

Study Guide
For
Labor's Story in the United States
by Philip Yale Nicholson

Preface.

What social and economic developments of the last thirty-five years make it necessary to think about the history of labor in the United States in new ways?

Chapter 1. European and Colonial Foundations to 1760

What were the important European traditions that were carried over into the history of labor in colonial North America? What new or innovative labor practices and institutions emerged in the colonial era?

Chapter 2. Labor and Liberty in the Formation of the Nation, 1760-1830

What did the concept "liberty" mean to labor? How was liberty related to economic opportunity? What was the social and political place of labor in early national society?

Chapter 3. Great Contrasts: Factory and Field, Slavery and Democracy, Civil War, 1830-1865

How did labor begin to organize collectively in the early national period? What part did law play in the relationship between labor and capital during these years? What commonalities existed between the early goals of labor, women's rights advocates, and abolitionists?

Chapter 4. The Heroic Age of Labor; The Days of the "Martyrs and the Saints," 1865-1893

Why is the period, 1865-1893, thought of as a "heroic age" for labor? Who were some of the "martyrs and saints" of this period? Why are they thought of that way? What was the place of black labor, female labor, and immigrant labor in the total picture of work during this era?

Chapter 5. Challenges and Responses, 1893-1913

How did owners and managers of wealth challenge labor during the Progressive era? How did labor respond? What were the challenges mounted by labor in this era? How did business respond? What is the place of technology in the relationship between labor and capital? Why does labor generally resist the new technology that other workers create, even when it relieves burdens or removes certain hazards? Why were important concessions given to some labor organizations during this era? Describe these concessions. Which labor groups received no concessions?

Chapter 6. Bang, Boom, Bust: The Great War, Jazz Age, and Great Crash, 1914-1932

Why might World War One be described as the high point in the career of Samuel Gompers? Did all of labor fare equally well during the war? What gains were made? Who made them? Which segments of labor suffered setbacks during and immediately following this war? What role did government play in the labor-management conflicts of the wartime period? What was the general fate of labor in the postwar era, 1919-1929? Describe Fordism. How did labor unions respond to the onset of the Great Depression? How did workers react to it?

Chapter 7. Labor Valued: The New Deal and War, 1933-1947

Why is the era of the New Deal and World War Two considered a time of great advances for labor in the United States? Evaluate those gains. Why is this era also considered a time of advances in democracy? Describe the role of John L. Lewis in the struggle for control of labor in this era.

Chapter 8. Constructing Consensus: Labor in the Cold War, 1945-1968

Why was the Cold War period a time of both advances and setbacks for labor? What were those gains and losses. What were the consequences for labor of the rise of the sunbelt and suburbanization? How did labor respond to the civil rights movement and the war in Vietnam? What actions, if any, did the government take to secure the support of labor during these years?

Chapter 9. Labor and the Corporate State, 1969-1992

How can we account for the decline of organized labor during the period, 1969-1992? What were the dominant labor-management trends during this period? How did business or corporate views expand into the national culture during this era? Were the interests of labor better served by one political party or the other during this era?

Chapter 10. Labor's Recent Past and the Future of Democracy

How is the future of democracy in the United States linked to the destiny of labor? What advice would you offer to labor leaders right now to rebuild the house of labor?