

LLC Syllabus

The 1919 Boston Police Strike: The Irish vs. the Yankees in the Wake of WW1

When? Tuesdays, 10:00 am – 12 noon at Temple Beth-El
September 10 – November 19, 2019 (no class October 1)

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Course Description Exactly 100 years ago, 1,142 mostly Irish Boston policemen went on strike for better wages and working conditions. All were fired, and Governor Calvin Coolidge's "toughness" with the strikers earned him a place on the national ticket in 1920.

In this course we'll explore the conditions that led to the strike (global, national, and local), what Boston was like in 1919, who the key players were, and the outcomes. Many of the issues that resonate today were pivotal then: immigration, public unions, terrorist bombings, political corruption, and the role of Russian interference in US politics and processes.

Readings We will read the following novel and discuss it during the course of the semester. I recommend you read it during the summer, and then refer back to sections as we move through the course. It's 700 pages long, but it's a fast and enthralling read.

- Lehane, Dennis. *The Given Day*. Harper Collins, 2008.

**Readings
(cont.)**

There is also a very good non-fiction book about the strike which will provide you lots of support in preparing your presentation.

- Russell, Francis. *A City in Terror: Calvin Coolidge and the 1919 Boston Police Strike*. Beacon Press, 1975.

The coordinator will distribute an article in the first class which outlines the key issues in the strike, the background, what happened in the strike, and what the results were. It is entitled "The Boston Police Strike of 1919," by Richard L. Lyons, *The New England Quarterly*, June 1947. Read it before the 2nd class, and use it as a review and reference throughout the course.

In addition, some session leaders may ask you to read or view something before class.

**Optional
Readings/
Research
Sources**

UMass Boston Library maintains a list of research sources on the 1919 strike. Please note that some of these sources are only available at physical archives. Some articles can be read online. (NOTE: In a fairly recent change, you can now read 6 JSTOR articles a year at no charge if you don't have access through your own library.) Some items are available through inter-library loan. The listed books (keep scrolling down) are more widely available.

<http://umb.libguides.com/bpstrike1919#s-lg-guide-main>

Format

Participants will be expected to read the assigned readings and to participate actively in the discussions. They will also be expected to report on one aspect of the strike. See the detailed schedule below for dates and topics.

The coordinator will spend 10-15 minutes at the beginning of each class introducing one of the individual strikers to you. Discussing a topic like this as a movement or an historical event doesn't always help us to learn about the individuals who took part in the strike, and how it changed their lives. So this is our chance to get to know some of the patrolmen!

Choosing and Preparing Your Topic

The specific topics for presentations/discussions are listed in the class schedule below. In order to present the material in a sequence that makes sense (deep background, recent background, strike activities, aftermath) I'd like to address each topic on the date it is scheduled.

If you are presenting/leading a discussion in one of the background areas (3/4 of the class!), please think about the relationship of the topic to the strike, and consider issues that still resonate today. (We'll look at these more explicitly in the last class, but if you raise the issue in your presentation it will help us focus on those topics at the end.)

Also remember the reporter's questions for each of these topics: who, what, when, where, why, and how.

Guidelines for Presentations

Your session should be no longer than 40 minutes in length (including at least 15 minutes of class questions/discussion time).

There are many different formats you may use for your session. You are welcome to do a PowerPoint presentation, or to use flip charts or handouts. Or you may wish to point the class ahead of time to an article or video that helps to illustrate your topic, and then manage a discussion of it. Or you may wish to send some discussion questions out to the class ahead of time. If your topic offers clearly contrasting points of view, you and a classmate may choose to use a debate format in class, or to manage a debate within the class.

Please use relevant research material from a variety of sources—not just a Wikipedia article. Use your own words. And please try not to read your presentation. It's OK to work from notes, but be sufficiently familiar with the material that you can take a breath and make eye contact with the class!

Guidelines for Presentations (cont.)

Please have a plan for involving the class, and stimulating discussion, whatever format or topic you've chosen. If you want to send material to the class ahead of time, you can send it yourself, or you can send it to me and I will forward to the class. If you plan to do this, please try to get this information to your classmates as early as possible (ideally at least 5-6 days ahead.)

Audiovisual support (whether it's photographs, drawings, maps, musical recordings, video, etc.) will help to tell your story.

I encourage you to consult LLC's guidelines for session leaders which you can find on this page:

<https://www.lifelonglearningcollaborative.org/resources-for-class-members-session-leaders/>

LLC Policies/ Procedures

Food: Food is not allowed in the classrooms. Beverages are allowed but must be covered. Food is permitted in the break room, but must NOT include pork, shellfish, or meat mixed with dairy.

Parking: Do NOT park in any assigned spaces in the Temple lot. Vehicles parked in assigned spaces will be towed at owner's expense.

Cancellations: All information about class cancellations for any reason (including weather) will be emailed to the class by the coordinator. Please do not call the Temple Office.

