President’s Report

Greetings,

Our June 2013 conference in Madison, “Fighting Forward,” was co-chaired by the Labor and Working Class Studies Project, who were active in the February 2011 occupation of the Wisconsin Capital building. This massive direct action followed Governor Scott Walker’s decimation of collective bargaining rights for public teachers in Wisconsin. As we saw in the WCSA’s opening plenary in Chicago that same year, the yearning and frustration that erupted in Madison has wound its way into a host of groups organizing throughout Wisconsin against corporate greed. Public protest has continued at and around the Capital building in Madison, despite a recall vote that left Walker in power. LWCSP invited the Wisconsin Solidarity Singalong that led an inspired concert/sing-along at the conference. They have sung on the steps of the Capitol every workday at noontime since the occupation. The Labor and Working Class Studies Project also held an awards ceremony for the local people most involved in this on-going effort. I felt privileged just to be there, celebrating their work; remembering the inspiration they gave me back then, and newly impressed with their ongoing organizing efforts (ie: their conference plenary on cooperatives and collectives). As WCSA member Lita Kurth pointed out in a Tikkun blog, this is a group that sprang out of defeat as much as victory, and has persevered now for two and a half years. Tenacity is a requirement for social change, and we are grateful to the LWCSP for their example.

What does the idea of fighting forward mean to working class studies? In essence, this was the question discussed in both in the large-group evaluation at the end of the conference and in written conference evaluations. With some of our initial organizers on the verge of retirement, we face what conference-goers called the “graying of working class studies.” A special session was also convened at this conference by some of our most committed younger WCSA members concerning the future of working class studies. Fortunately for all of us, several of them are on our Steering Committee and are already dragging working class studies into the twenty-first century with the creation of an online archive of working class studies. But a few people can only do so much. We need a new generation of working class studies scholars and activists.

New Working Class Studies will reach its 20-year mark in 2015, when our conference will be at Georgetown University, organized,--in part--by Sherry Linkon and John Russo, former directors of Youngstown State University’s Center for Working Class Studies. These two threw the first working class studies conference in 1995 at YSU. The conference was entitled: Working Class Studies/Working Class Lives, I saw it in The Nation magazine and it changed the next twenty years of my life. Being a full-time community and counseling psychologist, and only a part-time college instructor, I had not been to an academic conference outside my own university for over a decade. But this emerging movement drew me like a bee to honey.

In 1995, waiting for the puddle-jumper from Pittsburg to Youngtown, a friendly woman asked me if I was on my way to the conference (because I was reading The Nation). We then sat together on the plane and chatted. To my surprise, she appeared on stage that night as the keynote speaker. She read a wonderful piece called, “Traveling Working Class” that brought tears to my eyes. Yes, the friendly stranger was Janet Zandy. At the end of the conference I gave her my paper, “The Silent Psychology” on the off chance she might actually read it. Within a week or two she sent me a letter praising the piece, and later helped publish it in Women’s Studies Quarterly. In this world, she was a star; this brand new world where no one had ever heard of me. But she was, as were Sherry and John, kind and generous, welcoming me into this exciting new field that echoed my own intellectual passion: making the real lives, work, and cultures of working class people visible to the rest of society.
Now, 18 years and one full-length working class studies text later, here I am. As president, my job is outreach. Those early conferences I attended were a model of what working class studies can be: a multi- and inter-disciplinary field that welcomes folks of all academic disciplines and others that care about working class lives. I was surprised, in those early conferences, to see how labor studies folks, English professors, feminists and women’s studies scholars, GLBT academics, African-American scholars and activists, actors and play writers, visual artists, writers of fiction, musicians, and almost everyone else, was welcomed.

What is the future of working class studies? In evaluations of our last conference, people bemoaned the lack of scholars of color, of young folks, how too-separate and un-integrated the different sessions seemed, of the need for more consciousness about gender dynamics (even in sessions that were mostly women, a young Canadian presenter reported, the majority of “air time” was taken up by male voices). The future of working class studies needs all of these people. We have built it, but will they come? Only, I suspect, if we can also let a new generation have it—if we can let younger scholars and activists refine and design working class studies in their own 21st century ways.

A few years back we had an interesting plenary on the reasons for the lack of mass labor organizing. In a stuffed-to-capacity panel after the plenary, many of the same labor scholars and activists continued the discussion of what is to be done, and especially the paralyzing effect of racism on organizing. When the session closed, the room cleared out almost entirely. That left three young women at the table up front and a tiny handful of listeners for the next session on organizing. Two panelists proceeded to tell stories of their groups’ organizing, respectively, thousands and tens of thousands of people in their home states (Maine and Vermont). The third young woman, who chaired and had organized the session, was a labor organizer from Oregon who had been organizing crowds of hundreds for some time.

As the excellent presentations recounted many tales of successful mass organizing—including unemployed union guys; complete with colorful multi-ethnic photos—a fair number of the same labor guys that previously populated the room and plenary opened the door to check out the panel. It was striking that in every case—seven to nine men—they popped their heads into the room, saw the three young women at the table up front quietly turned on their heels and exited.

A new generation of working class studies and activists will only lead us forward if we listen to them.

I want to invite young people to tell their knowledge and share their activism. I also want to invite more GLBT people, people of color, independent scholars, women's studies scholars, and activists of all stripes to our 2014 conference at SUNY Stony Brook. These are not our only important constituencies, but they are in the minority. Other groups are already well-represented (such as labor studies folks, full-time academics, and 50 to 70 year-olds). I am especially sorry to see that GLBT representation has fallen quite a bit since those early days; especially with the premature death of outspoken GLBT and working class activist Felice Yeskel. This is regrettable not only for its own sake but because gay rights have become the defining civil rights issue for young people in the age of Occupy.

