President’s Report

Friends,
Working-Class Studies as a field began at a late spring conference at Youngstown State University (YSU) in 1995 and with the subsequent formation of the Center for Working-Class Studies in Youngstown. The YSU Center will end December 31. Working-Class Studies will not. I was not there for that spring of ’95, but I can imagine the joy and exhilaration of it, and not just because those who were there tend to talk about it a lot. Their eyes often mist over in recounting specific moments when they met somebody who said what they had been thinking but had had no place, no appropriate context, to ever say it. Or they said something, something that usually required a long (often defensive and sometimes tangled) explanation, that this time resulted in heads nodding and eyes lighting up. I can imagine it because both those things happened to me, multiple times, at the first Youngstown conference I attended four years later. And because I have witnessed it dozens of times since at more recent conferences, watching others pause to catch their breath while they digest a thrill of recognition. Some of those are old folks like me, but many others have stepped into the river of time downstream from where I did, making me wonder at the apparent consistency of American class dynamics over time. These moments reflect more than the satisfaction of finding a community of like-minded people. For some of us, they’re experiences of personal liberation that oddly combine the excitement of discovery with the relieved feeling of coming home. Working-Class Studies will survive yet another plant closing for a variety of reasons, which I highlight below. But, at base, we’ll survive – and thrive -- because a bunch of people, from various class backgrounds, have had enough contact with or experience in the working class to be aware of how overlooked, undervalued, erased, and excluded working-class life and culture are from both elite and mainstream middle-class awareness. And through the experience of each other, Working-Class Studies scholars, artists, journalists, and activists now know we are not alone – and we know how heartening and motivating it can be to know that.
The Working-Class Studies Association is a small, mostly academic association. And we will remain small until there is a stronger, more vibrant working-class movement than we’ve had for the past few decades. But our presence is important. We provide a space where “attention must be paid” to the diverse majority of people who work for a living. And providing that space is part of -- not the most important, but a vital part of -- building such a movement. Though the YSU administration had other options, possibilities that co-directors John Russo and Sherry Linkon suggested when John announced his retirement and Sherry accepted a new position at Georgetown University, the administration chose to act quickly to close the Center. The CWCS’s long-time secretary and our WCSA administrator Patty LaPresta was transferred to new responsibilities at YSU earlier this fall. The loss of the Youngstown center is more than a disheartening emotional blow. Along with Michael Zweig’s Center for Study of Working-Class Life at SUNY Stony Brook, it has been an organizing center for the Working-Class Studies movement, providing one of the two most important institutional bases for our emerging academic field. It is a blow that would have literally cut us in half before the Working-Class Studies Association was formed seven years ago. That is not quite the situation today, as the WCSA has established a strong institutional infrastructure of its own, and many folks have been “pitching in” to help WCSA step into the breach left by the precipitous action of the YSU administration.
Maria Dokes, for example, who coordinated the 2011 WCSA conference in Chicago, has stepped into replace the irreplaceable Patty LaPresta, and with Patty’s help in transitioning, Maria is now performing all the administrative, coordinating, and nudging tasks we need done. Sherry Linkon and Tim Strangleman are working with Sam Butler to create a new, more interactive WCSA web site that will merge content from our existing site with content from the legendary CWCS site in Youngstown. Christie Launius, besides editing our semi-annual newsletter, is helping the Labor & Working-Class Studies Project in Wisconsin organize our 2013 Conference, June 12-15 in Madison. As WCSA president this year, I have been amazed at all the work that gets done by numerous members, both on and off the Steering Committee, without any oversight or reminders. It just gets done. There is a pitching-in-and-doing-your-bit ethic that seems to intentionally avoid recognition, let alone fanfare – what sportswriters often refer to as “a blue-collar attitude.” We’re going to need more of that going forward. The WCSA is more important now than it was just a few months ago. We still have Mike and the SUNY Stony Brook Center, and besides continuing for the immediate future, Michael has developed a strong proposal for an expanded and exciting interdisciplinary program at Stony Brook that is now under consideration by the administration there. The rest of us need to think about how we can gain more institutional support from our exalted workplaces, where folks often claim they are all about truth and justice, innovation and discovery. We need to help them discover the working class. In the short term, however, we are developing a list of small tasks each of our members can do to advance our field. This list will be part of our membership recruitment effort in November and a permanent part of our new web site due in December. So get ready to pitch in. There will be an event honoring the Youngstown center at our June 2013 conference in Madison, tentatively titled “Don’t Mourn, Organize!” In the meantime, I know many of you will join me in doing a little mourning, too.

In solidarity,
Jack Metzgar
WCSA President

Treasurer’s Report

The conference seed money has been sent to the planning committee for the Madison conference. After that, in our Paypal and checking accounts we have a balance of $19,991.27.

A new membership form has been uploaded to the website which reflects increases in membership fees, as well as some new options (a multi-year option, a lifetime member option, and the option to donate additional funds to the WCSA Travel Fund which provides travel stipends to conference attendees in need of them).

Thus far we’ve received a fair amount of travel fund donations, and your participation—if you are able—is welcome.

