



Newsletter: Spring 2016

President's Letter

Welcome to the Spring WCSA newsletter. This marks just over half-way through my term as president of the WCSA and I can't believe how quickly it has gone by. This year has seen us really develop as an Association with a number of important initiatives which will help us consolidate and build the field of working class studies and the WCSA.

First, we have successfully merged with the Association of Working Class Academics, which enjoys a membership of 200 plus. We would like to welcome AWCA members to the WCSA and hope that together we will mutually benefit from each other. While there is a lot of cross over in membership and aims, the AWCA was set up to support and further the interests of working-class academics who might teach in a variety of settings. The WCSA, on the other hand, has a broader membership base interested in the study of working class culture and politics. I would really urge members of both organisations to get to know more about each other, to take active part in the WCSA, and to help develop the Association for the future.

Our second piece of exciting news is that we are rapidly moving towards having our own journal for the Association. Led by Australian members Liz Giuffre and Sarah Attfield, with support of your Steering Committee, we aim to produce the first online issue later this year. This marks a significant opportunity for the field and I hope as many of you as possible will become involved.

This summer marks, by my calculation, the ninth *How Class Works* conference at Stony Brook, organised by Mike Zweig and his colleagues. Mike says that this is his last conference, but he expects his colleagues to continue the excellent work of the SUNY Stony Brook centre. Thanks for all your work and generosity, Mike.

We are already planning our 2017 event which will be held in Bloomington, Indiana and will be organized by Joe Varga and his colleagues.

Finally, we are working hard to build our capacity on the steering committee and as an organisation. We are looking to expand the membership of the steering committee at the next round of elections in the summer. Please do consider standing for this important work.

Cheers,

Tim Strangleman, President WCSA

Treasurer's Report

WCSA has a combined balance of \$31,536.56 in our checking account and in our PayPal account. Since my last report, we received payment for \$6,727.81 as part of a three-way split of the proceeds of \$20,183.43 (the other parties including LAWCHA and the Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor) based on our participation with them in the 2015 conference, "Fighting Inequality: Class, Race, and Power."

Our membership numbers are low. We have 83 members and 111 lapsed members. In the last two years, our membership rolls have hovered in the 150s. I attribute the low number to the lengthy interruption in our website service over the summer. We know that you have been eager to renew, so by all means, go ahead and mail in your renewal or visit PayPal. Membership also enables you to fully participate in the conference "How Class Works" this June at Stony Brook.



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Donations to the Travel Grant Fund assist participants who are in need to attend our annual conference. You may donate \$10.00 through PayPal. You may donate more if you mail a check directly to my address below and earmark it for the Travel Grant Fund for the 2016 conference at SUNY, Stony Brook, NY. Funds are also used for our Young Scholars and Activists Initiative that supports conference attendance and the participation of scholars, activists, and organizers early in their careers whose work has the potential for advancing Working-Class Studies as a field. My address is:

Ken Estey, WCSA, PO Box 250827, New York, NY 10025

You may also contact me at kenestey@yahoo.com and call/text at 646.662.3594.

Secretary's Report

WCSA Steering Committee Report (October 2015 – February 2016)

Current Officers:

Steering Committee

President:
Tim Strangleman, U. of Kent, UK

Past President:
Christie Launius, U. of Wisconsin-Oshkosh

President-Elect:
Michele Fazio, U. of North Carolina at
Pembroke

Secretary:
Courtney Maloney, Milwaukee Institute of
Art and Design

Treasurer:
Ken Estey, Brooklyn College

At-large members:

Matthew Kendrick, William Paterson U.
Tim Libretti, Northeastern Illinois U.
Sara Appel, Independent Scholar
Katherine Kidd, U. of Pittsburgh

Initiatives:

Journal:

- The SC agreed to ask Lisa Kirby of Collin College (elections committee member and organizer of the new Texas Center for Working-Class Studies) to act as the institutional host for the journal's ISSN.
- The first issue will invite new substantive works from key people in the field. Inaugural issue should be impactful. It was agreed that we would take a little more time on the project to ensure that the first issue was excellent, and then have a structure in place for subsequent issues.
- It was proposed that we solicit leaders in the field (widely defined) for participation on an editorial advisory board, as distinct from an editorial managerial group.
- It was agreed that we would suggest the title of Journal of Working-Class Studies for the new journal

Finance Committee:

- To bring us in line with the constitutionally required standing committees, treasurer Ken Estey proposed a Finance Committee of 5 members: Treasurer, President, President-elect, and 2 others selected from the membership to serve at least a 2 year term. It was agreed that we have an interim Financial Committee made up of Ken Estey (Treasurer), Tim Strangleman (President), Michele Fazio (President



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Elect), Sara Appel (Steering Committee at large), Lisa Kirby (Elections Committee). We will elect a new set of members after the next set of elections in the summer of 2016.

Committee Chair Jack Metzgar at jmetzgar@roosevelt.edu. If you are nominating somebody besides yourself, please seek their permission before nominating and simply copy them on your email nomination to Jack. No biographical rationale is necessary at this point.