I am the first independent scholar to be president of the WCSA. I also want to acknowledge the independent scholars in our midst and to thank them for their continued commitment to working class studies. To do the work of working class studies, they heave the rest of their lives onto the back burner. While academic workers often get “credit” in their jobs for their working class studies work and their efforts and achievements may move them ahead in their academic profession (but not always!), for independent scholars the opposite is usually the case. Our dedication to working class studies takes us away from our usual work, and lives, usually to the dismay of the people in those jobs and lives. But a base in the world of non-
academic work informs both the content of our working class studies as well as the way we write about it. Independent scholars, you know who you are. What you may not know is how important your real-world perspective is to working class studies, and how often your sessions are praised in evaluations.

What makes these people special is similar to what distinguishes most of the academic work in working class studies from traditional academic work: the brave notion that we can strive to be public intellectuals that speak in plain language about complicated things. We come together to study working class life in its own context and to promote the interests of working class people. We talk across academic disciplines to promote insightful and intelligent public conversation on social change for all working people. If we continue to develop—and spread—this conversation, we can change our society for the better.

I believe our movement needs to grow beyond the two to three hundred participants that seem to be our standard. We need more public intellectuals and activists, and particularly the motivated, civic-minded, often spontaneously-organized young people who have emerged as serious social change’s best hope in the 21st century. Let us steer a course back toward the diversity our early organizers worked so hard to promote.

I can’t do outreach alone. I need the help of each and every one of you. Please help now by inviting people you know to consider submitting proposals for presentations at our next conference, or to simply attend our next conference. Thank you for the opportunity and privilege of the WCSA presidency. And please, Be in touch!

Warm regards,
Barbara Jensen
bjensen@umn.edu

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Treasurer’s Report

The final expenses for the Fighting Forward conference in Madison have been reconciled. The conference made enough money that the WCSA’s seed money was returned. We did pay out $810 for conference registrations and banquet tickets for WCSA Award winners. We have closed out the old Paypal account and moved all the funds to our bank account; a new Paypal account has been opened and attached to the new WCSA website—all is up and running with no glitches.

The organization currently has a balance of $25,309.05.

Our membership drive will be coming up soon and you should be receiving reminders from our secretary, Maria Dokes. You still have the option to pay through Paypal at the WCSA website, or to mail a check to me, the treasurer.

On a final note, there have been some recent problems with New Labor Forum subscriptions. They have changed publishers, and it’s been brought to my attention that members may have received a separate subscription notice from Sage Publications at a different price than we have agreed to; it also seems that some subscriptions are not being filled. If you are experiencing problems with your NLF subscription, please let me know by email at wiblet68@gmail.com

~ Cherie Rankin
Secretary’s Report

Elections were held in June and we welcomed two new steering committee members. Past presidents and members of the steering committee are in the process of creating an archive of past elections, awards, and conference-related materials for the WCSA—information will be made available on the organization’s website. This effort is a large undertaking, but a necessary one to reflect the growth and tenure of the organization as well as to promote the field and attract new members.

Member News

Paola Corso, this year’s winner of the WCSA’s Tillie Olsen Award for Creative Writing, is soliciting submissions of poems on behalf of the Thomas Merton Center for Peace and Social Justice. The Thomas Merton Center for Peace and Social Justice in Pittsburgh publishes two original, unpublished poems from local and national writers in each issue of New People. TMC works to build a consciousness of values and to raise the moral questions involved in the issues of war, poverty, racism, classism, economic justice, human rights, and environmental justice. The Thomas Merton Center was named after Thomas Merton, a trappist monk, (January 31, 1915 – December 10, 1968) who was a 20th century Anglo-American Catholic writer and mystic poet, social activist, and student of comparative religion intensely involved with peace and justice issues. Here’s the link to TMC: http://thomasmertoncenter.org/

Current Issue:
http://thomasmertoncenter.org/newpeople/
(See poems on pp. 14 and 19)

Online submission link:
http://thomasmertoncenter.org/submit-poetry/
When submitting, also copy Paola at paola_corso@hotmail.com and mention the WCSA.

Tim Fowler’s book, From Crisis to Austerity: Neoliberalism, Organized Labour, and the Canadian State has been published by Red Quill Books. More information can be found at: http://redquillbooks.com/From_Crisis_to_Austerity.html

Lita Kurth attended last June’s WCSA conference in Madison and had the chance to talk with other writers in attendance about publishing opportunities for working class poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, and plays. If you would like to be a part of this conversation, have information to share, or would like to have information shared with you, please contact Lita directly. (De Anza College, San Jose area) lakurth@yahoo.com

Jeanetta Calhoun Mish edited a special section of the November/December issue of World Literature Today that showcases World-wide Working-Class Literatures. Both the print edition and the web exclusives will feature working-class writing. Several WCSA members, including Sarah Attfield, Jim Daniels, and Jeanne Bryner, contributed either essays or creative works. http://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/


The book may be purchased at Steve' website, www.ShoeleatherHistoryProject.com
**Book Notes**

*Murder of a Post Office Manager* (Hard Ball Press), Paul Felton

In a one-page preface to this mystery novel ending in a courtroom drama, author Paul Felton explains that part of his motivation in writing it was to give readers a contextual understanding of where the expression “going postal” comes from. Felton knows because he was a postal worker and a union steward at a post office that experienced two workplace shootings in the 1990s. James Newton is the fictional post office manager who gets murdered, the kind of sadistic supervisor whose joy in life was not in delivering the mail but in making “his” workers’ daily grind as demeaning and miserable as he could get away with. As a result there are many workers who might have wanted to kill Newton, but the police focus on the union steward whose battles with Newton were especially long-lasting and bitter. The mystery is whether the steward committed a possibly justified homicide or whether he is an innocent man facing a life sentence simply for tenaciously enforcing the union contract. Felton ends his preface with the hope that readers will be entertained as well as informed: “I hope reading this novel gives the reader some insight into the daily life on the workroom floor at the post office, at the same time as it keeps you guessing about who killed James Newton.”

