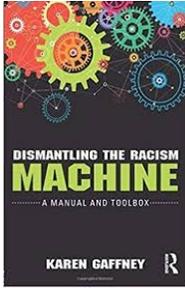
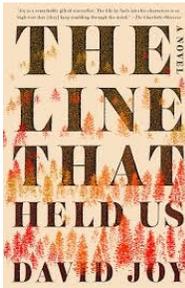


# BOOK NOTES



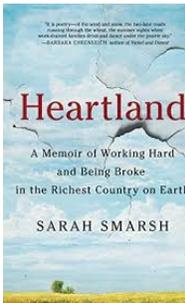
## ***Dismantling the Racism Machine: A Manual and Toolbox (Routledge), Karen Gaffney***

WCSA member Karen Gaffney uses the machine metaphor to explain how racism has become embedded in our institutions and in many people's minds in ways that continue to reproduce racial inequalities even when white people are trying hard to be color blind. Based on her own undergraduate college teaching and community activism, the book is meant to be used in popular education. It broadly covers the history of both racial ideologies and institutions not for its own sake, but to show how these histories have left rigid residues in our ways of thinking and doing in the present. A chapter on "The Racism Machine's Recalibration After the Civil Rights Movement" shows how certain long-lived racist notions and practices have been revived in new forms. And the final chapter makes a series of suggestions for how people of good will can "take apart the racism machine." One reviewer says: "In a politically polarized time . . . it is critical to understand America's roots of racism and how it manifests itself in every facet of our society. Gaffney does just this in clear, unflinching and accessible terms, providing readers with the racial literacy so missing in our current debates."



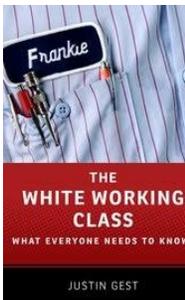
## ***The Line That Held Us (Putnam), David Joy***

*The Line That Held Us* comes from 2018 WCSA Tillie Olsen Award winner, David Joy. It's the tale of a hunter who accidentally kills someone while chasing a prize buck, and then must hide from the victim's notoriously violent and vengeful family. Putnam describes the book as "a story of friendship and family, a tale balanced between destruction and redemption, where the only hope is to hold on tight, clenching to those you love." The Associated Press writes that Joy's novel is: "Unflinching . . . Joy writes about rough-hewn men and women eking out a living in an economically depressed area, trying to avoid—but often affected by—violence and drugs that permeate the region. Their lives are tied to the land, its history and their families who established lives there decades ago."



## ***Heartland: A Memoir of Working Hard and Being Broke in the Richest Country on Earth (Schribner), Sarah Smarsh***

Sarah Smarsh is a journalist who has written for *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, and *The New Yorker*, but she grew up in the 1980s and 1990s on a Kansas wheat farm "the daughter of a dissatisfied young mother and raised predominantly by her grandmother." According to the publisher, her memoir "affirms the corrosive impact intergenerational poverty can have on individuals, families, and communities" and shows how changing economic policies strengthened "the forces of cyclical poverty" within her own and other families. "Combining memoir with powerful analysis and cultural commentary, *Heartland* is an uncompromising look at class, identity, and the particular perils of having less in a country known for its excess." *The Library Journal* calls it "a countervailing voice to J.D. Vance's *Hillbilly Elegy*," and *Oprah.com* describes its takeaway as: "The working poor don't need our pity; they need to be heard above the din of cliché and without so-called expert interpretation. Smarsh's family are expert enough to correct any misunderstanding about their lives."



