

## AMST 425: Americans at Work

**“Work makes life sweet.”**

--Yiddish saying

**“Take this job and shove it.”**

--David Allan Coe (popularized by Johnny Paycheck)

Instructor: Dr. Carrie Lane  
Class Meetings: MW 11:30am-12:45pm in MH-504  
Office Location: 413 University Hall  
Office Hours: MW 9:30-11:00am  
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**Course Description:** Explores a range of occupations, from factory worker to investment banker, nanny to drug dealer, mortician to exotic dancer. Considers the meaning work holds for those who perform it and the structures, cultures, and histories of particular occupations.

**Prerequisites:** AMST 201 or completion of General Education section on American history, institutions, and values.

**Course Objective:** This interdisciplinary course surveys a range of American occupations and the people who inhabit them. In doing so, it is intended to teach students both about the variety of jobs that make up the American labor force and about how work intersects with other aspects of American life and culture. Students will learn how the structure and culture of a particular job or organization can shape the experiences of those who work within it, as well as how workers' own actions and beliefs shape the work they do and the meanings it holds for them.

### Student Learning Goals:

- Students will come to understand the different ways work has been conceptualized over the course of American history and how those ideas and ideals continue to shape the structure and experience of work today.
- Students will learn how scholars have approached the study of work using different theoretical frameworks and research methods, including ethnography, cultural history, photography, and memoir.
- Students will analyze how the structure, status, and occupational cultures of particular jobs and industries shape the experiences of workers within those fields, and how those factors

vary by historical context and with regard to the work being performed and the social status of the people who perform it.

- Students will use the study of specific occupations as a lens through which to examine broader aspects of American history and culture, such as the work ethic, notions of service and value, race, gender, and class relations, hierarchy and discrimination, social stigma, the American Dream, work-life integration, and workers' rights.
- Students will present oral and written analyses of a sampling of the above subjects. A variety of assignments will demonstrate students' comprehension of course readings, films, and discussions, as well as their ability to draw connections between course materials in the process of crafting original, well-evidenced arguments.

### Required Texts:

- Candacy Taylor, *Counter Culture: The American Coffee Shop Waitress* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009)
- Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Domestica: Immigrant Workers Cleaning and Caring in the Shadows of Affluence* (Berkeley: UC press, 2001) **[free eBook via Pollak Library website]**
- Saru Jayaraman, *Behind the Kitchen Door* (Cornell University Press, 2013) **[free eBook via Pollak Library website]**
- Peter Benson, *Tobacco Capitalism: Growers, Migrant Workers, and the Changing Face of a Global Industry* (Princeton University Press, 2012)
- Caitrin Lynch, *Retirement on the Line: Age, Work, and Value in an American Factory* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012) **[free eBook via Pollak Library website]**
- Additional required readings available on Titanium

Books for this course are available for purchase at Little Professor Book Center (725 N. Placentia) and the University Bookstore. I do **not** require a specific edition of any book, so feel free to purchase used copies or older editions (I recommend Half.com for used books).

### Course Requirements and Policies

**Attendance:** You are allowed **three unexcused absences** over the semester. Any additional absences will result in a reduction of your final course grade by one half letter grade (5 percentage points) for each absence. If you have more than five unexcused absences, you will automatically fail the course.

**Technical/Email Requirements:** As a registered student you are enrolled in Titanium. I regularly use Titanium to communicate with you about this class, so be sure to check your student email address at least once every three days during the semester. With technical problems, contact the student help desk at (657) 278-8888 or email [StudentITHelpDesk@fullerton.edu](mailto:StudentITHelpDesk@fullerton.edu).

**Participation:** You are expected to complete the week's readings in time for class each week. Your **class participation grade** will depend not only on attendance and frequency of participation, but also on the substance of your participation, and whether your comments and questions contribute to the creation of an engaged and intellectually rigorous learning community. If you cannot participate verbally or need encouragement or assistance to do so, it is your responsibility to meet with me to discuss strategies for improving your participation level and, if necessary, identifying alternative methods of participation.