*Hardhats, Hippies and Hawks: The Vietnam Anti-War Movement as Myth and Memory* (Cornell ILR Press), Penny Lewis

If, given its title, you think this book is one more reflection on why the American working class is so pro-war, you could not be more wrong. The “myth” of the title is that the movement against the Vietnam War was driven by middle-class college students and elite intellectuals while the blue-collar working class was rabidly pro-war. One of Penny Lewis’ goals is to show how this myth, like most myths, takes something that is partially true (particularly in the early years of that war) and turns it into a “whole truth” that is egregiously false. In that part Lewis offers a counter-narrative of “a diverse, cross-class opposition to the war in Southeast Asia that included the labor movement, working-class students, soldiers and veterans, and Black Power, civil rights, and Chicano activists.” But her further goal is then to explain why the “dominant narrative of the period’s class-based political action, of working-class conservatism and liberal elitism, . . . now has the ring of catechism to it” – that is, how the myth first was established and then “has maintained such a hold on popular memory.” Pointing out that social movement history and theory has neglected the anti-war movement, Lewis hopes her historical corrective and class analysis of this particular myth-making will make a broader contribution to our understanding of social movements in general. The publisher sums it up like this: “By exposing as false the popular image of conservative workers and liberal elites separated by an unbridgeable gulf, Lewis suggests that shared political attitudes and actions are, in fact, possible between these two groups.”
Economic Emergency Kit: Building Power & Winning Change With Your Community (We Are Oregon), Aaron Giesa, Angela MacWhinnie, Alejandro Juarez, Angus Maguire and Chris Lowe

We Are Oregon (WAO) was formed by two Service Employee International Union locals a few years back to experiment with “a new strategy in the fight for economic justice, applying union organizing strength and experience to grassroots community organizing outside the workplace on the economic issues that affect working people the most.” Starting with a canvass of thousands of homes to find out what issues were most important in working-class communities, WAO then began organizing around these issues, including foreclosures, unemployment, and access to food. In each case they had some success, including in stopping numerous foreclosures, but they also built local organizations and local leaders that gradually became capable of mobilizing themselves and others for effective collective action. This 94-page booklet lays out their organizing approach in step-by-step fashion. The first part, “Getting started: Building relationships through conversation” goes from initial canvassing to how to take action. The second part, “Campaigns, escalation, & acting strategically,” walks the reader through goal-setting, strategy development, choosing tactics, and assessing results so you can do better the next time. The final part is a Toolbox with sample worksheets for “forming your group,” power analysis, meeting prep, action prep, press advisories and releases, and tip sheets for taking videos and preparing spokespersons – as well as a lengthy section on how to create a flyer.

The five authors are WAO organizers, including WCSA member Angela MacWhinnie. The booklet, which can be downloaded for free at www.economicemergencykit.com, includes a brief introduction that conveys the spirit of the work by proclaiming: “In Case of Emergency: Organize! No Experience Necessary.”

Birth Marks: Poems by Jim Daniels (BOA Editions)

This latest volume of Jim Daniels’ poems focuses on post-industrial cities and how working-class people “struggle to establish community on streets hissing with distrust and random violence.” Li-Young Lee says of these poems, “Jim Daniels keeps getting better, going deeper into his lived life to find there the language of celebration, lamentation, victory, defeat, moral ambiguity, and political and social outrage.” “His sharp eye surveys the landscapes of Detroit and Pittsburgh, his uncles struggling against alcoholism, his aunts scraping by on the wages of fast-food restaurants,” says Martin Espada. “His clear voice speaks for the fallen, from the company men who played by the rules and lost anyway to a child killed in a hit-and-run accident. Yet the poet finds dignity and redemption in the grace of baseball or the consolation of the human touch, spirituality in spite of churches, love in the mist of pesticide.”

The explicit purpose of this book, timed to come out during the 50th anniversary year of the March on Washington, is to reveal the key role of class and class analysis within both the March itself and the Civil Rights Movement long before and now well after the March. African-American politics since Reconstruction has always had different strains within it, but it has never been without a strong working-class component that has consistently fought for a broad multiracial movement for economic justice for all workers. As labor historian William P. Jones says in the book’s Preface, “By tracing the roots of the March on Washington to A. Philip Randolph’s demand for fair employment during the Second World War, this book demonstrates that the civil rights movement was always closely linked to the social democratic politics of the New Deal.” Thus, one of the key demands before and after the March as well as on the day of the March was for “a living wage” inclusive of a federal minimum wage but much beyond that in building a stronger, more generous social wage. By focusing on explicitly Socialist labor and civil rights leaders like Randolph and Bayard Rustin, who were key organizers of the March, Jones is able to show how its animating vision saw the fight for racial equality as a catalyst for a larger class struggle — not something separate from it or, regardless of what might be in the minds of many white workers, not in conflict with it. Jones is one of the founding members of the Labor & Working-Class Studies Project that sponsored the 2013 WCSA Conference in Madison, Wisconsin.


