

*WebRat* is the title of my Capstone Project for Graduate School.

This research project explores the rhetorical commonplaces - arguments and assumptions that are so used that people take them for granted - that surround the modern labor movement. These commonplaces have cultivated a social stigma around organized labor, giving the idea that “unions are corrupt” and connected with the mob, or that “unions protect lazy workers”, which, combined with anti-union laws and “right to work” states, has led to record levels of low enrollment in trade unions across the country.

The purpose of this project, then, is to interview members of the modern labor movement - journalists, leaders, activists, and workers - to try and trace the origins of these commonplaces. Where did these ideas originally come from? Are they based on actual events? If so, which events? Or, are these commonplaces created for some purpose? Whose purpose would this be? Through these interviews, I’m also going to get a sense of how modern labor organizers are reacting, and working with, these rhetorical commonplaces.

This project is going to be an interview-based podcast. Most people who listen to podcasts do so in some relation to work - commuting to work, while focused on a task. Being accessible (almost exclusively free) and easy to consume, I think that podcasts are the best way for labor movements to convey ideas about themselves - the state of labor today, the methods of collective action - to the general public.