Conference Matters:

- It was agreed that the WCSA would make a contribution of \$1000.00 towards the cost of the 2016 How Class Works conference at Stony Brook. The contribution will be recognized with a full-page space in the conference program.
- The president is in conversation with colleagues at Indiana University regarding the possibility of a 2017 conference there.

The open positions for 2016-17 are: President-Elect, two at-large members of the Steering Committee, and one member of the Elections Committee.

In addition, former members of the Association of Working-Class Academics need to nominate and elect a Chair and Chair-Elect for our new WCSA "Working-Class Academics Section."

Report from the Texas Center for Working-Class Studies Lisa Kirby

Website and Outreach:

- The new website is up and running at: <https://wcstudiesassociation.wordpress.com>. The communications committee invites volunteers who are interested in helping with the site.
- The Wikipedia page for the Working-Class Studies Association was updated in December.

The Texas Center for Working-Class Studies at Collin College will host its second annual conference on Thursday, March 31, at the college's Spring Creek Campus in Plano, Texas. Dr. Sherry Linkon will deliver the keynote address, "Class Trouble: Why

Working-Class Studies Matters." The conference will also feature scholarly panels composed of faculty both from Collin College and other institutions, as well as winners of this year's student essay contest. For more information, please visit the center's website (<http://iws.collin.edu/lkirby/>) or like us on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/collinworkingclass>).

Respectfully submitted by Courtney Maloney

Spring 2016 Reports

Elections Committee Report
WCSA 2016-17 Elections

The nominations process is now open for the WCSA elections in June. Though we will have blast-email calls for nominations in April and May, it is not too early to submit nominations, including self-nominations. Simply email your nominee to Elections

Report from the Center for Study of Working Class Life State University of New York at Stony Brook

How Class Works - 2016 conference:

The full schedule, registration, housing, and other information for the How Class Works-2016 conference is up at <http://>



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www.stonybrook.edu/commcms/workingclass/hcw2016.html>. The conference will be on the Stony Brook campus June 9-11, 2016, with a cultural program Wednesday evening June 8 to kick things off. Early-bird registration rates are available until April 15, 2016. The conference features over 200 presentations in more than 50 sessions over three days. Presenters come from twenty countries outside the U.S.

Winter-spring programs:

The Center has continued its tradition of events highlighting the intersection of race and class with two programs organized as part of Black History Month.

On February 5, the Center organized the showing of Stanley Nelson's documentary film *The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution*. A snowstorm prevented Mr. Nelson's appearance with the film that evening, but over 150 students, faculty, and staff attended. The event was co-sponsored by the film program of the Staller Center for the Arts, Africana Studies Department, and Humanities Institute.

On February 18, the Center hosted Bill Fletcher, Jr. for the second Distinguished Lecture in Working Class Studies: "The Legacy of Race for White People in America: A Tribute to W.E.B. DuBois 'The Souls of White Folks.'" Before the public event, Fletcher led a three-hour invitation-only seminar on methods and principles of organizing issues of race and class with leaders of labor and community organizations trying to develop a Moral Monday movement on Long Island. The public lecture was co-sponsored by the College of Arts and Sciences, Africana Studies Department, and Humanities Institute.

On May 26, 2016, the Center will sponsor a public talk in New York City by SOAS economist John Weeks: "Jeremy Corbyn, the Trident Controversy, and the State of Working Class Politics in Britain." The event is co-sponsored by the Left Labor Project

and the New York City Chapter of U.S. Labor Against the War.

New video:

The Center is producing a new video documenting the recent (December 2015) passage by the Iraqi parliament of a new labor law that gives unprecedented protections to Iraqi workers, in line with ILO standards. Jonathan Levin is the editor. We expect release by April 15.

New leadership for the Center:

The Center is reaching a new level of growth as it changes leadership after the How Class Works-2016 conference in June. The Center's Founding Director, Michael Zweig, is retiring after 49 years at Stony Brook, and 16 years leading the Center. Beginning fall 2016, the Center will have a new name: The Center for Study of Class, Inequality, and Social Justice. It will be led by Christopher Sellers (History), director; Rob Chase and Lori Flores (both History), deputy directors; and Nancy Hiemstra (Cultural Analysis and Theory), Zebulon Miletsky (Africana Studies), and Tracey Walters (Chair, Africana Studies). Michael Zweig will continue his association with the Center in *emeritus* status.

Budget challenges:

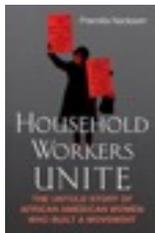
The Center continues to suffer severe budget restraints as the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences continues to zero out all College funding for the Center (and other centers in the College). This in the context of lack of support for SUNY, CUNY, and public education in general from NY Governor Andrew Cuomo and the state legislature. While support for the Center is still forthcoming from other parts of the University, the Center will have to embark on fundraising efforts among alumni, foundations, and other potential supporters to an unprecedented extent. The coming year or two will test its capacity in this regard.

Book Notes



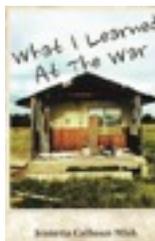
Illegal: Reflections of an Undocumented Immigrant (U. of Illinois), Jose Angel N.