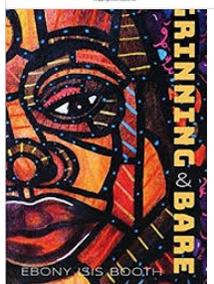
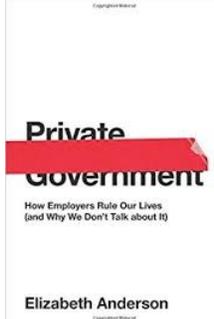
## ***The White Working Class: What Everyone Needs to Know (Oxford U. Press), Justin Gest***

Justin Gest is the author of an earlier study that compared Youngstown, Ohio, in the U.S. with Dagenham in the UK, focused mostly on deindustrialized white male workers. This slimmer volume builds on that work, but with a broader focus on the rise of right-wing populism in the U.S., the UK, and Europe, and as part of a broader discussion of the role of working-class whites in electing Donald Trump and voting for the UK's exit from the European Union. The publisher promises the book "provides context for understanding this large group of people," its demographics, history, and geography, "as well as the ways in which this group defines itself and has been defined by others."



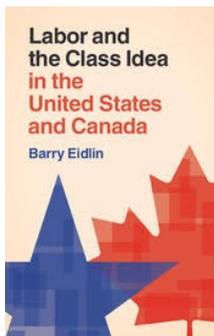
***Girlhood in the Borderlands: Mexican Teens Caught in the Crossroads of Migration* (NYU Press), Lilia Soto**

Based on interviews over a 6-year period with 60 teenage girls from Napa, California, and Zinapécuaro, Mexico, this book “examines the lived experiences of Mexican teenage girls raised in transnational families and the varied ways they make meaning of their lives.” Mexican men from Zinapécuaro have been recruited for temporary work in the U.S. for decades, leaving families behind for part of the year before returning home, bringing aspects of American life and culture into these families, and sometimes eventually bringing their families to the U.S. These different but shared experiences of being transnational is what Lilia Soto focuses on in *Girlhood in the Borderlands*. George Lipsitz calls it “a compassionate and compelling binational multi-site ethnography” that “reveals the hardships and heartaches of lives interrupted, but also the determination and dignity of young women coming of age on both sides of the border.”



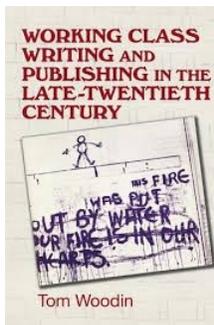
***Grinning and Bare*. Ebony Isis Booth. West End Press**

From the publisher: “Performance poet and activist Ebony Isis Booth sheds light on Black feminism, racism and inequality, social justice, and self-love in her debut collection of poems. She reveals the irony of a consumer culture that devours and disposes of Black bodies alongside the subsequent creation of social justice movements like Black Lives Matter. In the book’s second, poignant half, Booth turns her gaze from the outward to the inner, to look at how her own life has been affected by Black fatherhood, romantic love, and self love. She opens the way for a conversation about the intersections in feminism between the visibility of Black women’s lives and their bodies.”



***Labor and the Class Idea in the United States and Canada* (Cambridge U. Press), Barry Eidlin**

This book offers a new interpretation of why labor unions are so much weaker in the U.S. than in Canada. Barry Eidlin argues that today’s difference goes back to “different ruling party responses to worker upsurge during the Great Depression and World War II.” According to the publisher’s blurb, “US labor’s long-term decline resulted from what was initially a more pro-labor ruling party response, while Canadian labor’s relative long-term strength resulted from a more hostile ruling party response. These struggles embedded ‘the class idea’ more deeply in policies, institutions, and practices than in the US.” These different historical trajectories, Eidlin argues, account for why U.S. unions came to be seen as “special interests” while Canadian unions are more often viewed as working-class institutions.

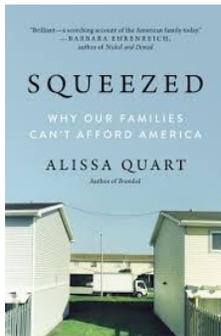


***Working Class Writing and Publishing in the Late Twentieth Century* (Manchester U. Press), Tom Woodin**

The publisher describes the book as follows: “From the early 1970s, working class writing and publishing in local communities rapidly proliferated into a national movement. This book is the first full evaluation of these developments and opens up new perspectives on literature, culture, class and identity over the past 50 years. Its origins are traced in the context of international shifts in class politics, civil rights, personal expression and cultural change. The writing of young people, older people, adult literacy groups as well as writing workshops is analysed. Thematic chapters explore how audiences consumed this work, the learning of writers, the fierce debates over identity, class and organisation, as well as changing relations with mainstream institutions.” The author, Tom Woodin, is Reader in the Social History of Education at the Institute of Education, University College London.