Hell’s Kitchen – now largely gentrified and promoted as “Clinton Heights” by realtors – was until late into the 20th Century a storied working-class Manhattan neighborhood between 34th and 59th streets from 8th Avenue to the Hudson River. During the period Joseph Varga focuses on in this book, it was an urban dumping ground for low-wage, expendable immigrant workers in a still industrializing New York City. When middle-class Progressive reformers and professional urban planners won ruling-class approval (and funds) to remake Hell into a more livable place with a city park and “model tenements,” they set off a class struggle with working-class residents who had a different understanding of urban space and their place within it. An Antipode reviewer calls Varga’s account of this struggle “a nuanced and theoretically-sophisticated history of the social relations and spatial imaginaries that produced this area in the turbulent decades from 1894 to 1914” and “not just an eminently readable history of Hell’s Kitchen, but a fascinating example of how ‘taking space seriously’ can alter our historical understandings and perspectives in powerful ways.”
A Bitter Pill: A Lenny Moss Mystery (Hard Ball Press), Timothy Sheard

In this sixth Lenny Moss mystery, Tim Sheard’s intrepid if world-weary union steward faces both a new hospital president bent on decertifying the union and a troubled coworker’s death that looks like suicide but may be a murder. The publisher characterizes the story: “With the bosses threatening to close the hospital if their slash and burn policies are not accepted, and with the police pressuring him to help with their investigation, Lenny faces his most difficult case. This time, it’s personal.” Labor educator Helena Worthen says it is not only a “short, fast, tight” mystery, but also “a great book for labor studies students who want to experience the intensity of a big fight vicariously but realistically. The piling-on of stressors culminates in a happy ending when Lenny finally gets a night’s sleep.”

Continental Crucible: Big Business, Workers and Unions in the Transformation of North America (Fernwood Books), Richard Roman and Edur Velasco Arrequi

Political economist Leo Panitch praises Continental Crucible as a “tremendously insightful book” that presents “a rare analysis of the intertwining political economies of all three countries that make up North America.” According to Panitch, “No other study has shown so clearly that, far from the neoliberal integration of the continent being imposed from the outside by the United States, it was the Canadian and Mexican states which took the crucial initiatives, above all as a means of shifting the domestic balance of class forces in favor of their own capitalist classes and against their working classes.” But more than an analysis of how the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) has consolidated a sweeping neoliberal corporate agenda, the book traces the makings of a pancontinental resistance. The publisher’s blurb says: “The failure of traditional labor responses to stop the continental offensive being waged by big business has led workers and unions to explore new strategies of struggle and organization, pointing to the beginnings of a continental labor movement across North America. The battle for the future of North America has begun.”

Palomino: Clinton Jencks and Mexican-American Unionism in the American Southwest (U. of Illinois Press), James J. Lorence

Though not many people saw it at the time, many of us in Working-Class Studies have seen and shown Salt of the Earth, the 1954 Hollywood film that was suppressed and whose producers were then blacklisted. Clinton Jencks is the “strikingly blond” Anglo union organizer in the film and in the reality of the 1951 strike by Mexican-American miners at the Empire Zinc Company in Grant County, New Mexico. “El Palomino” (basically, “the white guy”) was a term of endearment for Jencks, according to James Lorence, “reserved only for those who enjoyed the deep respect of workers and their families . . . among the Chicano/a community.” Jencks and his wife, Virginia Derr Jencks, in the late 1940s were sent by the militant International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers to New Mexico, where they helped organize Local 890, whose strike is the
setting for *Salt of the Earth*. Lorence’s biography traces Jencks’ life from his childhood and early days as an organizer to his later years as an economics professor at San Diego State University. The core of the biography, however, is his years in New Mexico, including his participation in making the movie and what that cost him in anti-Communist government harassment. Like the strike itself and the movie that portrayed it, Jencks’ activism seems to have combined nearly a century of struggle where fights against class, ethnic, racial and gender prejudice were integrated and all of one piece — rather than a series of separate and often conflicting movements, as more commonly envisioned.

**Last Year’s Jesus: A Novella and Nine Stories** (Hyperion Books), Ellen Slezak

When one of Ellen Slezak’s characters returns to the remnants of her old neighborhood, which had once been a vibrant Polish-Catholic urban village in Detroit, she finds a field full of bushes, shrubs, and prairie grass that at a distance looks almost bucolic. As she walks into the field, however, “the shrubs and roots only covered up empty beer cans, jagged edges of broken liquor bottles, disposable diapers, and other trash. And even under that layer of discard, the remains of long-gone homes – old foundations and rotting two by fours – jutted up amidst the growing brush. It was only when I kept my distance that the cycle of this land from forest floor to modest working-class community, to fraying neighborhood, to abandoned slum, and then back to forest, seemed balanced and hopeful, like something I should be part of. Up close, it was not to be trusted.” In this collection of stories, all set in Detroit, Slezak introduces us to female autoworkers, a recently-fired office manager looking after her elderly grandfather, and a woman struggling to manage the family junk business and care for her daughter after her husband’s death. Comparing it to *Winesburg, Ohio*, the publisher says: “Writing with tremendous empathy, warmth, and humor, Slezak brings to life the sights and sounds of a place she calls home – a place readers won’t soon forget.”

**Behind the Kitchen Door** (Cornell ILR Press), Saru Jayaraman

Saru Jayaraman is one of the founders and now codirector of Restaurant Opportunities Centers United, a nationwide network of restaurant workers — some union, mostly not — that works with the hotel workers union Unite Here! to improve the conditions of restaurant workers using a wide variety of tactics. One of the tactics is to expose the low wages and degrading working conditions workers at particular restaurants face. In *Behind the Kitchen Door* Jayaraman presents a comprehensive picture of restaurant work in all its variety by following the lives of workers in New York, Philadelphia, Washington, Miami, Chicago, Detroit, New Orleans, Houston and Los Angeles. A work of both analysis and narrative, Jayaraman argues: “Sustainability is about contributing to a society that everybody benefits from, not just going organic because you don’t want to die from cancer or have a difficult pregnancy. What is a sustainable restaurant? It’s one in which as the restaurant grows, the people grow with it.” Danny Glover says it’s “a must-read for anyone who eats at restaurants.” And *Library Journal* seems to agree: “The author reveals . . . [how] many restaurants steal workers’ wages and tips, and put white workers in the best jobs out front while assigning those of color to the worst kitchen work. Women are harassed and not promoted. Few food workers have insurance or even sick leave, which is a problem not just for the workers; patrons also suffer when ill workers prepare and serve meals. . . . This book will leave readers angry at the injustices detailed within, queasy about eating out, and much better tippers.”
Working Lives: The forgotten voices of Britain’s post-war working class (Bantam Press), David Hall