Jose Angel N. entered the U.S. by crawling through a tunnel from Tijuana to San Diego as a teenager in the 1990s. He made his way to Chicago, where he now lives with his wife and children in a high-rise overlooking Lake Michigan. N.'s is a rags-to-riches tale to warm the hearts of the most conservative "American exceptionalist," but with one exception - he is an "illegal" who cannot use his name for fear of being arrested and deported. While working in yards, kitchens and factories, N. got his GED, bachelor's and master's degrees, and works now as a professional translator. But despite his success, he does not travel outside of Chicago or do anything else that would require routine identification. Illegal, he is both in plain sight and in the shadows. Richard Rodriguez praises the memoir: "Because we speak of them in the collective - as 'illegal immigrants' or 'the undocumented' - it is shocking to be addressed by a singular voice. . . . There are ironies aplenty in this book. Perhaps the greatest irony is that he has been studying us and he knows us better than we know him."



Household Workers Unite: The Untold Story of African-American Women Who Built a Movement (Beacon Press), Premilla Nadasen

African-American domestic workers organizing in the 1950s? If that strikes you as an historical anomaly, you need to read Household Workers Unite. It recounts the history of domestic-worker activism from the 1950s to the 1970s, showing the innovative labor and citizen strategies black household workers developed, forming unique alliances in both the women's rights and black freedom movements. Premilla Nadasen, a Columbia University professor active with Domestic Workers Alliance today, finds her historical narrative and analysis in the compelling stories of the leaders and participants - mimicking how these domestic workers used "storytelling as a form of activism and as means of establishing collective identity as workers." Barbara Ransby calls the book "a must read for anyone seriously interested in the confluence of race, class, gender and citizenship in the lives of women of color, and in the historic struggles for social justice, in the 20th and 21st centuries."



What I Learned At The War, (West End Press), Jeanetta Calhoun Mish

Jeanetta Calhoun Mish's new poetry collection "pays homage to a rough-and-tumble Oklahoma upbringing." Rusty Barnes, author of Reckoning, writes of Mish's book: "There's a never-misty nostalgia and sometimes hard edge to these poems of a rough childhood and an homage to the equally rough environs of Oklahoma. It's the sure hand of the writer that keeps you reading, the propulsive sense of a life happened, lived and recorded, with as much candor as the best poetry offers us."



The Working Classes and Higher Education: Inequality of Access, Opportunity and Outcome (Routledge), edited by Amy Stich and Carrie Freie

This collection of essays challenges the popular notion of higher education as the principal path toward equality of opportunity and social mobility for working-class students. Against a backdrop of a "college-for-all" discourse, the authors find higher education becoming "increasingly stratified by social class." What's more, "the same economic vulnerability and negative cultural stereotypes . . . continue to present obstacles for new generations of working-class youth, many of whom pursue higher



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education as a necessity rather than a ‘choice.’” The book is organized around three “moments on a transitional continuum”: the movement from high school to college, experiences within higher education, and the transition into the workforce. Besides the editors, contributors include Allison Hurst, Diane Reay, Jennifer Silva, and Jenny Stuber.



From South Texas to the Nation: The Exploitation of Mexican Labor in the Twentieth Century (U. of North Carolina), John Weber

This book focuses on the early 20th century in South Texas to explain how the exploitation of Mexican migrant workers, legal and otherwise, transformed a region previously considered too isolated and desolate for large-scale agriculture into “one of the United States’ most lucrative farming regions and one of its worst places to work.” But it’s not just a local community study. Rather, according to the publisher, John Weber shows how “South Texas pioneered the low-wage, insecure, migration-dependent labor system on which so many industries continue to depend.” In doing so, the book offers a reinterpretation of the U.S. record on human and labor rights into the 21st century.



Someone Has to Die, (Hard Ball Press), Tim Sheard

In Timothy Sheard’s 7th Lenny Moss mystery novel, a nurse accused of the wrongful death of her patient swears she is innocent. The only one who believes her is a co-worker, who asks the hospital’s fearless union steward and amateur detective, Lenny Moss, to investigate and clear the nurse’s name. But Lenny has his hands full. The Croesus Medical Group, the new hospital owner, is threatening to withdraw contributions to the union’s health and pension benefit fund. If they stop making payments, the fund will become insolvent and all the workers, active and retired, will lose their benefits. For many of them, it would be a death sentence. Publishers Weekly calls the book a “well-plotted page turner,” and Library Journal says that Sheard “provides... polished prose and elements of warmth and humor.”

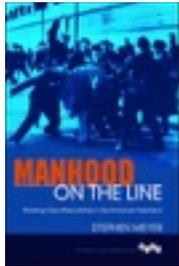


Spatializing Blackness: Architectures of Confinement and Black Masculinity in Chicago (U. of Illinois), Rashad Shabazz

Spatializing Blackness links the prison-industrial complex’s current incarceration of black men, sometimes called the school-to-prison pipeline, to the “prison-like environment” of Chicago’s Black Belt as some 300,000 African-Americans migrated to the city from 1900 to 1940. “Moving from the kitchenette to the prison cell,” according to the publisher, the book “explores the myriad architectures of confinement, policing, surveillance, urban planning, and incarceration.” In the process, Rashad Shabazz highlights “the racialization of space, the role of containment in subordinating African Americans, the politics of mobility under conditions of alleged freedom, and the ways black men cope with - and resist - containment.” Dylan Rodriguez calls it an “engaging, interdisciplinary, historically situated examination of the creation of ‘carceral’ space in Chicago as a constituting dimension of the city’s modern policing and de facto segregation of black people and communities.”