- Cherie Rankin

Secretary’s Report

As your newly-appointed secretary, I hope to keep members informed of major developments concerning the WCSA throughout the year, so look for my report in upcoming newsletters regarding general announcements as well as the progress of the Communications Committee in updating the website’s content and design.

- Michele Fazio
Graduate Committee Report

The Graduate Committee of the Working Class Studies Association is looking to recruit more graduate students interested in expanding the presence and involvement of junior scholars within the organization. Since I recently graduated (finally!) after 9 long years, Mike Boyle, a Cultural Anthropology PhD student at the City University of New York and enthusiastic presence at the last several annual conferences, has graciously agreed to take over duties as Chair of the Grad Committee for the remainder of the academic year.

Moreover, through e-mail exchanges and weekend phone conversations, Mike, myself, and several other members of the Association have been brainstorming plans for a new scholarly blog to be featured on our homepage, www.wcstudies.org. Though there is still much conceptual work to be done as far as determining the angle the blog will take—what will distinguish this blog, for instance, from the long-standing Working Class Perspectives blog vetted out of Youngstown State?—we have been especially keen on Mike’s vision for the project, which emphasizes the importance of making a space to share works-in-progress from junior scholars and other emerging Working Class Studies voices. As anyone who has attended our summer conference knows, the question of how to sustain the politicized passion and intellectual rigor born of that three-day long experience of communion remains both elusive and essential to the survival of the Association and our inherently cross-disciplinary field. We therefore hope this blog will offer a venue to expand the reach of emerging scholars committed to class-based perspectives and further enrich the work of those who have been formative, frequently-contributing members of our community.

In that spirit, and after working out some of the logistical issues that come with setting up a project like this, we would like to turn the first of hopefully many blog posts into a forum for those interested in becoming regular or guest contributors to introduce themselves and their work in a way that emphasizes the connection between the personal, political, and scholarly. What do you work on—and, perhaps more importantly, what motivated you to do this work? And why does class, in particular, matter in your work? If you’d be interested in contributing to this project, in the form of either an 800-word response to these questions or other support (further ideas for the structure and content of the blog, perhaps, or an offer of technical or logistical know-how), e-mail Mike (mboyle@gc.cuny.edu) or myself (sea10@duke.edu). There is no deadline yet for this first blog post; at this point, we’re mostly interested in assembling a list of potential contributors, and finding ways to reach populations of junior and emerging scholars who would like to help shape the conversations to come. And by all means, message us if you would like to join the Graduate Committee—which, if all goes well, will contribute editorial support to this project as well as fresh ideas for future projects of relevance to the Association and field.

- Sara Appel
Member News

William Boggs served as guest editor for the 10th Anniversary Issue of Florida English.

Martin Comack’s book, Wild Socialism: Workers Councils in Revolutionary Berlin, 1918-21, was just published in September by the University Press of America.

Michele Fazio, a recent recipient of a Woody Guthrie Research Fellowship by BMI, Inc., has been conducting archival research at the Woody Guthrie Archives in Mt. Kisco, NY and the Smithsonian’s Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage in Washington D.C. She presented her work in progress, “Remembering Rosie: Gender and Family Dynamics in Woody Guthrie’s Ballads of Sacco and Vanzetti” at the Woody At 100: Woody's Legacy to Working Men & Women conference held at Pennsylvania State University in September 2012.

Lita Kurth’s article on Co-ops, "Co-ops: a good alternative?" was accepted by Tikkun magazine for their fall issue. She has started contributing to Betsy Leonar-Wright’s Classism.org site, and her satirical piece “Library Success Task Force” was reprinted in CA Community College Journal, Spring 2012. A piece of her creative nonfiction, "Glass Art" was accepted by compositearts.com (Issue No. 9, Sept.) and her short story "Lifetime TV Movie" was a finalist in the Writers@Work contest.


Claudia Ortu has published a new book, Industrial relations and Conservative governments in the eighties. It explores the instances of argumentation and the linguistic strategies used by British conservative governments in the 1980s in their discourse on trade unions. Such discourse is taken as an important example of neoliberal ideology at work in one of the countries where, through Margaret Thatcher’s rule, such ideology has had the strongest impact on the lives of working people. The book has a preface by Alex Callinicos.


Maynard Seider recently completed work on the documentary film “Farewell to Factory Towns?” In blue-collar North Adams, Massachusetts, the world’s largest museum of contemporary art moved into the complex of buildings that formerly housed the city’s huge textile and electronics industry. Aided by a state subsidy and the hopes of many, the museum was sold as an “engine of economic development.” “Farewell to Factory Towns?” critiques the museum’s record and argues that what is needed in North Adams, and throughout the country, is a new “New Deal.” To order, see farewelltofactorytowns.com.
**Eyes on Labor: News Photography and America’s Working Class** (Oxford), Carol Quirke

The first half of the 20th century saw both the rise of labor unions and the proliferation of news photography as a major means of representing the daily stream of national events. By analyzing more than 80 photographs from tabloid photos of the 1919 strike wave to photo-essays in the nationally popular *Life Magazine*, as well as those in *Steelabor* and from a union camera club, Carol Quirke tells the story of how the class struggle played out both on the ground and in the public’s imagination. According to the publisher: “Quirke anchors her interpretations in a lively historical narrative that takes readers from Washington, D.C. hearings, to small towns in Indiana and Pennsylvania, to local union halls and to New York City boardrooms. Illuminating why unions, employers, and news publishers vied to represent workers with the camera’s eye, *Eyes on Labor* explores how Americans understood the complex and contradictory portrait of labor they produced.” Labor historian Eileen Boris calls it a “powerful and original work . . . cultural history at its most potent.”

