

Resources for Teaching the WGA and SAG-AFTRA Strike

This is a working document compiled by Kate Fortmueller (with suggestions from the SCMS Media Industries Scholarly Interest Group)

There are plenty of ways to integrate labor and labor history into your film and media studies courses. Please find citations below:

Books on Hollywood Unions (General)

Gray, Lois S., and Ronald Leroy Seeber, eds. *Under the Stars: Essays on Labor Relations in Arts and Entertainment*. Ithaca: ILR Press, 1996.

Gray and Seeber's collection focuses on how technology influences labor and changes in the media industries. The introduction gives a brief overview of media unions and makes a substantive case as to why media unions should be of interest to policy makers and those interested in labor relations. The two chapters divided into "craft and production" and "talent" focus on the major transformations within these types of film unions.

Perry, Louis B., and Richard S. Perry. *A History of the Los Angeles Labor Movement, 1911-1941*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963.

Perry and Perry situate Hollywood's unionization within the larger history of union activity in open shop Los Angeles during the beginning of the 20th century. The discussion of Hollywood unions is limited to a single chapter that covers unionization of craftworkers, actors, extras, directors, and writers. In relation to broader labor struggles, Perry and Perry claim that successful unionization of Hollywood workers contributed to the prestige of unions in the 1930s.

Ross, Murray. *Stars and Strikes: Unionization of Hollywood*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1941.

Ross's 1941 study of Hollywood unions is a foundational text of Hollywood unions. This book-length study covers all of the Hollywood unions with special attention to stakes for individuals engaged in the unionization process. There is no contemporary equivalent to this book in terms of its breadth.

Books on the WGA and SAG-AFTRA

Banks, Miranda. *The Writers: A History of American Screenwriters and Their Guild*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015.

Using interviews, memoirs, and archival documents, this thorough study traces a critical history of screenwriters from the formation of the WGA in 1933 through 2015. *The Writers* is structured around key conflicts throughout the WGA's history including the blacklist and the guild's significant strikes.

Clark, Danae. *Negotiating Hollywood: The Cultural Politics of Actors' Labor*. University of Minnesota Press, 1995.

A theoretically informed approach to the study of actors, their subjectivity, and labor. Drawing on work from cultural studies, Clark takes up unions to consider the idea of the “collective subject” and specifically addresses SAG’s founding in chapter three.

Fisk, Catherine. *Writing for Hire: Unions, Hollywood, and Madison Avenue*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016.

Legal scholar Catherine Fisk argues that the Writers Guild helped Hollywood screenwriters achieve the professional status of authorship that un-unionized advertising writers were never able to attain. Throughout this comparative study Fisk explores copyright law, attribution and authorship, and the role of unions.

Fortmueller, Kate. *Below the Stars: How the Labor of Working Actors and Extras Shapes Media Production*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2021.

Fortmueller uses union documents (from the Screen Actors Guild [SAG] and Screen Extras Guild [SEG]) and interviews to focus on the perspectives of working actors and extras. *Below the Stars* places less emphasis on union histories, but uses union documents to showcase the professional interests and priorities of actors and extras and situate these creatives as labor.

Prindle, David F. *The Politics of Glamour: Ideology and Democracy in the Screen Actors Guild*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988.

As evidenced by the title, Prindle is interested in exploring the role of democracy in SAG and the relative liberal and conservative factions of the union as a whole. Prindle outlines inherent contradictions in SAG (for example: it is a union that does not provide job security in the traditional sense), but he focuses more on union leadership than on the problems facing the rank-and-file.

Popular Press and Trade Articles

Banks, Miranda and Kate Fortmueller. “Unity will determine if the Hollywood writers strike is successful.” *The Washington Post*. June 22, 2023.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/made-by-history/2023/06/22/wga-strike-hollywood-unions-solidarity/>

Bady, Aaron. “To Be a Consumer of Culture Means Living in a Hostage Situation.” *Slate*. August 11, 2023.