### **Classroom Tips and Policies:**

- **Punctuality:** Get to class on time. I make most important announcements in the first 5 minutes. If you need to arrive late or leave early please notify me in advance.
- **Attention:** I expect your full focus and attention for the entirety of every class meeting. No texting, no sleeping, no homework for other classes. No doing anything other than paying attention to what your classmates and I have to say about the subject matter at hand.
- **Etiquette:** I expect you will demonstrate tolerance and respect in all interactions with your classmates and professor. Disagreement is a natural, even necessary part of the learning process, and we will likely touch on sensitive topics in this class. I hope you will keep an open mind when others express opinions different from your own and approach all interactions in the spirit of intellectual curiosity. If someone offends you, give them the benefit of the doubt by assuming they did not intend to offend and either misspoke or were misinformed; respectfully help them see alternative perspectives or correct their misperceptions. However, if at any time you feel uncomfortable, insulted, or unsafe in our classroom, notify me immediately and we will work together to address the problem.
- **Phone Policy:** Please turn cellphones off and keep them in your bag. If need to make or receive a text or call during class time, please leave the classroom in order to do so.
- **Computer Policy:** You may not take notes on computers or audio record lectures unless specifically authorized to do so by DSS. Studies have confirmed that people retain far more information when they write rather than type their notes. Typing up notes, even verbatim, decreases students' retention of the material presented. I ban computers not because I'm an ogre or a Luddite but because I truly believe it helps you learn.
- **Questions:** Don't be shy with questions—I'm happy to answer them, big or small. However, always check the syllabus, website, and/or assignment sheets before contacting me in case the answer is already there (e.g., When is the paper due? What should I read this week?).

## Course Assignments:

- 1. Presentations on Weekly Readings (20%):** For most class meetings, a team of students will be responsible for kicking off discussion of the assigned reading material. By **noon on the day before the class** in which they'll be presenting, **each presenting** student will submit to me by email **three comments about that week's readings and three questions for class discussion**. Your comments should concern something you found especially interesting or thought provoking in the reading, and each of your three comments should be approximately one paragraph long (for a total of about three paragraphs). These comments should be thoughtful and original and must relate directly to that week's reading/s. You should, when possible, reference specific pages, quotations, and/or sections of the reading. (You may also choose to put the week's reading in discussion with readings from previous weeks.) Questions should be thoughtful, specific, and designed to encourage class discussion about the week's readings. Your questions may connect back to your comments on the readings, but they do not have to. You will be graded on the quality of your comments for that week as well as the questions you present to the class. Students presenting on the same week's readings must communicate beforehand—ideally in person—to plan their presentation. You and your co-presenter(s) must decide how to divide the material and structure your presentation (i.e., Will you all present together or will you go one at a time? Will you each cover one section of the reading, or will you each discuss one theme?). You may use handouts or audiovisuals for your presentation but you are not required to do so. **Half of your presentation grade will be based on the comments and questions you submit; the other half will be based on your in-class presentation.**
- 2. Job Description (10%):** The second week of class we will read excerpts from Studs Terkel's classic oral history collection, *Working*. You will then write your own 3-4 page entry about a job you have held for a new (imaginary) edition of *Working*. Write in the first-person, as if you were being interviewed by Terkel himself, about a job you have held. It can be a formal position you held (e.g., receptionist, server) or an informal one (e.g., babysitter), a paid or volunteer role, even your "job" of being a student or homemaker or parent. Be honest and detailed. Use the interviews you read in *Working* as models for style and content.
- 3. Interview Report (30%):** Each student will interview someone engaged in an occupation that interests you, one you've considered for yourself or would like to learn more about. Interviews must be recorded (I have audio recorders I can loan you). You are not required to transcribe the entire interview, although you are welcome to do so and I believe you will find it helpful in your analysis. I do recommend transcribing the most important portions of your interview, as all quotations must be word-for-word. I will provide specific questions your interview must cover, and you will also draft questions specific to that occupation and

shaped by your own interests. You will use the interviewee's responses to your questions to write a paper reporting what you learned about the occupation and connecting the interview to course readings and themes. Your interview report will be **approximately 4-5 pages long** and should: **1)** briefly describe who you interviewed and why; **2)** answer the provided questions about this occupation; **3)** connect your analysis of the interview to **at least two** course readings; and **4)** reflect on the experience of interviewing someone about their work. You may focus on any occupation you choose, but you must obtain my approval of your choice before conducting the interview. You cannot focus on an occupation we read about in class. You will also present your interview findings in a brief in-class presentation.