**Smoke: Poems** (Bottom Dog Press), Jeanne Bryner

Jeanne Bryner’s *No Matter How Many Windows* won the Working-Class Studies Association’s 2011 Tillie Olsen Award for Creative Writing. Bryner is a practicing registered nurse who lives and works in Newton Falls, Ohio. Her latest book of poems wins high praise from working-class studies pioneer Janet Zandy: “With her nurse’s hand and poet’s eye, Jeanne Bryner cuts into hidden human geographies — bodies ‘unhinged’ like weathered barn doors, an open chest’s ‘ribbed canyon,’ and bone cells like ‘drunken thugs in a cave.’ She claims the body as working class without a union to negotiate. This collection is a stunning achievement, a howl against going gently into any good night, a life claim that hits, and hits, and hits back at death. Bryner’s *Smoke*, sweet and acrid, heals wounds we have yet to see.”

**No Place to Be Sick: A Lenny Moss Mystery** (Hard Ball Press), Timothy Sheard

Lenny Moss is not a private detective. He’s a janitor and union delegate at James Madison Hospital, but he’s solved four previous murders at the hospital while battling the hospital bureaucracy and championing the union. As Tim Sheard’s fifth Lenny Moss Mystery opens, Lenny is suffering from post-traumatic stress after a brutal attack that nearly killed him in his last freelance detective effort. He has withdrawn from his friends and family and from his union activism. Feeling beaten and hopeless, he just wants to be left alone to do his job. Two threats now press on Lenny to revive his detective and organizing skills. Too many patients are dying of unexpected cardiac arrests, and the nurses fear there may be a serial killer roaming the hospital, but management instructs them to keep their mouths shut or be fired. And a hedge fund CEO is trying to buy the hospital, turn it private and kick out the union. Can Lenny overcome his PTSD in time to find the killer and help stop the leveraged buy-out?
Casino Women: Courage in Unexpected Places (Cornell), Susan Chandler and Jill B. Jones

Based on interviews with the women of gaming in Nevada – maids, cocktail waitresses, cooks, laundry workers, dealers, but also pit bosses, middle managers and vice presidents – this book tells the story of their work and of how some of them struggled to form the powerful, 60,000-member Culinary Workers Union and some of them didn’t. It portrays “a world whose enormous profitability is dependent on the labor of women assigned stereotypically female occupations – making beds and serving food on the one hand and providing sexual allure on the other.” It is unique in that it focuses on the women interviewed, seeking to understand why some worked overtime to create their union while others remained silent or actively promoted the status quo. Annelise Orleck, author of the award-winning Storming Caesar’s Palace, praises the result: “The people in this book do seem to have a remarkable degree of self-awareness, a keen ability to analyze their situations in larger context, recognition of the joys and traps in the work they do – jobs that are sometimes exciting and sometimes relatively well paid, but often physically battering and soul-sapping. This book contains both haunting and inspiring characterizations that humanize by digging beneath the glossy, clamorous, smoky surface of commercial gambling establishments to the complex, often tragic effects of that environment on people’s lives.”

The Pattern Maker’s Daughter: Poems (Bottom Dog Press), Sandee Gertz Umbach

This collection of poems is firmly rooted in a place, Johnstown, Pennsylvania, that has been shaped by mountains, floods, and steel mills, and by a larger-than-average set of disabilities, in this case epilepsy. It is also rooted in an occupation. A pattern maker is a sort of carpenter who makes forms (usually in wood) that then hold sand into which molten steel is poured and molded. Sandee Gertz Umbach’s father was a pattern maker for U.S. Steel, and these poems “explore both her personal history and the historical record of this working-class city.” Jim Daniels praises it as “a remarkable debut collection full of honesty, wisdom, and heart.” He says: “She brings this community to life from an insider’s perspective . . . . In these finely wrought poems, danger and trauma exist in the landscape, in the homes, and in the very bodies of her characters. These are simply the stories we tell each other to stay alive.”