<https://slate.com/culture/2023/08/writers-actors-strike-sag-aftra-wga-hollywood-fans-scabbing-solidarity.html>.

Fortmueller, Kate. “The Writers Strike Opens Old Wounds.” *Los Angeles Review of Books*. May 19, 2023.

<https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/the-writers-strike-opens-old-wounds/>.

Kilkenny, Katie and Winston Cho. “Hollywood’s High Stakes Strike: Actors and Writers Make History with Bid to Reshape Industry.” *The Hollywood Reporter*. July 24, 2023,

<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/business/business-news/sag-aftra-wga-actors-writers-strike-hollywood-1235533651/>.

Kim, Max. "South Korean actors in Netflix originals want better pay. The company refuses to meet with their union." *Los Angeles Times*. August 7, 2023.

<https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2023-08-07/south-korea-actors-netflix-pay-dispute-union>

Maddeus, Gene. "Residuals are Key to Every Strike in Hollywood—Here's Why." *Variety*. September 21, 2023,

<https://variety.com/2023/biz/news/residuals-strike-hollywood-history-wga-sag-aftra-1235727986/#article-comments>.

Nguyen, Janet. "How much less are screenwriters getting paid compared to what they used to?" *NPR Marketplace*. June 8, 2023,

<https://www.marketplace.org/2023/06/08/how-much-less-are-screenwriters-getting-paid-compared-to-what-they-used-to/>.

Parvini, Sarah. "Video game voice actors say 'soul of the industry is on trial' with unregulated AI." *Los Angeles Times*. August 14, 2023.

<https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/business/story/2023-08-14/actors-strike-voice-acting-games-ai-call-of-duty-activision-ea-sag-aftra-interactive-agreement>.

Willis, Holly. What are actors and writers afraid of? A Cinema Scholar explains how AI is upending the Movie and TV Business. *The Conversation*. August 7, 2023.

<https://theconversation.com/what-are-hollywood-actors-and-writers-afraid-of-a-cinema-scholar-explains-how-ai-is-upending-the-movie-and-tv-business-210360>

Podcasts (Strike Specific)

Belloni, Matt. "Inside the SAG-AFTRA Strike with its Top Negotiator." *The Town*. July 14, 2022.

<https://www.theringer.com/2023/7/14/23795277/inside-the-actors-strike-with-its-top-leader>.

Ray, Billy. *Deadline Strike Talk*

Examines the strike from a variety of perspectives. Worth looking at each episode to see what might fit best in your specific class. Some interesting topics: Episode 4 Billy Ray interviews ChatGPT and in Episode 10 Billy Ray interviews showrunners to talk about why it is harder to mentor new writers in mini rooms. Available on Spotify and Apple Podcasts.

Podcasts (Contextual/Contemporary Industry)

Belloni, Matt. "It's Time to Break Up Hollywood with Nick Stoller." *The Town*. June 22, 2023.

<https://www.theringer.com/2023/6/22/23769357/its-time-to-break-up-hollywood-matt-stoller-american-economic-liberties-project-no-hard-feelings>

Thompson, Derek. "How Hollywood Drove its Business Model off a Cliff." *Plain English*. July 19, 2022.

<https://www.theringer.com/2023/7/19/23800849/hollywood-drove-its-business-model-off-a-cliff-disney-streaming>

Additional Media

Film Quarterly Roundtable on the Strikes:

<https://filmquarterly.org/2023/08/11/webinar-hollywood-on-strike-examining-the-2023-wga-and-sag-aftra-strikes/>

WGA West, “The New Gatekeepers: How Disney, Amazon and Netflix will take over media,” August 2023, https://www.wga.org/uploadedfiles/news_and_events/public_policy/GatekeepersReport23.pdf.

Research report advocating for the break-up of streamers, which gets at the heart of the WGA’s concerns during the strike.