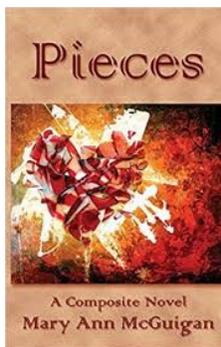
***Private Government: How Employers Rule Our Lives (and Why We Don't Talk about It)* (Princeton U. Press), Elizabeth Anderson**

Which has more control over our lives, our employers or our local, state and federal governments? Elizabeth Anderson says it is obviously employers, and that if we saw employers as private governments, we would be more likely to demand more democracy where we work. “In many workplaces,” Anderson shows, “employers minutely regulate workers' speech, clothing, and manners, leaving them with little privacy and few other rights. And employers often extend their authority to workers' off-duty lives. Workers can be fired for their political speech, recreational activities, diet, and almost anything else employers care to govern.” Anderson’s argument, initially a Tanner Lecture at Princeton University’s Center for Human Values, is presented in the first 70 pages of the book, followed by comments by a cultural critic, an economist, a historian, and a philosopher, capped by Anderson’s response to these comments.



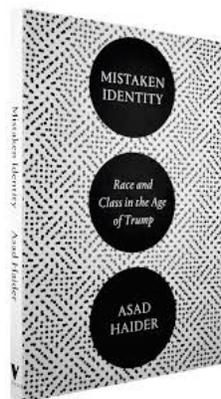
***Squeezed: Why Our Families Can't Afford America* (Ecco), Alissa Quart**

Alissa Quart says her book is about “middle-class” families, but her definition of the middle class is a sweeping one – all families with household incomes from \$42,000 to \$125,000. Drawing on her own experience as well as intimate portraits of a wide variety of individuals and families, Quart “shows how our country has failed its families” and argues that “parenthood itself [is] financially overwhelming, except for the wealthiest.” This includes the families of professors and lawyers as well as those of nurses and other caregivers. It, of course, does not include the families of low-wage workers, as portrayed in Tamara Draut’s *Sleeping Giant: The Untapped Economic and Political Power of America’s New Working Class*. Barbara Ehrenreich endorses *Squeezed* as “a keen, elegantly written, and scorching account of the American family today. Through vivid stories, sharp analysis and wit, Quart anatomizes the middle class’s fall while also offering solutions and hope.”



***Pieces: A Composite Novel* (Bottom Dog Press), Mary Ann McGuigan**

Pushcart nominee Mary Ann McGuigan has crafted a novel out of 16 separate but linked short stories, tracing the path of the Donnegan family over the span of 60 years and through a difficult history marked by alcoholism and abuse. Reviewer Michael Radon writes: “It is a testament to the author that this family feels so real and alive, telling 60 years’ worth of stories that connect the audience to this family in just a few hundred pages. The quality storytelling and palpable tension will keep the reader connected to the book even during breaks, while the brutally honest portrayal of how alcoholism and abuse stay with a family long after those outbursts will almost necessitate said breaks. McGuigan’s novel is both dizzying and unforgettable; certain to make an impact on its readers.”



***Mistaken Identity: Race and Class in the Age of Trump* (Verso), Asad Haider**

Drawing on the legacies of black freedom struggles as well as on autobiographical reflection, theoretical exegesis, and protest reporting, Asad Haider argues that “identity politics is not synonymous with anti-racism, but instead amounts to the neutralization of its movements. It marks a retreat from the crucial passage of identity to solidarity, and from individual recognition to the collective struggle against an oppressive social structure.” Bill Fletcher Jr. says *Mistaken Identity* is a “devastating and constructive critique of what is commonly understood as ‘identity politics,’ while still maintaining the centrality race, racism and racist oppression in capitalism.” Robin D.G. Kelley calls it a “bold, fresh, and *radical* critique of so-called identity politics [that] deserves a wide reading.”