During the period covered by this book, 1878 to 1929, working-class parents often used orphanages to temporarily care for their children while they desperately tried to deal with economic and other family crises. The book compares how two orphanages in Pittsburgh operated, the all-white United Presbyterian Orphan’s Home and the all-black Home for Colored Children, focusing on the agency of parents as they both conflicted and cooperated with orphanage managers and staff as well as progressive reformers and the broader community. According to the publisher: “Raising new questions about the role of child care in constructing and perpetuating social inequality in the United States, Child Care in Black and White provides insight into the lives of working-class families struggling to balance wage labor and parenting responsibilities in a modernizing industrial economy.” The book has won prizes from the Labor and Working-Class History Association, the Women’s History section of the Organization of American Historians, and the National Academy of Social Insurance.
The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries (Duke U. Press), Kathi Weeks

In a get-a-job, any-job society, Kathi Weeks challenges the very notion of work’s centrality to human life and especially the way “we have accepted waged work as the primary mechanism for income distribution, as an ethical obligation, and as a means of defining ourselves and others as social and political subjects.” Weeks values progressive political movements’ fights for equal pay, better working conditions, and the recognition of unpaid work as a valued form of labor, but she criticizes them for assuming that work is “a naturalized or inevitable activity.” She articulates an “antiwork politics” that would challenge the sacredness of “the work ethic,” and she finds resources for such “postwork imaginaries” in European autonomous Marxists and their “refusal of work” and in 1970s American feminism’s critique of the gendered labor of social reproduction. Nick Coles has highlighted Weeks’ provocative analysis, saying: “Weeks is also interested in rehabilitating the practical usefulness of utopian thinking. She discusses proposals that offer alternatives to a life dominated by work, such as the 30-hour work week and the provision of a guaranteed annual income to all. These proposals are utopian in that they envision a profound transformation of the work society in the direction of greater equality and freedom. But they are not therefore impractical.”

Lunch Bucket Paradise: A True-Life Novel (Heyday), Fred Setterberg

Fred Setterberg grew up in Jefferson Manor, a blue-collar suburb of Oakland, in the 1950s and ’60s during a period of “innocence and boom” and California dreaming. Lunch Bucket Paradise is his “true-life novel” of that time and place and the people who populated it. Mark Greenside calls it “a growing-up story, a family story, and an American story, part banishment from Eden, part escape.” According to the publisher: “Setterberg reveals the quirks of his family and neighbors with nuance and care. Each chapter propels him toward adulthood while poignantly exploring class, masculinity, and modern life amidst the intoxicating abundance of a new California. Fred's coming-of-age casts a bittersweet pall on today's world in light of the good life far out of reach for working-class families today. Reading his words, we realize the true meaning of the phrase ‘lunch bucket paradise’: it symbolizes an era of prosperity for blue-collar Americans that may never come again.”


This collection of essays was generated at an informal meeting of labor and working-class historians, and as the title indicates, the charge of each of the contributors was to use their understanding of the past to shed light on the present and future of the working class. There is a special focus on the future of unions and the labor movement, but the various authors are not limited to decrying the current situation and the terrible state of labor law, and the policy and politics that have shaped it. In two dozen essays, the authors find examples from the recent past of ways that worker organizations, broadly construed, are affecting the present and developing possibilities for the future. As Alice Kessler-Harris says in the Forward, this collection “provides a sense of possibility, even optimism, that there might be constructive ways of restoring power and influence to working people everywhere.”
Chicago in the Age of Capital: Class, Politics, and Democracy during the Civil War and Reconstruction (U. of Illinois), John B. Jentz and Richard Schneirov

This interpretive history takes Chicago as a key location for understanding the mid-19th century transition from mercantile to industrial capitalism in the U.S., as it traces the rise of a permanent wage-worker class and the formation of an industrial upper class from the 1850s through the 1870s. Based on this crucial economic transformation, which turned Chicago from a small trading town prior to the Civil War to a bustling industrial metropolis, Jentz and Schneirov trace the development of the new social movements that responded to this upheaval – labor unions, a variety of forms of socialism, urban populism, Protestant revivalism, women’s activism, and even businessmen’s municipal reform movement. In doing so, they show how with the emergence of wage work as the predominant form of earning a living came a new democratic politics as workers sought to become agents of their own destiny and not just victims of increasingly brutal circumstances. The publisher says: “Setting local detail against a national canvas of partisan ideology and the seismic structural shifts of Reconstruction, Chicago in the Age of Capital vividly depicts the upheavals integral to building capitalism.”

The Betrayal of the American Dream (Public Affairs), Donald Barlett & James Steele

Barlett and Steele are probably the most admired investigative reporters in America, based on more than 40 years of work at the Philadelphia Inquirer, Time Magazine, and now Vanity Fair and on a series of books beginning with America: What Went Wrong in 1992. Here’s how The Columbia Journalism Review describes their latest effort: “Not merely number-crunching chroniclers of middle-class decline, they are invested in the fate of the people who exemplify it. Barlett and Steele’s preeminent talent is their knack for combining the micro and the macro. They look systemically at issues and policies, from the US tax code to healthcare. . . . . But they also use the paper trail to track down the system’s apparent victims…the laid-off, the discarded, the pensionless, and the uninsured.” The publisher describes it as “the story of how the American middle class has been systematically impoverished and its prospects thwarted in favor of a new ruling elite.”