By the early 1950s Britain had recovered its industrial might after the devastation of World War II, and it was still “the most urbanized and industrialized nation” on the planet. The world’s original industrial proletariat was still the leading European producer of coal, steel, ships, cars and textiles. Today many of these industries are gone entirely, and others severely diminished. In this oral history collection David Hall, a television producer and documentary filmmaker for 30 years, sets out to capture what it was like to live and work in these industrial communities during what turned out to be a heyday of union strength and rising standards of living in the 1950s and ‘60s and into the ‘70s. Organized largely by industry, the book moves around the country to record the recollections and thoughts of industrial workers who did similar work in different places. Through hundreds of interviews, Hall systematically explores both work life and community life as both incomes and leisure time increased and then quite suddenly, just as it came to be taken for granted, these workers were unable to stop a brutal reversal of their fortunes. One reviewer calls it “a timely memorial for a nation that loves its pastoral history but struggles with the nobility of the industrial age.”


The “inbetweener generation,” in Tony Blackshaw’s chronology, was born in 1930s and the early 1940s and lived their working lives into the 1970s, during which time “working-class life in England was fundamentally transformed . . . rapidly and radically.” The transformation as Blackshaw sees it was from a “solid modernity . . . of rationalization of objects (and human subjects) through standardization, abstraction and mass production” to a “liquid modernity . . . of rationalization through cultural difference, reflexive individualization and consumerism.” According to the publisher, Blackshaw was inspired by Zygmunt Bauman’s concept of generational change based on historical events and experience (rather than by arbitrary 20-year timelines), and he uses “life history research” conducted in South Leeds and elsewhere in the English North to trace “a revolution in everyday life that radically altered the reigning structures of time and order.”

Locked Out: A Century of Irish Working-Class Life (Irish Academic Press), edited by David Convery

This collection of historical monographs and essays both commemorates the 100th anniversary of the 1913 Dublin Lockout and seeks to remedy what the editor and authors see as the working class’ having been locked out of Irish history. “The idea that class – rather than ethnicity, religion, or the idea of national identity – could have a role to play in politics and cultural production is an alien one to the mainstream Irish historical debate.” The volume opens with three essays on the 1913 lockout and class relations during that time, and then progresses through the 20th Century, including the lives of Irish workers who emigrated to America and England. It ends with a contemporary historical reflection by Michael Pierse titled “From Yeatsian nightmares to Tallafornian dreams: Reflections on classism and culture in ‘classless’ Ireland.”
The Employee: A Political History (U. of Pennsylvania Press), Jean-Christian Vinel

If you are an “employee” in American law, you have certain rights that you do not have if you are not legally designated as an “employee.” As a result, American business has fought for more than a century to define this everyday term in the most restrictive way possible. This book traces the history of this political and legal campaign up to the present day as “businessmen . . . pressed their interests in Congress and the federal courts, pushing for an ever-narrower definition” that excluded more and more groups of workers – possibly as many as 10 million today. Labor historian Nelson Lichtenstein says The Employee “is extraordinarily timely because in the twenty-first century, as never before, the entire world of work is undergoing such a radical and profound transformation.” AFL-CIO General Counsel Craig Becker says: “gathering insight from both sides of the Atlantic, this book is essential reading for anyone who believes U.S. labor law must be refashioned to fit a new economy.”

Expanding the Strike Zone: Baseball in the Age of Free Agency (U. of Massachusetts Press), Daniel A. Gilbert

This book treats baseball as “one of the most captivating forms of modern popular culture” and highlights “the ways in which baseball’s players, owners, writers, and fans have shaped and reshaped the sport as a central element of popular culture from the postwar boom to the Great Recession.” Cultural historian George Lipsitz calls it a “deft blend of labor history and cultural studies” that “shows how the history of major league baseball’s labor relations policies provide a rich repository of evidence about the full magnitude of the enormous changes that have taken place in the nature of work, consumption, marketing and management in our lifetimes.”
Book Reviews

Jeanne Bryner, Smoke (Bottom Dog Press, 2012)
By Jeanetta Calhoun Mish, Oklahoma City University

In Smoke, Jeanne Bryner’s fifth book of poetry, she offers readers poetry that presents working-class lives and peoples in richly-imagined details, evocative metaphor, and mastery of craft. Those who have followed her writing career will not be disappointed with this collection, but instead, along with those new to her work, they will find within it phrases, lines, entire poems that will linger in the heart and mind long after the book has been closed. Like Bryner's previous collections, Smoke centers on Bryner's vocation as a registered nurse, but it seems to me that in this collection there are more poems than in earlier collections on Bryner's childhood and her life outside the hospital. No matter the topic, though, the poems in this collection are crafted of finely woven, powerful metaphors that give me the shivers, among them recurring metaphors of the cleansing, healing power of water, of flowers which signal a radically empathetic perspective on beauty, and of birds, alternately figured as signs of emotional freedom or fragility.

The first poem of the collection, "Bed Bath," sets up a collection-wide trope of the sacred within the human realm, proclaiming "... it is one of the holiest acts" to give a patient a bath in "the morning's sacred space." Another ritualized bathing takes place in "Violets," written in the voice of a nurse attending to a "... girl with enormous / eyes and shoestring hair / who puts razor blades on her tongue, / ... month after month." The girl's life is "battered as a sparrow," yet, when the nurses wash her bloody body "the way you'd wash a mauled terrier," their ministrations initiate a turn toward redemption, a redemption brought about through a startling evocation of the beauty of flowers:

And when we close her skin
with suture, scars blossom pink scrolls
—rows of azaleas—like nothing
you can smell or taste, like little girls
in their eyelet sundresses
running toward you
their fists full of violets
crying, Here, here, love me.