Technology: The TV/computer setup in each room accepts flash drives and provides Internet access. Individual laptops may not be connected to these setups. *Only the class coordinator or a trained designee* should set up the TV/computer at the beginning of class and break it down at the end of class. If you have not been trained, do not set up or change any technology equipment or settings.

Class	Date	Topic	Presenters/ Discussion Leaders
1	Sept. 10	Introduction of class members (Why did you select this class? What do you know about the topic?) <u>Introduction to class</u> Introduction to, and overview of, the strike	<u>Cathy Hurst</u>
2	Sept. 17	TOPIC 1: <u>The Irish in Boston 1850-1919</u> with a focus on their relationship to the Yankees (aka Brahmins), and how the city changed as a result of their presence. Include political parties (Democrats vs. Republicans) and religion (Catholics vs Protestants). TOPIC 2: <u>Boston environment 1910-1919</u> . Look at demographics, employment (including working days/hours), economic environment (e.g. cost of living), life for women, impending prohibition, art, music, culture, sports, leisure, and any other topic you wish to examine (except for politics which will be discussed in the next class).	
3	Sept.24	TOPIC 3: <u>Boston politics in the years prior to the strike</u> . (Include issues of political parties, graft, ward bosses, patronage system.) Mini-biographies of some key players <u>prior to the strike</u> : Commissioner O'Meara, Mayors Fitzgerald (Honey Fitz) and Curley. TOPIC 4: <u>WW1 and flu epidemic</u> – what happened nationally and what was the specific impact in/on Boston? How did these two events set the stage for the strike?	
	Oct. 1	NO CLASS	

4	Oct. 8	<p>TOPIC 5: <u>The labor movement up to 1919</u>—look at nationally and then focus on Boston. Set the stage and then talk about the strikes (in all sorts of occupations) that took place in the year prior to the Boston Police Strike.</p> <p>BOOK: We will discuss Chapters 1-5 of <i>The Given Day</i>.</p>	
5	Oct. 15	<p>TOPIC 6: <u>The Red Scare and Anarchists</u>—what happened in the Russian Revolution and when? What was the attitude of Bostonians towards the Communists? Look at anarchist/terrorist bombings in the US 1900-1919, nationally and in Boston What happened and why? Look at May Day 1919 events, Russian involvement in Boston prior to the strike, and such figures as Luigi Galleani and Louis Fraina.</p> <p>BOOK: We will discuss Chapters 6-12 of <i>The Given Day</i>.</p>	
6	Oct. 22	<p>TOPIC 7: <u>Police unions</u>—before, during, and immediately after the strike—in Boston, elsewhere in the US, and in Britain and Canada. The role of the Boston Social Club. <u>Working conditions for police</u> in the years prior to the strike. What were they striking for? How did police salaries compare to other jobs available to this population?</p> <p>BOOK: We will discuss Chapters 13-20 of <i>The Given Day</i>.</p>	

7	Oct. 29	<p>TOPIC 8: <u>Biographies of key players in the strike</u>: Commissioner Curtis, Mayor Peters, Governor Coolidge, James Storrow (take them up to 1919 only). Who controlled the management of the Boston Police Department, and how did that contribute to the strike situation? What vested interests did each of these key players have? If each of them had to deal with the strike by himself, what might he have done?</p> <p>BOOK: We will discuss Chapters 21-27 of <i>The Given Day</i>.</p>	
8	Nov. 5	<p>TOPIC 9: <u>Detailed timeline of the strike</u> (August-October 1919). Not just dates and events, but help us really understand what was happening. Both of the books recommended earlier in the syllabus can really help you here. Use photos! Also look at media response. What did the Boston newspapers (as well as those in New York and Washington) have to say about the strike at the time?</p> <p>BOOK: We will discuss Chapters 28-33 of <i>The Given Day</i>.</p>	
9	Nov. 12	<p>TOPIC 10: <u>Impact of the strike on the Boston Police Department</u>. Did it take a long time for the department to recover? What was the impact of the strike on polic unions/strikes in the US after 1919? Also include a discussion of what happened to the Boston Social Club after the strike.</p> <p>TOPIC 11: <u>Calvin Coolidge becomes President of the US</u>. How did his behavior during the strike propel him to national attention? What happened to other key players in the strike: Commissioner Curtis, Mayor Peters, and others you wish to talk about?</p>	

10	Nov. 19	<p>BOOK: We will discuss Chapters 34-40 of <i>The Given Day</i>.</p> <p>GROUP TOPIC: <u>Reflections 100 years later: lasting impact?</u> Have we resolved the issues that the city and country wrestled with in 1919? What issues which we have discussed throughout the semester are still resonating today?</p> <p>CLASS LUNCH</p>	<p><u>Whole Class</u> (specific guidelines will follow)</p>
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