Broken Collar: A Novel (Bottom Dog Press), Ron Mitchell

This first novel draws on Ron Mitchell’s experience of working in an Ohio Valley steel mill when he was young, his decades as a supervisor of adult probation officers in Arizona, and his service as a Eucharist minister for the Catholic Church. The story is of a young priest returning to serve a parish in the steel town where he grew up, and struggling with issues of faith and celibacy. Lori DeBoer says: “In Ron Mitchell’s capable hands, the story of a priest’s return to the steel mill village and people of his youth takes on aching, redemptive qualities. In turns gritty and exuberant, Broken Collar draws us into the turmoil of one man’s longing for both the heavens and the heart." Jeff Vande Zande says the novel “weaves an authentic working-class world of sinners and saints. From the first paragraph, one feels pulled in, swept up, as though called to the text like a priest to the collar."
Trampling Out the Vintage: Cesar Chavez and the Two Souls of the United Farm Workers (Verso), Frank Bardacke

Frank Bardacke was a student radical and anti-war activist at the University of California at Berkeley in the 1960s, but in 1970 he became a farm worker in the Salinas Valley, working in the fields for six seasons and engaging in the United Farm Workers’ epic struggle to win a better life through collective bargaining. Bardacke subsequently spent 25 years teaching at Watsonville Adult School just north of Salinas. Trampling Out the Vintage is his comprehensive history of the Farm Workers union and its leader Cesar Chavez. Santa Cruz history professor Dana Frank calls it a “long-awaited masterpiece . . . the kind of book that comes along only once in a generation. Not only is the research spectacular and his analysis of the United Farm Workers as a social movement nuanced and compelling, but he finally places rank-and-file farmworkers at the center of the story as savvy and opinionated activists. Best of all, he’s a superb writer who’s constructed a gripping tale.”

Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt (Nation Books), Chris Hedges & Joe Sacco

Chris Hedges is a journalist, and Joe Sacco is a cartoonist/illustrator. Together they travelled the country collecting the stories of people who live “in places where the marketplace rules without constraints, where human beings and the natural world are used and then discarded to maximize profit.” In Pine Ridge, South Dakota; Camden, New Jersey; Welch, West Virginia, and Immokalee, Florida, they convey lives of heart-breaking loss, inspiring resilience, and determined struggle. They end their journey at “Liberty Square” with Occupy Wall Street, “where a new generation revolts against a corporate state that has handed to the young an economic, political, cultural and environmental catastrophe.” One reviewer says of the result: “Eloquently written and embellished by spare, desolate drawings from Joe Sacco, Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt is accessible and deeply uncomfortable.”

The Wire: Race, Class, and Genre (U. of Michigan), edited by Liam Kennedy & Stephen Shapiro

This collection of essays on the five seasons of The Wire television series both celebrates and analyzes what has been called the best dramatic series ever on television. Set in Baltimore in what looks like a standard police procedural, the series probes relationships of race and class like few others. Developing a wide variety of characters who come and go across the five seasons, the show systematically explores the corruption of police departments, city hall, the waterfront, schools, and newspapers – all against the background of a deindustrializing city. The drama is centered on rank-and-file workers (in both legal and illegal trades) searching for good work within their jobs in hopes of maintaining a hard-won personal integrity. Some do, some don’t, and some die trying. The collection includes an essay on “Contested Memories: Representing Work in The Wire” by Sherry Linkon, Alexander Russo and John Russo.
**Envy Up, Scorn Down: How Status Divides Us** (Russell Sage Foundation), Susan Fiske

Social psychologist Susan Fiske holds that “we are all wired for comparison” and that “all groups rank their members, and all societies rank the various groups within them.” Despite our formal commitment to equal opportunity, and possibly because of it, “social class and other differences in status reverberate throughout American life, and prejudice based on another’s perceived status persists among individuals and groups.” *Envy Up, Scorn Down* “examines the psychological underpinnings of interpersonal and intergroup comparisons, exploring why we compare ourselves to those both above and below us and analyzing the social consequences of such comparisons in day-to-day life.” According to the publisher, Fiske makes a distinction between status comparisons and group prejudice, showing that “understanding envy and scorn” can mitigate their effects and prove “invaluable in our lives, our relationships, and our society.”

**Hidden America: From Coal Miners to Cowboys, an Extraordinary Exploration of the Unseen People Who Make This Country Work** (Putnam), Jeanne Marie Laskas

An oil rig in Alaska, a coal mine in Ohio, a migrant labor camp in Maine, the air traffic control tower at LaGuardia Airport, the Cincinnati Bengals stadium, the cab of a long-haul truck in Iowa, and a California landfill. These are just some of the workplaces Jeanne Marie Laskas’ went to interview workers of many different varieties. According to Rebecca Skloot, author of *The Life of Henrietta Lacks*: “With beauty, wit, curiosity, and grace, [Laskas] doesn’t just interview the people who dig our coal and extract our oil, she goes deep into the mines and tundra with them. She goes nationwide to find the hidden soul of America, the people we depend on most but know the least. She tells the story of the United States from deep inside the machinery that makes it work.”