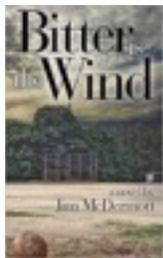


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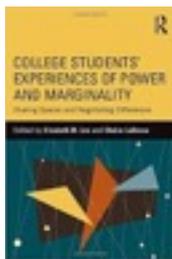
Manhood on the Line: Working-Class Masculinities in the American Heartland (U. of Illinois), Stephen Meyer

Industrial labor, and especially assembly-line work in the auto industry, challenged traditional notions of masculinity, and this book traces “the complex vagaries of men reinventing manhood in twentieth century America.” Drawing on a wealth of archival material, according to the publisher, *Manhood on the Line* “recreates a social milieu in stunning detail - the mean labor and stolen pleasures, the battles on the street and in the soul, and a masculinity that expressed itself in violence and sexism but also as a wellspring of the fortitude necessary to maintain one’s dignity while doing hard work in a hard world.” Elizabeth Faue says the book “compellingly shows us how automation, economic crisis, and the presence of women and African-American workers reshaped the shop floor and working-class white men’s identity and politics,” and in doing so, “illuminates the social worlds of white and black working-class men and women in the twentieth century.” David Roediger calls it “In both argument and evidence, . . .among the richest studies of U.S. working class history.”



Bitter is the Wind (Cune), Jim McDermott

This is the first novel of Jim McDermott, a former assembly-line worker who is now an attorney. According to the publisher, the novel “opens a window on the American working class and its aching desire for financial security, recognition, and respect. His characters confront a modern world with limited possibilities, ambiguous mores, and authorities who seem devoted to keeping the brightest and most talented members of the underclass on the other side of town. *Bitter Is the Wind* deconstructs the American dream.” Stephen Fife, author of *The 13th Boy* and *Dreaming in the Maze of Love-Grief-Madness*, writes that McDermott’s book is “a pungent slice of working-class life in 1970s America, as well as a deeply-affecting father-son story. *Bitter is the Wind* reminded me how hard it’s always been to achieve success for those who weren’t handed it on a silver platter.”

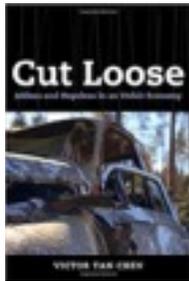


College Students’ Experience of Power and Marginality: Sharing Spaces and Negotiating Differences (Routledge), edited by Elizabeth M. Lee and Chaise LaDousa

According to the publisher, this book “explores what actually happens on campus as students from an increasingly wide range of backgrounds enroll and share space.” Contributors focus on the qualitative experiences of Asian-American, Latino/a, Hawaiian, and African-American students, with one essay on “Supportive Friendships Based on Both Racial Solidarity and Racial Diversity.” Likewise, several essays look at working-class and first-generation students, and one at the experience of “Being ‘the Gay’ on Campus.” The authors pay due attention to academics, but their primary focus is on how students from diverse backgrounds experience power and marginality both inside and outside the classroom. One essay is titled “Pulled in or Pushed out? How Organizational Factors Shape the Social and Extra-Curricular Experiences of First-Generation Students.”

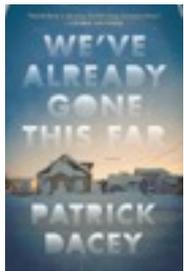


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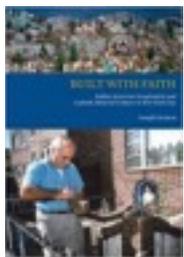
Cut Loose: Jobless and Hopeless in an Unfair Economy (U. of California), Victor Tan Chen

This interview-based study of workers who have lost their once well-paid jobs on assembly lines provides what the publisher describes as “a poignant look at how the long-term unemployed struggle in today’s unfair economy to support their families, rebuild their lives, and overcome the shame and self-shame they deal with on a daily basis.” William Julius Wilson calls it “the most powerful and poignant study of the effects of prolonged joblessness in today’s economy that I have read.” Wilson praises Victor Tan Chen’s “skills as an interviewer” in eliciting moving responses from laid-off autoworkers and combining it with a stirring call to action. Katherine Newman says it is “a must-read for anyone who wants to understand the costs of globalization on the ground and the efficacy of social policy for protecting citizens caught in the grip of profound economic change.”



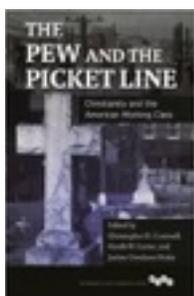
We've Already Gone This Far (Holt), Patrick Dacey.