Here, the poet references flowers twice, underscoring the empathetic shift of perspective required to re-value this hurting, battered child. Love is required to give to this girl a sense of her own beauty and worth, and, it seems, the ER nurses are the only font of love—a font of baptismal redemption created by the hands of human workers—in this girl's life.

The idea that redemption and healing are human practices as much as they are God's indulgences is revisited later in the collection, in "Where God Lives," one of the poems arising from Bryner's childhood. The first two lines of the poem read "It is hard to believe in God, even now, / He was always somewhere else. Maybe fishing." God was somewhere else when the speaker and her sister, ages six and eight, were left "alone with my baby brothers" while their father was out drinking. The speaker, the younger sister, went to take her brother off the potty seat and while doing so, "his weenie got caught in a crack / of blue plastic. Blood spurted as if I'd chopped / a hen's neck." Needless to say, the sisters were terrified and, without adult supervision, unsure of what to do. The elder sister "ran," while the younger wrapped her
brother’s wounded appendage in a wash cloth and prayed. From the speaker's perspective, her prayer was not answered by God, but by two neighbor women her sister had alerted, women who took care of the injured boy, gave the sisters “orange popsicles,” and threw the obviously dangerous potty seat in the trash. On that day, the speaker asserts, "God “lived on our street” —a pragmatic, hands-on god, much like the nurses and doctors and caregiving family members in Bryner's work.

Throughout the collection, it seems clear that one constructive response to trauma and tragedy is to contribute to others’ spiritual and physical healing. Bryner's childhood of neglect and abuse and her efforts and wishes to help her siblings survive and overcome that abuse served to prepare her for nursing. In fact, it appears, as Janet Zandy has pointed out about laborers in general, that trauma and illness are prevalent among Bryner's hospital coworkers, and that each person's injuries and fears are both reawakened and partially exorcised in the practice of caregiving. In the poem "Kindness," nurses trade out emotionally-difficult duties with each other: they make plans to cover for one of their coworkers who could not suction tracheotomies without vomiting and for another who whispers "If there's a rape tonight, I don't think I can do it."

The final poem of the collection, "Retired Nurse: Poetry Reading with My Patients," reveals that practicing hard-won, creative responses to the ugliness of the world is a cyclical gift first given to the speaker from a woman who survived a concentration camp, a woman whose "violet eyes" are "a meadow of forgiveness." The gift is a survivor's imperative: "Do something special with your life." Smoke, as befits a working-class poet, is firmly on the side of a theology of acts: we are saved by the acts of others, therefore we should ourselves work toward forgiveness by engaging in redemptive acts on behalf of others.

In Smoke, God is a working-class neighbor, a nurse, a wife whose husband is dying of cancer, a doctor who saves a young, unmarried woman's life by telling her that her unborn child is not a sin. These angels of mercy are born from tragedy. And, in Jeanne Bryner's case, a poet was also born, a poet whose writing has matured into this collection, a masterwork of craft and emotional integrity.

Janet Zandy, Unfinished Stories: The Narrative Photography of Hansel Mieth and Marion Palfi (RIT Press, 2013)
Reviewed by Mary Lou Nemanic, Penn State Altoona

Janet Zandy’s book Unfinished Stories: The Narrative Photography of Hansel Mieth and Marion Palfi is not only an outstanding and much-needed addition to the literature of working class culture, but also the history of documentary photography. Zandy’s book tells the parallel stories of two gutsy and empathetic “citizen-photographers” who devoted their lives to documenting the working class and the poor, and whose contributions to the history of photography have been largely neglected. Zandy uses the term narrative photography to emphasize both the storytelling aspects of their work as well as the activist roles they assumed, and for which the categories of photojournalism or documentary photography are inadequate. She writes that both "enable a re-thinking of the practice of citizenship in relation to the practice of photography."

Hansel Mieth (1909-1998) came to American in the 1930s. Traveling with her partner (and later husband) photographer Otto Hagel, she photographed the homeless, migrants and seasonal laborers. She was the second woman photographer hired by Life magazine, but Zandy writes that Mieth’s “working class consciousness” often made her work too controversial for the magazine’s editors, with several major assignments going unpublished.
Marion Palfi (1907-1998) photographed children and the elderly, and was known for her documentation of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement. Despite several fellowships and grants, such as the prestigious Guggenheim fellowship, she struggled financially most of her career, and risked her life to cover civil rights in the Deep South. Her photograph of the Henry Street Settlement House became the first cover of Ebony magazine.

Zandy called her book *Unfinished Stories* to emphasize the fact that Mieth and Palfi “…exposed the unfinished. They resisted ignorance, lies and deliberate blind spots.” Their work embodies the “unfinished work in building the American democracy.”

Although these photographers never met, Zandy saw uncanny parallels in their work and lives. Crossing the country to photograph children, physical labor and marginalized and oppressed groups, both were German émigrés who fled the Nazis and became American citizens. Both struggled economically over the course of their careers and were blacklisted during the McCarthy Era of the 1950s.

Unfortunately, as Zandy points out, their work never found an audience during their lifetimes despite their passionate beliefs that photography provided a way to improve the human condition. Nonetheless, they continued to “tell stories about America through their pictures that most Americans did not want to see.”

This book is truly a labor of love. Zandy retired in 2008 to devote herself to the research for this book. *Unfinished Stories* is well crafted and painstakingly researched. It is a treasure not only because of its beautiful prose but also because of the photographs Zandy chose to represent their work. Her keen eye and love of photography enabled her to see parallels in the work and philosophies of these women despite their differing methodologies—Palfi taking a social scientific research approach to her photo stories while Mieth’s was a more “inductive, organic and fluid approach.”

Significantly, Zandy’s book breaks with the academic convention of starting with theory or interweaving theory with biographical detail. Instead she presents the biographical narratives first and ends with theory to avoid interrupting “the narrative flow” (xiv).