**The State of Working America, 12th Edition** (Cornell), Lawrence Mishel, Josh Bivens, Elise Gould, Heidi Shierholz

Every couple of years for the past two decades the Economic Policy Institute has produced what is now the standard encyclopedia of information on family incomes, wages and benefits, the productivity/wage gap, employment, health and wealth, poverty, and the distribution of income and wealth. It is mostly a story of steady decline in “the state of working America,” now made even more painful and threatening by the Great Recession. The 12th edition will not be available as a book until later this year, but you can download the 49-page “Overview” and other chapters and charts from the EPI’s web site.
Archie Green (1917-2009) is a hero indeed to folklorists committed to populist and pluralist cultural expressions, progressive politics, collaborations between scholars and workers, and the presentation of research in **publicly accessible** modes of representation (books, exhibits, media productions, festivals). Born in Winnipeg to left wing Ukrainian Jewish immigrants, he grew up in a culturally diverse working class neighborhood in East Los Angeles, attended UCLA and Berkeley, then veered from conventional upward mobility to seek blue collar Depression-era work with the Civilian Conservation Corps before an extended stint as a journeyman shipwright, union activist, and carpenter in the San Francisco Bay area.

Compelled by anarcho-syndicalism and New Deal pragmatism, antagonistic towards the top down dictates of both business unions and the Communist Party, Green developed a lifelong appreciation of grass roots working class cultural expressions and of their often complicated, ideologically impure, regionally rooted, ethnically varied, and individually distinctive creators. In the 1960s, through a series of serendipitous events, his particular passion for American folk music, workers’ songs, and what he would eventually dub “laborlore” led him to the academy and public service. He taught labor history and folklore at the Universities of Illinois and Texas, worked at the AFL-CIO’s Labor Studies Center, initiated the Smithsonian Institution’s inclusion of workers in the annual Festival of American Folklife, almost single-handedly won bi-partisan federal support for the establishment of the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress, founded the Fund for Labor History and Culture, fostered a series of “Laborlore” gatherings commingling academicians with trade unionists, produced landmark documentary recordings of American folk music, and authored a succession of influential essays and books, many of which were produced during the final decades of his long life. The most notable include: *Only a Miner: Studies in Recorded Coal-Mining Songs* (1972); *Wobblies, Pile Butts, and Other Heroes* (1993); *Calf’s Head & Union Tale* (1996); *Tin Men* (2002); and *The Big Red Songbook*, co-edited with David Roediger, Franklin Rosemont, and Salvatore Salerno (2007).

As early as 1965, as Sean Burns notes, Green had begun “to integrate his specific life experiences and... many disciplines of study, including ballad scholarship, labor history, and a nascent kind of media-based cultural studies” in an era when “such disciplines had been isolated from one another” (70). The subtitle of Burns’ book likewise aptly integrates the blue collar *cri de coeur* of John Lennon’s song, “Working Class Hero,” with an allusion to E.P. Thompson’s *The Making of the English Working Class* and its path-breaking emphasis on “robust and rowdy” vernacular culture pervading workers’ lives (1963:59). Burns’ insightful, affectionate, beautifully researched book deftly combines biography with contingent oral and intellectual histories of the labor movement, American folksong and its revival, and the fields of folklore and working class studies. Augmented by a gallery of photographs from every phase of Green’s ninety-two years, the book concludes with an edited transcription of an interview folklorist Nick Spitzer conducted with Green just eight days before he died on March 22, 2009. For those who are unfamiliar with Archie Green, or those who seek a deeper understanding of the underpinnings and implications of his life and work, Sean Burns’ fine book is essential reading.

*By Nick Coles, University of Pittsburgh*

Many of us in Working Class Studies know Larry Smith best as the founder and director of Bottom Dog Press. Based in Huron, Ohio, Bottom Dog has for more than twenty-five years been publishing poetry, fiction and nonfiction that evokes life in Appalachia and the Midwest. The Press, according to its mission statement, “supports the history and development of Working Class Literature, and we work to provide outlets for that writing and information on that vital art.” Along with John Crawford’s West End Press, Bottom Dog has been an invaluable resource for our work.

Seeing Larry behind the book tables at conferences, we may not also know what a fine and prolific writer he is in his own right. His work, in fact, exemplifies another of the values articulated in the mission statement: “We believe in a sense of place and person, in writing that reveals through its directness an essential human story.” Smith is the author of half a dozen books of poetry, five of fiction, along with the memoir *Milldust and Roses*, and biographies of the “rebel poets,” Kenneth Patchen and Lawrence Ferlinghetti. I have just read, with great interest and pleasure, Smith’s two most recent novels, *The Long River Home* (2009) and *The Free Farm* (2011), and I would like to recommend them to colleagues in WCSA.

The long river of the title is the Ohio, and the river itself and the towns along its banks are as much a living presence as the four generations of the McCall family whose stories are told in the first of these linked novels. Smith has a insider’s feel for the industrial landscape, a vision of the ways town and country — woods, mills, streets and rivers — interpenetrate and imprint themselves on those who grow up among them. Although work itself — farming, moonshining, millwork, housework, schoolwork — is a central theme, it is clear that what matters most to the McCalls is their deep and complicated relationships to each other and to the places they have tried to make home: especially McArthur in the hills of southern Ohio, and Mingo in the Ohio river valley near Steubenville.