Patrick Dacey’s debut collection of short stories focuses on a group of long-time residents of working-class Wequaquet, and the ways in which—self-destructive and otherwise—they negotiate the roller coaster of economic boom and bust. Rae Meadows, author of *Mercy Train* and *Calling Out*, writes: “Whether a used-car salesman or past-his-prime coach or lonely mother of a deployed soldier, the characters in Dacey’s collection are 'living on these images of the past' looking for something that glimmers just out of reach. A book that brims with unguarded humanity and quiet moments of communion, I couldn't stop reading it. Dacey is a masterful prose stylist, a vibrant and original new literary voice.”



Built with Faith: Italian American Imagination and Catholic Material Culture in New York City (U. of Tennessee), Joseph Sciorra

The author of *Italian Folk: Vernacular Culture in Italian-American Lives*, Joseph Sciorra trains his eye in this volume on Italian-American neighborhoods in New York City, “where Catholic residents enhance [their] neighborhoods with imaginative yard shrines, elaborate sidewalk altars, miniature nativity scenes, and colorful displays of Christmas lights.” These and other community art forms, Sciorra argues, create “community-based sacred spaces” that exist outside of but in relationship to churches and parish halls, and they bring an ethnically infused religiosity to conventionally secular locations. According to the publisher, “Sciorra reveals how Italian Americans in the city use expressive culture and religious practices to transform everyday urban space into unique, communal sites.” What’s more, the “folk aesthetics practiced by individuals within their communities are integral to understanding how art is conceptualized, implemented, and esteemed outside of museum and gallery walls.”



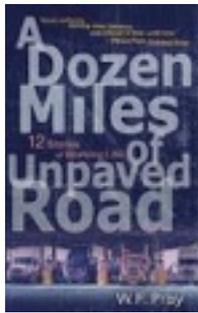
The Pew and the Picket Line: Christianity and the American Working Class (U. of Illinois), edited by Christopher Cantwell, Heath Carter and Janine Giordano Drake

This book gathers together some of the work of “a new generation of scholars working at the nexus where religious history and working-class history converge.” According to the publisher, the collection ranges from “Pentecostal miners preaching prosperity while seeking miracles in the depths of the earth” to “black sharecroppers and white Protestants establish[ing] credit unions to pursue a joint vision of cooperative capitalism.” Robert Orsi praises these “richly textured historical case studies” for reopening “all questions about how



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work, race, gender, ethnicity, region and religion have intersected in the American past.” Nick Salvatore calls it “a terrific collection” and says: “In treating the religious commitments of American working people seriously, it offers a more holistic perspective of these men and women that reflects their very humanity.”



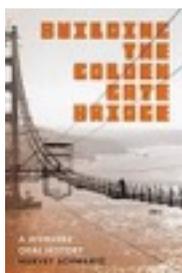
A Dozen Miles of Unpaved Road: 12 Stories of Working Life (Firebird), W.F. Pray

All these stories, W.F. Pray tells us, are based on actual events that he either witnessed himself or was told about by a “highly reliable source.” They include: “a truck driver who shields a transvestite from a prison rape, the murder of a trucker behind a strip club that no one reports, a reluctant union organizer who must go to jail to get a contract signed, a young dock worker who accidentally turns his lover into a prostitute, a crew of drivers who protect a woman truck driver from the consequences of failing at her job, [and] two black drivers in Alabama who must keep a terrified white woman out of the hands of her family.” In his author’s preface, Pray tells us that he tried to stay as close to the actual event as possible, “letting the straightforward development of the occurrence deliver its meaning.” He justifies this aesthetic, saying: “If that meaning is typically outspoken rather than tangled in a morass of symbolism I think that is a symptom of the source, a frank and even blunt view of the world, and not a graceless lack of subtlety.”



Women Writing Cloth: Migratory Fictions in the American Imaginary (Lexington Books), Mary Jo Bona

This book seeks to uncover “the relationship between literary cloth-working women and migration” and explores “the intricate connections between handwork, resourcefulness, and mobility.” With close readings of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Alice Walker, Sandra Cisneros, and Adria Bernardi, Mary Jo Bona argues that each of these authors draws on “pre-modern stories of weaving women” and on “women’s migratory experiences” to show how “women’s handwork constitutes a revolt against a devaluation of cultural heritage and a distrust of self.” Josephine Hendin of New York University praises Women Writing Cloth as “a groundbreaking work of impressive scholarship and lucidity.” She explains: “Informed by an extensive command of ethnic literature and theory, migration studies, feminist scholarship and historical perspectives, this book develops relationships between needlework, verbal and visual art, and storytelling traditions across a broad spectrum of ethnicities and transnational experiences. It is a stunning contribution to our knowledge of women’s cultures and expressive forms.”