Zandy’s book is a must-read for those interested in working class culture or the history of photography. Her respect and appreciation for these women is summed up in a line from her preface: “They engaged visual art as resistance to domination in kinship with the least powerful. That ethos spoke to me. That is why I wrote this book” (xiii).


**Melissa Townsend, Producer, Minnesota Public Radio**

In *Coming Up Short* Jennifer Silva offers compelling, three-dimensional pictures of young working-class adults coming of age in a neoliberal nation.

Silva sets the context as modern day America where traditional markers of adulthood—well-paying, stable work, a house, a car, marriage, kids—have become scarce. She’s interviewed
hundreds of working-class Millennials to learn how they are charting the course to adulthood with fewer traditional markers to light their way. And indeed, they are having great difficulty.

Her description of working-class Millennials is a far cry from the common illustration of irresponsible young adults lacking the work ethic to get an education or hold down a decent job. The young people in Silva’s sample group come across as resourceful and committed to hard work in the face of great odds.

Their difficulty, she argues, results from a confluence of three social and political trends—the rise of neoliberalism, the reorganization of the domestic labor market, and the emergence of what she calls “the mood economy.”

She argues that neoliberal ideology ignores social and economic barriers to mobility. A person’s success or failure is seen to be solely determined by how hard they work. This goes way beyond the “bootstraps” mentality. She describes young adults who have come to believe they cannot rely on anyone but themselves. These lessons from working-class parents and others are reinforced by their experiences with middle-class institutions. They are betrayed and bewildered by school, group homes, jail, work places and public agencies.

The new global, hourglass economy has created a fluctuating and volatile labor market with stagnant wages. Young adults have to be unceasingly flexible about what they do, how long they do it, and what they can expect in compensation. With no financial stability, they can’t plan a life. They can’t invest in their future without knowing they’ll be able to pay off that initial investment. There’s also no sense of solidarity, no way to embrace a class identity with fellow workers around similar work and life experiences. Many of these young people are in jobs where they are delivering a service to members of the middle and owning classes. I expect they experience classism hour after hour with no name or frame for it.

The freshest part of Silva’s work is where she tackles the psychology of working-class Millennials. She calls it “the mood economy.” I call it “internalized classism.”

Every coming of age story features a protagonist going out to “slay the dragon.” Silva argues that working-class Millennials have located the dragon inside themselves. Their coming of age story is about vanquishing those parts of themselves that hold them back from being successful. Seeking justice through social change is replaced by developing a better self through psychological self-improvement.

She tells us about George. He is a young, African-American man raised by a single mom and as a kid, he says, they moved at least 38 times. He has diagnosed himself with OCD. “By reading about obsessive-compulsive disorder, George has learned to organize his past experiences of flux, uncertainty and betrayal into a coherent and intelligible narrative, thus solidifying his identity in suffering and self-transformation.”

In the end Silva offers some hope that “their coming-of-age stories are still unfolding, their future not yet written.” She hopes there is potential for these young adults to embrace a new set of cultural norms that more strongly support class solidarity. This shift is not born out of the interviews, but it is her hope for their future.
Center Reports

Our Daily Work/Our Daily Lives is a joint program at Michigan State University drawing on the mutual interest at the MSU Museum and in the MSU Labor Education Program in workers culture, labor history and working class life. This collaboration has promoted the preservation, promotion and presentation of workers culture through a variety of activities including film showings, fiction and poetry readings, museum exhibits, and the ODW/ODL brown bag series, which entered its 18th year in September. Topics this year will include: 1870s-era strikes in the US and Canada; religion and the auto factories in the 1950s; organizing a union for Chicago couriers; the labor culture of the beauty shop; Cesar Chavez and the United Farmworkers; women and work in the art of Winslow Homer; Great Lakes maritime disasters; and working at the zoo among others.

We recently opened two new photographic exhibits at the MSU Museum: “An Extraordinary Document of Our World” and “Detroit Resurgent” which are co-sponsored by Our Daily Work/Our Daily Lives. Both exhibits, which run into January of 2014, are the work of French photographer Gilles Perrin, assisted by his wife Nicole Ewenczyk. The first exhibit is a selection of Perrin’s photographic portraits of working people (peasants and farmers, artists and musicians, miners, factory workers and craftspeople) who are in periods of transition and change across the world (including Burkina Faso, China, Egypt, Ethiopia, France, Laos, Mali, Peru and Tibet). The second exhibit is a body of portraits specifically created for the MSU Museum of people from all works of life who are working to rebuild the City of Detroit and secure its future: urban farmers and food entrepreneurs, workers and union leaders, designers and business owners, visionaries, artists and activists. Gilles Perrin and Nicole Ewenczyk were featured in one of the September brown bags coinciding with the opening of the two exhibits at the MSU Museum. After January, the “Detroit Resurgent” exhibit will move to Detroit where we will be coordinating a number of educational events around some of the themes raised by it.

We are working with the Michigan State University Poetry Center, which is located in MSU’s Residential College in the Arts and Humanities, on a series of events and readings focusing on clothing and textiles and clothing and textile work and workers. The centerpiece to the effort will be the November visit by North Carolina poet Barbara Presnell. Presnell is the author of Piece Work (Cleveland State University Press, 2007), a collection of poems which can be read individually or as a “novel in poems” linked by overlapping characters, stories and themes. There will be an exhibit of pieces of clothing highlighting the world locations in which they are made along with commentary on working conditions and recent plant fires and disasters across the globe.

As in recent years, we are co-sponsoring relevant films at the East Lansing Film Festival in November. This year we are happy to be showing “The Rich Have Their Own Photographers,” Ezra Bookstein’s fine film on the life and work of documentary photographer Milton Rogovin. After being hounded by the red-baiters of the 1950s as “Buffalo’s Top Red,” optometrist Rogovin turned to the use of his black and white camera to document many of his neighbors in western New York – urban dwellers, African American church goers, and steelworkers at work and at home – as well as others like Appalachian coal miners. Until his death in 2011 at the age of 101, Rogovin continued to represent the best of respectful photographic documentation of workers and the working class.

