5 in CGIS K437. You are welcome to drop by anytime but to guarantee time for discussion please email for an appointment. Office hours are a useful opportunity to talk through plans for the final research paper. All students are required to meet with me to discuss their choice of topic for the research paper **at least twice**. Please make sure to tell me early on if you are struggling with the requirements of the class.

**Drafts, Late Policy and Extensions:**

I will not read drafts of research papers, but am happy to discuss them in office hours. Extensions can only be granted for personal emergency or medical necessity verified with a note from a doctor or Resident Dean. Late papers will be downgraded a 1/2 of a letter grade for each day that they are late.

**Disabilities:**

Any student with a documented disability, whether visible or invisible, needing academic adjustments or accommodations should speak to me and give a copy of his/her accommodations form by the end of the second week of the term. All discussions will remain confidential, although I may consult the Director of Student Disabilities if questions arise.

**Academic Integrity and Collaboration:**

Discussion and the exchange of ideas are essential to academic work. Students are encouraged to discuss any aspect of the course – including your paper topics, sources and ideas – with classmates or anyone else. You may find it useful to discuss your chosen topic with your peers, especially if you are working on the same or similar topics as your classmate. All written work, however, must be yours alone. It should be the result of your own research and reflect your own approach to the topic. You must adhere to standard citation practices of the discipline and must cite all materials (books, articles, websites, lectures, etc..) that have helped you with your work. If students received help with your writing (e.g. feedback on drafts from friends, family, advisors, mentors etc.), you must acknowledge this assistance.

**Texts:**

To limit costs for students, every attempt has been made to use texts that are available online (links are on the course site or PDFs in the “Files” folder, or if they are accessible via databases via Hollis this will be indicated). Please let me know if you have trouble accessing a file or if something is missing from the website.

The following books are also recommended and are available for purchase at the COOP:

Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*

C Wright Mills, *White Collar*

Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*

**Appendix:**

In week 2 I will distribute an appendix of *Recommended Supplementary Reading* for you to look at if you choose to. The point of these is to provide you with additional material if you are interested in pursuing a topic further – either in your preparation for presentations or in your own research paper. These readings mostly fall into two categories. Some of the reading is secondary material by historians or critics, who are contextualizing the texts we read or are moving beyond

the arguments we encounter. Others are additional theoretical perspectives on the topic we deal with that would be useful to you in a research project. These reflect a variety of traditions within social and political theory: normative, critical, contextualist, liberal, Marxist, feminist. When you come to decide on a topic of your own, these will be your first stop. All listed are books and articles available in Harvard libraries or online via Hollis.

### **Week 1. (Jan 28): Introduction**

**\*\*no reading\*\***

### **Week 2 (Feb 4): Key Concepts: Work and Labor**

- Adam Smith, 'Of the Wages of Labour' and 'Of the Accumulation of Capital, or productive and unproductive Labour' in *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of The Wealth of Nations*, Book 1, chapter 8; Book 2, chapter 3.
- Karl Marx, 'Estranged Labour', in *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, 'Wage Labour and Capital', in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 70-81, 203-217
- Max Weber, 'The Spirit of Capitalism' in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* 76-98
- EP Thompson, 'Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism' in *Past and Present* (1967), 56-97

### **Week 3 (Feb 11): Wage-Slavery and the Labor Movement**

- Frederick Douglass, 'I Denounce This So-Called Emancipation as a Stupendous Fraud' in Foner ed. *Frederick Douglass: Selected Speeches and Writings* (accessible via the Black Thought and Culture Database), 711-722
- George E McNeill, *The Labor Movement: The Problem of Today* (1887) chapters 17-19 434-496
- Samuel Gompers, 'Some Reasons for Chinese Exclusion: Meat vs Rice' (1902)
- Alex Gourevitch, 'Labor Republicanism and the Transformation of Work', *Political Theory* (2013) 591-617

### **Week 4 (Feb 18): Organization and Struggle**

- Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *Industrial Democracy* (1897), (selections on course site)
- Vladimir Lenin, *What is to be Done?* (1902) (selections on course site)
- Thorsten Veblen, *The Theory of the Business Enterprise* (1904) (selections on course site)