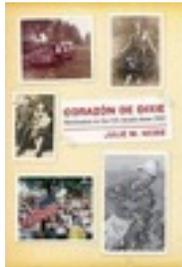
Building the Golden Gate Bridge: A Workers’ Oral History (U. of Washington), Harvey Schwartz

Compiling the recollections of nine workers who helped build the Golden Gate Bridge in the 1930s, labor historian Harvey Schwartz chronicles “the technical details of construction, the grueling physical conditions they endured, the small pleasures they enjoyed, and the gruesome accidents some workers suffered.” Most of those interviewed are men of European descent, many the sons of immigrants, but two are female nurses who “cared for the injured and tolerated their antics,” and one is an African-American ironworker who worked on the bridge in later years. Following “the example of Studs Terkel by allowing the workers to speak for themselves,” Schwartz gives us cable spinners, ironworkers, engineers, and nurses who describe terrible accidents, “company safety innovations, workers’ ingenuity, racism, and the



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cold, wet, and dangerous conditions of the San Francisco Bay.” Former San Francisco Mayor Art Agnos says, “After reading these riveting stories, . . . your next trip across the Golden Gate Bridge will never be the same.”



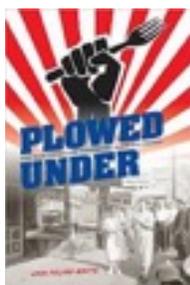
Corazon de Dixie: Mexicanos in the U.S. South since 1910 (U. of North Carolina), Julie M. Weise

Drawing on oral history interviews and family photographs, as well as archival research in both the U.S. and Mexico, *Corazon de Dixie* recounts the histories of Mexicanos’ migrations to five urban, rural, and exurban areas of the American South - New Orleans, Mississippi, Arkansas, Georgia, and North Carolina. By showing the foundations these immigrants laid beginning early in the 20th century, the book seeks to illuminate the worlds more recent Mexican immigrants to the South have been entering. These early Mexican immigrants “navigated the Jim Crow system, cultivated community in the cotton fields, purposefully appealed for help to the Mexican government, shaped the southern conservative imagination in the wake of the civil rights movement, and embraced their own version of suburban living at the turn of the twenty-first century.” Natalia Molina, author of *How Race Is Made in America*, says: “By extending borderlands historiography to include the South, Weise sheds light on a little-studied facet of Mexican immigration in the United States, powerfully demonstrating how our concepts of race are inevitably shaped by region, history, and community.”



British Working-Class Fiction: Narratives of Refusal and the Struggle Against Work (Bloomsbury Academic), Roberto del Valle Alcalá

Roberto del Valle Alcalá’s book focuses on working-class writing from the 1950s through the economic crisis of 2008/9. The author argues “that throughout this period, working-class writing developed new strategies of resistance against the social discipline imposed by capitalist work.” Drawing on a range of theorists, Alcalá attempts a thorough account of the British literary treatment of postwar work, and he analyses “the strategies adopted by workers in their attempts to identify and combat the source of their oppression.” The authors focused on include Alan Sillitoe, David Storey, Nell Dunn, Pat Barker, James Kelman, Irvine Welsh, Monica Ali, and Joanna Kavenna.



Plowed Under: Food Policy Protests and Performance in New Deal America (Indiana U.), Ann Folino White

Today “food stamps” and school lunches subsidize American farms and agribusiness by increasing effective consumer demand for food, but the initial New Deal effort focused on reducing supply to prop up farm commodity prices. The Agricultural Adjustment Act encouraged farmers to let fruit rot on trees, to plow crops under, and to slaughter and discard piglets and sows. Since starvation and malnutrition were widespread at the time in American cities, this supply-side approach came to be viewed as a moral abomination, and public protests resulted. These protests “ranged from the ‘Milk War’ that pitted National Guardsmen against dairymen, who were dumping milk, to the meat boycott by Polish-American women in Michigan, and from black sharecroppers’ protest to restore agricultural jobs in Missouri to the protest theater of the Federal Theater Project.” According to the publisher, *Plowed Under* “approaches these events as performances where competing notions of morality and citizenship were acted out, often along lines marked by class, race, and gender.”



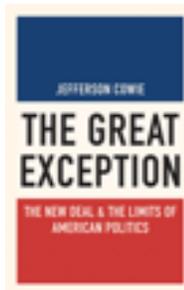
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A Hidden History of the Cuban Revolution: How the Working Class Shaped the Guerrillas' Victory (Monthly Review Press), Steve Cushion

The standard history of the Cuban Revolution focuses on the military efforts of a small band of guerrillas led by Fidel Castro. In this book, Steve Cushion turns this story on its head, arguing that far from being “too influenced by corrupt union leaders” and too focused on strictly economic demands, “the Cuban working class launched an underground movement in tandem with the guerrillas operating in the mountains.” Among their efforts were illegal strikes, sabotage, and armed conflict with the government, “all of which culminated in two revolutionary workers’ congresses and the largest general strike in Cuban

history.”

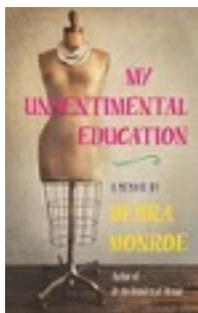


The Great Exception: The New Deal & the Limits of American Politics (Princeton U.), Jefferson Cowie

The author of *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* undertakes in this volume to situate the years from the Great Depression into the 1970s within the long arc of American history. In doing so, Jefferson Cowie argues that the “crises of the Depression and World War II forced realignments of American politics and class relations, but these changes were less a permanent triumph of the welfare state than the product of a temporary cessation of enduring tensions involving race, immigration, culture, class, and individualism.” Thomas Edsall says *The Great Exception* is “a brilliant

contribution to the understanding of American politics,” and Tom Geoghegan calls it “exceptionally brilliant in casting light on our contemporary struggle with plutocracy.”