- 4. Occupational Study & Final Project (40%):** In addition to required course readings, each undergraduate will read one additional book about an American occupation of your choosing (historical or contemporary), although not one already covered in course readings or films. I hope that over the semester you will serve as our resident expert on the occupation you chose to read about, referencing it when relevant during class discussions. I have provided a list of occupational studies at the end of this syllabus to spark your imagination. You may read one of these books or select another **with my approval**. No two students may read the same book, so run your selection by me as soon as possible.

At the end of the semester, each student will prepare a final project about the occupation they chose to study. That project may be presented in one of three forms:

- A.** Write a **5-7 page paper** in which you analyze the additional occupation you elected to read about with regard to course readings and themes. Your paper will inform the reader about that occupation and consider it in comparison to other occupations we studied in class, as well as to the themes and concepts around work that we have covered. Each paper should make an original argument and incorporate the additional book you read and **at least three** course readings (you may also reference films we watched in class but these do not count toward the required minimum of readings).
- B.** Make a **video of 5-10 minutes** analyzing the occupation you chose to study with regard to course readings and themes. Your video will inform the reader about that occupation and consider it in comparison to course themes as well as other occupations and concepts we studied in class. Your video should make an argument about this occupation, not just describe it, and should incorporate **at least three** course readings and one additional book on your occupation. The video should include a list of sources, either integrated into the video or presented as a bibliography at the end. Along with the video you will submit a 2-3 page essay outlining the video's argument and what you hope viewers will learn from the video.

- C. Create a website** showcasing the occupation and what you learned about it. You may use text, photographs, video, audio recordings, or other digital media to present your findings. You should design the website with a specific purpose and audience in mind. For example, the website could provide a history of the occupation, or it might educate young people considering entering this field. It might be designed for other scholars studying this occupation, or it might be a resource for people already working in this field. Either way, you should have a thesis in mind with regard to what you want visitors to the site to learn about this occupation. Your website should also directly engage with course themes and concepts and include references (with full citations) to **at least three** course readings and one additional book on your occupation. Along with the website you will submit a 2-3 page essay outlining your thesis and why and how you selected the content for your website.

**Graduate Student Requirements:** Graduate students will complete the same readings and assignments as undergraduates but will be expected to demonstrate a higher level of written and oral communication and a greater scope, depth, and length of analysis than that expected of undergraduates. **In lieu of the final undergraduate project, each graduate student will complete an original research project on a specific occupation or occupational group.** These projects will culminate in a **final paper of approximately 10-15 pages** that demonstrates a substantial engagement with a minimum of ten secondary sources (not including course readings). Graduate students may opt to complete the film or website versions of the final project, but if so there will be additional requirements to those assigned for undergraduates. I will meet with graduate students over the course of the semester to determine any additional requirements.

### Grading Details and Procedures:

In grading your assignments and exams I will pay close attention to both substance and form (grammar, spelling, organization, and clarity of expression). In evaluating the substance of an essay, I will examine whether you have demonstrated a critical understanding of course materials **and** presented and substantiated a coherent thesis or argument.

Reading Presentations	20%	Presentation dates will vary
Job Description	10%	Due 2/8 in class
Interview Report	30%	Due 3/15 in class
Final Project	40%	Due 5/17 to my mailbox in UH-313 by 4:30pm

A	92-100%	B-	80-81%	D+	68-69%
A-	90-91%	C+	78-79%	D	62-67%
B+	88-89%	C	72-77%	D-	60-61%
B	82-87%	C-	70-71%	F	59% or lower

The +/- grading system will be used. Late assignments will be penalized one letter grade for every unexcused day overdue. Extensions must be requested well in advance of the assignment deadline. There is no make-up work in this class without a documented excuse. Keep all graded assignments so that any discrepancies can be easily and fairly straightened out. I reserve the right to add or modify assignments over the course of the semester. There are currently no extra credit assignments for this course; I elect to add extra-credit assignments during the semester they will be equally available to all students.