- Eugene Debs, 'Unionism and Socialism: A Plea for Both' (1904), 1-44
- Rosa Luxemburg, *The Mass Strike, Political Parties and Trade Unions* (1906) in *Reform or Revolution and Other writings*, 101-182
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#### **Week 5 (Feb 25): Who Works? (i)**

- W E B Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935), chapters 1, 2, 11, 12
- C L R James (as J R Johnson), 'Revolution and the Negro', *New International* (1939),
- C L R James (as J R Johnson) 'Preliminary Notes on the Negro Question', (1939), 1-16
- Esther Cooper Jackson 'The Negro Woman Domestic Worker in Relation to Trade Unionism', (1940), 1-18
- George Padmore, 'Imperialism: The Basis of the Labour Party Crisis' (1944)

#### **Week 6 (March 4): Mechanization and Managerialism**

- Frederick Winslow Taylor, 'Principles of Scientific Management' (1911) (selections)
- Antonio Gramsci, 'Americanism and Fordism' in *The Prison Notebooks* (1929-1935), 558-622
- James Burnham, *The Managerial Revolution* (1942), 37-93
- C Wright Mills, *White Collar: The American Middle Classes* (1951), 77-111

#### **Week 7 (March 11): Labor, Leisure and the Future**

- J M Keynes, 'Economic Possibilities for Our GrandChildren', (1930) in *Essays in Persuasion*, 358-375
- Michael Kalecki, 'Political Aspects of Full Employment' (1943), 322-331
- J K Galbraith, 'Labor, Leisure and the New Class', *The Affluent Society* (1958) 243-254
- Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (1958) part 3 and part 4, 79-174

#### **Week 8 Spring Break, No Class**

#### **Week 9 (March 25): Work and Status**

- C Wright Mills, *White Collar: The American Middle Classes* (1951), chapters 9-11: 189-259
- Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), chapters 9 and 14
- Bayard Rustin, 'The Foundation: A Black Working Class', *Ebony* (1975), 90-94
- Evelyn Nakano Glenn, 'From Servitude to Service Work: Historical Continuities in the Racial Division of Paid Reproductive Labor', *Signs* (1992), 1-43.

## **Week 10 (April 1): Prospectus Workshop**

\*\*no reading\*\*

## **Week 11 (April 8): Who Works? (ii)**

- André Gorz, *Strategy for Labor: A Radical Proposal* (1964)
- Eldridge Cleaver, *On the Ideology of the Black Panther Party*, 1-11
- Silvia Federici, 'Wages Against Housework' (1974) in *Revolution at Point Zero*, 15-22
- Angela Davis, 'Approaching Obsolescence of Housework' in *Women, Race and Class* (1981), 222-244
- Barbara Ehrenreich and John Ehrenreich, "The Professional-Managerial Class," *Radical America* 11, no. 2 (March-April 1977), 7-32.

## **Week 12 (April 15): Domination and Class Formation**

- Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital* (1974) 188-283
- Adam Pzeworski, 'Proletariat into a Class: The Process of Class Formation from Karl Kautsky's *The Class Struggle* to Recent Controversies', *Politics and Society* (1977), 343-401.

## **Week 13 (April 22): Emotional Labor and Service Work**

- Silvia Federici, 'Sexuality is Work' and 'Counter-Planning from the Kitchen' in *Revolution at Point Zero*, 23-40
- Arlie Hochschild, 'Feeling Management,' in *The Managed Heart* (University of California Press, 1983), 89-136
- Arlie Hochschild, 'Love and Gold' in *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids and Sex Workers in the New Economy* (2002), 15-30
- Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (Duke University Press, 2011), 150-174

## **Week 14 (April 29): The Future of Work**

- Lauren Berlant, 'After the Good Life, An Impasse' in *Cruel Optimism* (2011), 191-222
- Michael Denning, 'Wageless Life', *New Left Review* 66 (2010), 79-97
- Philippe Van Parijs and Yannick Vanderborght, 'Basic Income: The Instrument of Freedom' (2017)
- Alex Gourevitch and Lucas Stanczyk, 'The Basic Income Illusion', *Catalyst* (2018)