Book Reviews



Debra Monroe, *My Unsentimental Education*. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015)

Review by Christie Launius, University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh

Debra Monroe’s *My Unsentimental Education* is a fascinating page-turner and a new entry into the genre of straddler memoirs, that is, memoirs that narrate and reflect upon an individual’s movement out of the working class and into the middle class. As the name straddler implies, the movement described in memoirs in this genre is typically neither neat nor without ambivalence, and Monroe’s is no exception. The causes of that messiness and ambivalence in

Monroe’s life are not just or only about her individual trajectory out of a small Midwestern blue-collar town and into academia; in addition, born in 1958, she comes of age into a society in the midst of grappling with feminism and its resulting mixed messages to women about “having it all.”

Like many straddlers, Monroe achieves upward class mobility via education, and her narrative focuses on her pursuit of that education. Born in Spooner, WI, Monroe doesn’t venture far from home for college, traveling just down the road to Eau Claire, but subsequently, her pursuit of education and of upward mobility takes her west, then back east, and finally west again. She moves to Kansas for a master’s degree, Utah for a Ph.D., North Carolina for her first tenure-track job, and finally, Texas, where she is currently a professor of creative writing at Texas



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State University.

But Monroe's narrative is structured as much around her romantic relationships as her educational experiences. This is not a yoking together of two disparate aspects of her life; rather, her choices in men have everything to do with her pursuit of upward class mobility and her ambivalence about it. Unlike many working-class women who seek upward class mobility through connection to middle-class men, Monroe's relationships tend to be with downwardly mobile men, unsuitable men, or both. The blurb on the back cover of the memoir puts it, "When it comes to men, she's still blue collar."

This strategy persists over time, but with subtle changes. Early in the process, she describes it this way: "I usually dated down anyway, because dating up was work. Work was work, pretending to be who I wasn't yet, pretending to be self-assured and expert by day. So at night and on weekends, I'd wanted to stop pretending. I chose men as if I'd never left home" (5). While working on her master's degree, she offers a similar reflection that "I didn't date classmates—dating would seem like homework. The distance between my aspiring daytime self and my nighttime self had widened" (87).

At various points Monroe also expresses a desire for integration, a move beyond this compartmentalization of selves, but expresses frustration at her ability to do so. In the introduction she writes of wanting "a man who'd match my old self, my new self, all my selves. So far I'd met Either or Or" (3). When moving from Kansas to Utah to start a Ph.D. program, Monroe hopes that it will be "my last stop before I'd settle and friends would stop being bit players and match each other, become a circle, a unity, and all my selves would match too" (100).

Over time, through another marriage and divorce and the launching of her academic career, Monroe continues to feel as though she only finds men who like "Just my homework. Just my housework. Or just how I was in bed, flesh-and-blood and wanton" (152). Monroe's relationship trials and travails, then, are certainly tied to her complicated feelings about her upward class mobility, but they ultimately have as much to do with gender politics. What comes through in the memoir is an ambivalence about the end of the patriarchal bargain brought about by second-wave feminism.

As a writer, Monroe is skillful not only at depicting all of those twists and turns in her life course, but also at capturing, for the reader, who she was all along the way, even as she frames the narrative at beginning and end with the insights gleaned from those experiences.



Elizabeth R. Gottlieb, *We Are One: Stories of Work, Life and Love* (Hard Ball Press, 2015).

Review by Lou Martin, Chatham University

In *We Are One: Stories of Work, Life and Love*, Elizabeth Gottlieb has compiled interviews with 34 people from all walks of life with one thing in common: they all belong to unions. Gottlieb notes that if readers are unfamiliar with the word "union" or if it has negative connotations for them, then "this collection of personal stories will offer you a refreshingly accessible and extraordinary perspective." She hopes that this book will "address many myths and fears" and reflect "the personal and very diverse nature of how unions have affected the inside and outside lives of various workers." (ix)

Actor and activist Danny Glover introduces the interviews, sharing thoughts about his late father, a member of what was then called the National Alliance of Postal Employees, and



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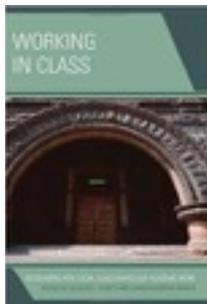
contemplating the threads that run through the interviews. These workers, he writes, “share in the reality and dreams of living a life where they have the freedom to be safe and healthy, to be supportive of others, to be heard, respected, and fulfilled.” (vii)

The interviews that follow are edited to be just the voice of the workers themselves talking about who they are, the nature of their work, thoughts on their union, and their definitions of success. They live in New York, Virginia, Illinois, Montana, California, Alabama, and Kentucky to name some of the places. And they work in many varied occupations, everything from doorman to hard rock miner, pilot to violinist, Oreo cookie packing tech to sheet metal detailer. Several grew up in union households while pilot James Ray says that his grandfather would “roll over in his grave if he knew” his grandson belonged to a union. (199) Some of their jobs come with prestige and high pay as with retired Major League Baseball player Tony Clark while others work in relatively unseen and lower paid occupations like farm worker Olivia Herrera Mendoza.