## Policies and Resources

**Office Hours:** I encourage you to attend office hours or schedule an appointment at another time if those hours do not work with your schedule. I am always happy to talk with you about course readings, assignments, and broader questions about American Studies and academic life. It is a pleasure for me to get to know you and your intellectual interests, so don't hesitate to drop by with questions or to mull over something you've been thinking about. If you're struggling in the class, contact me sooner rather than later so we have time to work together to improve your performance before the semester ends.

**Students with Special Needs:** Please inform me during the first week of classes about any disability or special needs you may have that may require specific arrangements related to attending class sessions, carrying out class assignments, or writing papers or examinations. According to CSU policy, students with disabilities must document their disabilities at the Disability Support Services (DSS) Office in order to be accommodated in their courses. For information visit the [DSS website](#), call 657-278-3112, or email [dsservices@fullerton.edu](mailto:dsservices@fullerton.edu).

**Academic Dishonesty Policy:** Academic dishonesty includes such things cheating, inventing false information or citations, plagiarism, and helping someone else commit an act of academic dishonesty. I take academic dishonesty very seriously; students who engage in cheating, plagiarism, or other forms of dishonesty in this course will receive a zero on the assignment in question and be reported to judicial affairs. For additional information see [UPS 300.021](#)

**Emergency Preparedness:** Visit CSUF's [Classroom Preparedness website](#) to review procedures to follow in an emergency. Please contact Professor Lane if you have any concerns or questions about what to do should an emergency occur during this class.

**University Learning Center (ULC):** The ULC provides CSUF students with academic support including assistance with assignments, general study skills, and computer user needs. The ULC offers one-to-one peer tutoring, online writing review, and many more services. More information can be found on the [ULC website](#).

**Writing Center:** Located on the first floor of Pollak Library, the Writing Center offers 30-minute, one-on-one peer tutoring sessions and workshops, aimed at providing assistance for all written assignments and student writing concerns. Registration and appointment schedules are available at the [Writing Center Appointment Scheduling System](#). Walk-in appointments are also available on a first come, first served basis, to students who have registered online. More information can be found at the [Writing Center webpage](#) or by calling (657) 278-3650.

## Course Schedule and Reading Assignments

### 1/23 & 1/25 Introduction:

- No Reading
- **In Class:** *Sign up to lead class discussion*

### 1/30 & 2/1 Thinking about (and Studying) Work

- Studs Terkel, *Working*, Intro & **TEN** narratives (choose whichever interest you most)

### 2/6 & 2/8 Salesmen

- Caitrin Lynch, *Retirement on the Line*, Cast of Characters, Intro., Part I
- **DUE 2/8: Your Job Description**
- **In Class:** Watch *Salesmen*

### 2/13 & 2/15 Factory Workers

- Caitrin Lynch, *Retirement on the Line*, Part II, Conclusion, and Postscript

### 2/22 Diner Waitresses

- Candacy Taylor, *Counter Cultures*

### 2/27 & 3/1 Investment Bankers and Lawyers

- Karen Ho, *Liquidated: An Ethnography of Wall Street*, Intro. & Ch. 1-2
- Jennifer Pierce, "Racing for Innocence"

### 3/6 & 3/8 Morticians and Exotic Dancers

- William Thompson, "Handling the Stigma of Handling the Dead"
- William Thompson et al., "Managing the Stigma of Topless Dancing: A Decade Later"

### 3/13 & 3/15 Interview Analysis

- No reading
- **DUE 3/15: Interview Analysis and Self-Evaluation**

### 3/20 & 3/22 Models and Drug Dealers

- Ashley Mears, "Discipline of the Catwalk"
- Philippe Bourgois, "Crack in Spanish Harlem: Culture & Economy in the Inner City"

\* \* \* **SPRING BREAK** \* \* \*

**4/3 & 4/5 Stay-at-Home Parents**

- Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Domestica*, Parts 1&2
- **In Class:** Watch *The Big Flip*

**4/10 & 4/12 Domestic Workers**

- Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Domestica*, Part 3

**4/17 & 4/19 Manicurists**

- Miliann Kang, "Manicuring Race, Gender and Class"

**4/24 & 4/26 Cowboys**

- Peter Benson, *Tobacco Capitalism*, Introduction & Ch. 2
- In Class:** Watch *Sweetwater*