Like other working-class novelists — Thomas Bell in *Out of This Furnace*, for instance, or Raymond Williams in *Border Country* — Smith is writing a form of collective fiction, the stories of a people. In *The Long River Home* there is no single protagonist. Instead, there’s an extended family with its key figures and strong personalities, each of whom is given voice. Successive chapters take up different points of view on the events of their lives, narrated sometimes in conversation or in letters. To help us keep track, the McCall genealogy is illustrated by a detailed family tree.

*The Free Farm* is more focused both in its time period — the late 1960s and early 1970s — and its central character, Lee McCall, ten years old at the end of *The Long River Home*. It follows Lee’s coming of age through school-days, family scandals, romance with his childhood sweetheart, (some) college, and the founding of the communal Free Farm. These events are narrated from his first-person perspective, which includes, it should be said, a distinctly masculine gaze, particularly regarding the prospects of “free love.” Lee’s story is set initially in the unconscious collective of his family, and later in the consciously designed collective of the commune, with its own cast of characters. Together they develop a practical utopianism, as they explore group decision-making and Eastern spirituality while negotiating the wackiness introduced by drugs, nudity, and transient living.
Smith writes as a modern-day American Romantic — Emerson and Thoreau, as well The Whole Earth Catalogue, are sources for the commune — but this does not make the work sentimental. He is clear-eyed about the pain of hunger and family meanness, the toll of alcoholism, the human costs of industrial labor; but he sees the good in people and arranges their stories so that it can shine, often in unexpected places. In both novels he is evoking the meanings of community and the effective possibilities of different forms of love.

If you’re a bit jaded by the cynicism and self-absorption of much postmodern American fiction, you may appreciate these big-hearted novels. The writing is crisp and clear, the characters real and engaging, and it’s good to be reminded that for all the bad stuff that can happen along a river, things have a way of working out. As James Wright puts in his poem “Beautiful Ohio,” as he sits above the sewer main emptying into the river: “I know what we call it / most of the time. / But I have my own song for it, / and sometimes, even today, / I call it beauty.”

(You can listen to Smith’s prose, enhanced by beautiful photographs, in a YouTube video in which Larry and his wife Ann read an excerpt from The Free Farm.)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vBwBkuF5bA0

Carol Tarlen, Every Day is An Act of Resistance (Mongrel Empire Press)

Sandee Gertz Umbach, author of The Pattern Maker’s Daughter: Poems

With poverty rates today climbing to some of their highest levels since 1965, the faces of the under-employed, out of work, and homeless are growing and changing. It seems all the more important to keep Every Day is An Act of Resistance, a collection of poetry by the late Carol Tarlen, next to the bedside.

Known as the “Rebel Poet of California,” Tarlen wasn’t afraid to put her own face on poverty. She grew up poor, earned a degree as an adult, wrote poetry and organized readings, yet was never an academic, instead choosing to labor as a secretary at UC San Francisco Medical Center, becoming a champion of union workers and welfare rights until her death in 2004. Too busy politically to be ambitious about placing poetry (this collection, with an introduction by Jack Hirschman and a forward by Julia Stein, is Tarlen’s sole collection), Tarlen’s work nonetheless made its way into numerous literary journals and several anthologies, including Calling Home: Writings of Working Class Women, (Rutgers University Press); For a Living: The Poetry of Work (University of Illinois Press) and American Working-Class Literature (Oxford UP).

Tarlen knew suffering. Her father was an out of work truck driver with narcolepsy. She witnessed the heart-wrenching illness of her brother from dysentery due to a lack of quality medical care. In her long poem which opens the book, “White Trash: An Autobiography,” she writes of trailer parks and living amidst the grit: “We didn’t have lawns, instead we shared the gravel, /the wash tubs, the showers, the toilets…”

In Tarlen’s lush narratives, the reader is invited to linger a while in the dust and danger of the streets. In “White Trash,” Tarlen tells of the endless walking she did with friends, escaping into enclaves with names like “Mission San Jose,” where the houses had dens and lawns and two and one half baths.
The reality of her own neighborhood was one of foreclosure and impermanence. Here she describes how a family friend lived after their house was taken: “Louie, the older brother, parked his car by the Safeway and lived in it, painted a picture of a Mohawk Indian on the passenger door...Everyone called him Chief.”

Tarlen’s book also speaks to separation and class divides. In the last stanza of “White Trash (Part IV: The Projects, 1960)” the speaker (by this time exposed to college prep classes and literary reading) has been forced to leave her best friend in subsidized housing. The passage seems a palpable hearkening to Carolyn Forche’s poem “As Children Together:”

“Louie visited...He hadn’t bathed in weeks. He said Diane was pregnant. Her boyfriend stole a car and was in jail. Write her, he said. I didn’t. I didn’t know what to say. Becky married Bobby Gomez. I went to junior college.”