Through these interviews, some themes emerge. It is hard not to notice the gratitude of older workers and retirees for the benefits of unionism as well as their concern for the younger generation. Also, reminders of the current state of the labor movement creep into these stories, especially in the thoughts of shop stewards, organizers, and union officers. Roberta Reardon, an actor and founding co-president of Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists, says that her union faces the same challenge of unions in general: “a world that doesn’t understand why we exist.” (212)

Finally, these union members have many different definitions of success, but they often involve their relationships to their families and communities. Coal miner Charles “Hawkeye” Dixon notes that the CEO of Massey Energy has millions of dollars. But, he continues, “I tell you what I do have that he’ll never have and that’s respect and appreciation from the people I live with. And that makes me a hell of a lot richer.” (79)

This collection of interviews presents a rich portrait of union members in the U.S. at this moment. The volume would have been strengthened with some small details such as captions for the photographs and a list of union acronyms, and while we have the introductory essays, it would have been satisfying to have a thoughtful conclusion. Those details aside, *We Are One* is a wonderful record of real people and their experiences and stands in stark contrast to the polemics of anti-union propaganda and the negative representations of unions on TV and in films.



Allison L. Hurst and Sandi Nenga, eds. *Working in Class: Recognizing How Social Class Shapes Our Academic Work* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2016).

Review by Caroline Pari-Pfisterer, Borough of Manhattan Community College, CUNY

There are a plethora of anthologies by and about working-class academics, so Dews and Laws’ *This Fine Place So Far From Home*, Shepard, McMillan, and Tate’s *Coming to Class*, Tokarczyk and Fay’s *Working-Class Women in the Academy*, and so many more came to mind when I first opened this book. I immediately wondered how it would contribute to this robust collection from the past thirty years; I didn’t have to read past the introduction to find the answer. While many of the previous collections present vivid depictions of life as working-class academics, few cover the extensive ground that this collection does, showing how one’s working-class subject position infuses how we conduct research, teach, and perform our work as academics.



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In a discussion of the multiple meanings of the title, “Working in Class,” the editors reveal that it refers to more than the classroom, but also to “the sheer effort it takes to make social class a visible, salient part of our teaching, scholarship, and administrative work.” We feel this effort viscerally in almost every chapter, as the working-class academics illustrate how they have struggled to redefine the way research is conducted, or work through ways of guiding working-class students, or mentor working-class colleagues. It’s work! There’s a sense that it is not only ongoing work, but that academics like those in this collection have only just started and they are not afraid to admit their failure.

In Part One: Research, one outstanding chapter is “Controlling for Class: Or the Persistence of Classism in Psychology” by Irene López and Olivia Legan, who show us how they have changed the way they do research by going beyond definitions of and demographics on class to incorporate the effects of social class in their studies. They are working against their field’s dominant view of social class as something to be “controlled” as a variable rather than studied.

In Part Two: Teaching, two chapters are absolute must-reads: “Lessons Learned: How I Unintentionally Reproduce Class Inequality” by Jessi Streib, and “Making Class Salient in the Sociology Classroom” by Melissa Quintela. Streib brings us into her classroom as she demonstrates how some of her practices undermine the social class equality she so firmly upholds. She provides valuable “lessons learned” at the end of each example or vignette, and she reminds us that even when we have the best of intentions, we need to work hard to ensure true social equality takes place. This chapter had the most profound impact on me as I began to call into question my own classroom practices. Quintela, taking a Freirean approach to “how class operates as a very conscious reflection developed in praxis,” also presents pedagogical techniques that engage students in a critical awareness of how knowledge is constructed, how to understand social class differences and how to explicitly focus on class in her various sociology courses. I particularly enjoyed these two chapters mainly for their practical application. And as Streib, Quintela and so many of the contributors have made me more aware, it is precisely because of my working-class background that I value that practicality. Finally, anyone in teacher education needs to read “The Classroom Crucible: Preparing Teachers from Privilege for Students of Poverty” by Michael Svec and P.L. Thomas.

In Part Three: Work in the Academy, contributors turn to the institutions of higher education by closely examining the ways in which working-class students and professors are situated in “class.” Krista M. Soria tackles adjunct labor and the social class hierarchy of our colleges and universities. Deborah M. Warnock provides “concrete steps that campuses can take to recruit and support working-class students.” Overall, though most of these academics teach in private colleges with a majority of privileged students and I teach at a CUNY community college where the majority of students are working class, I still feel so wonderfully disturbed by this book. I cannot enter my classroom without thinking of Streib and Quintela’s chapters; I cannot progress in my research and writing without thinking of López and Legan’s chapter; I cannot attend meetings at my college without thinking of Timothy Haney’s or Warnock’s chapter; I cannot reflect on my entire career as an academic without thinking of many of the chapters in this book, especially Lynn Arner’s “Survival Strategies for Working-Class Women as Junior Faculty Members.” You, too, will be transformed.



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