**5/1 & 5/3 Tobacco Farmers**

- Peter Benson, *Tobacco Capitalism*, Ch. 5, 6, & Conclusion

**5/8 & 5/10 Concierges and Professional Organizers**

- Rachel Sherman, "Time Is Our Commodity"
- Carrie Lane, "The Self-Assembled Career"
- David Graeber, "On the Phenomenon of Bullshit Jobs"

**5/17 FINAL PROJECTS (and self-evaluation) DUE to my mailbox in UH-313 by 4:30pm**

### Occupational Studies

You may choose a study from this list or select another scholarly book about an occupation of your choice. Contact me with your book selection to confirm it is still available (no two students may read the same book). If you choose a book not on the list you must contact me for my approval.

<b>Bike Messengers:</b>	Kidder, <i>Urban Flow: Bike Messengers and the City</i>
<b>Boxers:</b>	Wacquant, <i>Body &amp; Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer</i>
<b>Car Salespeople:</b>	Lawson, <i>Ladies on the Lot: Women, Car Sales &amp; the Pursuit of the Amer. Dream</i>
<b>Cocktail Waitresses:</b>	Spradley & Mann, <i>The Cocktail Waitress</i>
<b>Construction Workers:</b>	Eisenberg, <i>We'll Call You If We Need You: Women Working Construction</i>
<b>Copier Repair Techs:</b>	Orr, <i>Talking about Machines: An Ethnography of a Modern Job</i>
<b>Direct Salespersons:</b>	Biggart, <i>Charismatic Capitalism: Direct Selling Organizations in America</i>
<b>Engineers:</b>	Kunda, <i>Engineering Culture: Control &amp; Commitment in a High-Tech Corporation</i>
<b>Farmers:</b>	Dudley, <i>Debt &amp; Dispossession: Farm Loss in America's Heartland</i>
<b>Fast Food Workers:</b>	Leidner, <i>Fast Food, Fast Talk: Service Work &amp; the Routinization of Everyday Life</i>
<b>Firefighters:</b>	Chetkovich, <i>Real Heat: Gender and Race in the Urban Fire Service</i>
<b>Freelancers:</b>	Barley and Kunda, <i>Gurus, Hired Guns, and Warm Bodies</i>
<b>Guitar Makers:</b>	Dudley, <i>Guitar Makers: The Endurance of Artisanal Values in North America</i>
<b>Headhunters:</b>	Finlay & Coverdill, <i>Headhunters: Matchmaking in the Labor Market</i>
<b>Health Care Aides:</b>	Stacey, <i>The Caring Self: The Work Experiences of Home Care Aides</i>
<b>High-Tech Workers:</b>	English-Lueck, <i>Cultures@Silicon Valley</i>
<b>Lawyers:</b>	Pierce, <i>Gender Trials: Emotional Lives in Contemporary Law Firms</i>
<b>Managers:</b>	Jackall, <i>Moral Mazes: The World of Corporate Managers</i>
<b>Nurses:</b>	Street, <i>Inside Nursing: A Critical Ethnography of Clinical Nursing Practice</i>
<b>Prison Guards:</b>	Zimmer, <i>Women Guarding Men</i>
<b>Professional Golfers:</b>	Crosset, <i>Outsiders in the Clubhouse: The World of Women's Professional Golf</i>
<b>Scavengers:</b>	Perry, <i>San Francisco Scavengers: Dirty Work and the Pride of Ownership</i>
<b>School Principals:</b>	Wolcott, <i>The Man in the Principal's Office</i>
<b>Shrimpers:</b>	Harrison, <i>Buoyancy on the Bayou: Shrimpers face the Rising Tide of Globalization</i>
<b>Street Vendors:</b>	Duneier, <i>Sidewalk</i>
<b>Surgeons:</b>	Katz, <i>The Scalpel's Edge: The Culture of Surgeons</i>
<b>Teachers:</b>	Stoll, <i>Race &amp; Gender in the Classroom: Teachers, Privilege, &amp; Enduring Soc. Ineq.</i>
<b>Temp Workers:</b>	Rogers, <i>Temps: The Many Faces of the Changing Workplace</i>