Tarlen prized herself on being a “working class intellectual” and never forgot her roots. Poems with titles like “The Receptionist Sits at Her Desk and Hums ‘Solidarity Forever,’” and “While Watching the Clock at Work, I Contemplate the End of Entropy” make Tarlen the person you'd want to vote for as your union representative.

Reading Every Day is an Act of Resistance is a bit like sitting down in a dimly lit bar with an interesting stranger who tells you her life story over shots and beer. By the end of the night, you’ve made a life-long friend. Just don’t forget to tip the waitress.
Call for 2015 Annual Award Submissions

Working-Class Studies Association
Call for Award Nominations

The Working-Class Studies Association (WCSA) invites nominations (including self-nominations) for awards covering the year of 2012. Award categories are:

- The Tillie Olsen Award for Creative Writing: Published books of poetry, fiction, creative non-fiction, and other genres
- Two C.L.R. James Awards, one each in the following categories:
  1. Published books for academic or general audiences
  2. Published articles or essays for academic or general audiences
- Studs Terkel Award for Media and Journalism: Single published articles or series, broadcast media, multimedia, and film
- The Constance Coiner Award for Best Dissertation: Completed dissertations.

In all categories, we invite nominations of excellent work that provides insightful and engaging representations of working-class life and culture; addresses issues related to the working class; and highlights the voices, experiences, and perspectives of working-class people.

To be eligible, works must have been published (in the case of books or articles) or completed (in the case of films and dissertations) between January 1, 2012 and December 31, 2012.

To nominate a work for consideration, please send three copies (submit books and dissertations on paper, other materials may be submitted on paper or in electronic form) with a cover letter, identifying the category in which you are nominating the work and a brief explanation of why you think the work deserves recognition. Nominations are due by January 15, 2013. Submit nominations to:

Dr. Nicholas Coles
Department of English
526 Cathedral of Learning
University of Pittsburgh
Pittsburgh, PA 15260

Winners will be announced at the WCSA conference in Madison, Wisconsin, in June 2013. Winners will receive free conference registration and a plaque.

For more information, contact Nick Coles, WCSA Past-President, at coles@pitt.edu.
CALL FOR PARTICIPATION

THE LABOR & WORKING-CLASS STUDIES PROJECT

Hosts the 2013 conference of the

June 12-15
Madison College - Downtown Campus
Madison, Wisconsin
Fighting Forward - A Labor & Working-Class Summit
www.fightingforward.org

Join us at the epicenter of the “Wisconsin Uprising” for a gathering of working people, community and labor activists, students and educators focused on building a revitalized movement in support of labor and the working class. Since the start of the Uprising, we have witnessed an historic response by working people to the decades-long assault on our rights and livelihoods. Now is the time to reflect, strategize, and build connections, as we not only continue to fight back against this assault but also move forward in building a better future for labor and working class people. It is time for Fighting Forward!

The Summit will provide an opportunity to celebrate, educate, strategize, share experiences and best practices, and build connections and relationships. The program will incorporate a broad array of activities, including workshops, panels, training sessions, roundtables, cultural exhibitions and performances, strategy sessions, tabling and exhibits, and social activities aimed at building and strengthening connections among participants.

The Program Committee welcomes proposals on topics addressing the wide range of social, economic, political, and organizational challenges confronting working-class people. Presenters are encouraged to use styles of presentation that promote the participation of attendees, emphasize problem-solving, and view both problems and solutions within a broader social, economic and political context.

Against this background, we encourage the wide diversity of topics, themes, presentations, and panels that have characterized previous Working-Class Studies conferences. Please try to place your proposal within one of the categories below, as this will help us organize individual
Guidelines for Proposals
Sessions will be 75 minutes, and we ask participants to adopt presentation styles fostering participation and discussion on the part of attendees. Proposals may take one of the following forms:

- Panel, roundtable, training session, workshop, featuring multiple presenters proposing jointly.
- Individual presentation, paper, or talk.
- Performance, reading, display, or screening of creative work.

Proposals should include:
- Proposed title and a brief (150-word) description.
- Suggested topic category (see list above).
- Brief biographical statement and contact information, including mailing and e-mail addresses.
- Technology needs, if any.

We will also accept proposals for caucuses for groups and organizations that would like to take advantage of the opportunity that the summit offers for convening their members.

Proposals for presentations, papers, and sessions are welcome until January 14, 2013. Notification of acceptance will be made by March 1. Submit proposals electronically to Fightingforward2013@gmail.com. Inquiries and special requests should be directed to Don Taylor at the same e-mail address. Please understand that due to limited space, we are not able to accommodate all proposals.

The conference web site is at http://www.fightingforward.org with basic information on registration, travel, lodging, and the program as it develops. The site will progressively include more information as the conference nears, including how to apply for low-income travel grants and reduced registration fees.

The Labor & Working Class Studies Project (LWCSP) is a collaborative campus-labor-community initiative to connect the campus and the community in dialogue and action on issues related to labor and working class people in the state of Wisconsin. The LWCSP is a member of the Working Class Studies Association.

The Working Class Studies Association (WCSA) aims to develop and promote multiple forms of scholarship, teaching, and activism related to working class life and cultures.