In 2014, there will be a campus-wide conversation/exploration/commemoration/celebration across Michigan State University of two key anniversaries – the 60th anniversary of the US Supreme Court decision in Brown vs. School Board, which ended the legal doctrine of racial inequality based in “separate, but equal,” and the 50th anniversary of the 1964 Civil Rights Act which was passed by the US Congress and signed by President Lyndon Johnson and
designed to broadly end discrimination based on race, religion, national origin and gender. Planning is underway across campus for a speaker series, a major conference on Brown, and a number of campus-community collaborations that will see the theme played out across the state. Our Daily Work/Our Daily Lives will have a number of events in the 2014 calendar year that reflect on the themes of “60/50,” including a January brown bag with Dr. Ysaye Barnwell, one of the founders of the iconic singing group and force for social change, Sweet Honey in the Rock. Additional readings, exhibits and Fall 2014 brown bags are being explored and/or scheduled.

Call for 2015 Annual Award Submissions

Deadline for Nominations: Friday, January 15, 2016

The Working-Class Studies Association (WCSA) invites nominations (including self-nominations) for awards covering the year of 2015. Award categories are:

- **Tillie Olsen Award for Creative Writing**: Published books of poetry, fiction, creative non-fiction, and other genres
- **C.L.R. James Award for Published Books for Academic or General Audiences**
- **Russo & Linkon Award for Published Article or Essay for Academic or General Audiences**
- **Studs Terkel Award for Media and Journalism**: Single published articles or series, broadcast media, multimedia, and film
- **Constance Coiner Award for Best Dissertation**: Completed dissertations.

In all categories, we invite nominations of excellent work that provides insightful and engaging depictions of working-class life, culture, and movements; 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, 2015 and December 31, 2015.

To nominate a work for consideration, please send three hard 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, 2016. Submit nominations to:
Dr. Christie Launius

Director, Women’s and Gender Studies
Sage Hall 3457
UW Oshkosh
Oshkosh, WI 54901

For more information and electronic submissions, contact Christie Launius, WCSA Past-President, at launiusc@uwosh.edu.

Winners will be announced at the 2016 How Class Works conference at SUNY Stony Brook, June 9-11, 2016. Winners will receive free conference registration and a plaque.
Calls for Papers

HOW CLASS WORKS - 2014
CALL FOR PRESENTATIONS
A Conference at SUNY Stony Brook  June 5-7, 2014

The Center for Study of Working Class Life is pleased to announce the How Class Works – 2014 Conference, to be held at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, June 5-7, 2014.

Proposals for papers, presentations, and sessions are welcome until December 11, 2013 according to the guidelines below. For more information, visit our Web site at: <www.workingclass.sunysb.edu>.

Purpose and orientation: The conference seeks to explore ways in which an explicit recognition of class helps to understand the social world in which we live, and ways in which analysis of society can deepen our understanding of class as a social relationship. Presentations should take as their point of reference the lived experience of class; proposed theoretical contributions should be rooted in and illuminate social realities. Presentations are welcome from people outside academic life when they sum up social experience in a way that contributes to the themes of the conference. Formal papers will be welcome but are not required. All presentations should be accessible to an interdisciplinary audience.

Conference themes: The conference welcomes proposals for presentations that advance our understanding of any of the following themes.

The mosaic of class, race, and gender. To explore how class shapes racial, gender, and ethnic experience and how different racial, gender, and ethnic experiences within various classes shape the meaning of class.

Class, power, and social structure. To explore the social content of working, middle, and capitalist classes in terms of various aspects of power; to explore ways in which class and structures of power interact, at the workplace and in the broader society.

Class and community. To explore ways in which class operates outside the workplace in the communities where people of various classes live.

Class in a global economy. To explore how class identity and class dynamics are influenced by globalization, including experience of cross-border organizing, capitalist class dynamics, international labor standards.

Middle class? Working class? What's the difference and why does it matter? To explore the claim that the U.S. is a middle class society and contrast it with the notion that the working class is the majority; to explore the relationships between the middle class and the working class, and between the middle class and the capitalist class.

over please.
Class, public policy, and electoral politics.
To explore how class affects public policy, with special attention to health care, the criminal justice system, labor law, poverty, tax and other economic policy, housing, and education; to explore the place of electoral politics in the arrangement of class forces on policy matters.

Class and culture: To explore ways in which culture transmits and transforms class dynamics.

Pedagogy of class. To explore techniques and materials useful for teaching about class, at K-12 levels, in college and university courses, and in labor studies and adult education courses.

How to submit proposals for How Class Works – 2014 Conference

Proposals for presentations must include the following information: a) title; b) which of the eight conference themes will be addressed; c) a maximum 250 word summary of the main points, methodology, and slice of experience that will be summed up; d) relevant personal information indicating institutional affiliation (if any) and what training or experience the presenter brings to the proposal; e) presenter's name, address, telephone, fax, and e-mail address. A person may present in at most two conference sessions. To allow time for discussion, sessions will be limited to three twentyminute or four fifteen-minute principal presentations. Sessions will not include official discussants. Proposals for poster sessions are welcome. Presentations may be assigned to a poster session.

Proposals for sessions are welcome. A single session proposal must include proposal information for all presentations expected to be part of it, as detailed above, with some indication of willingness to participate from each proposed session member.

Submit proposals as an e-mail attachment to michael.zweig@stonybrook.edu or as hard copy by mail to the How Class Works - 2014 Conference, Center for Study of Working Class Life, Department of Economics, SUNY, Stony Brook, NY 11794-4384.

Timetable: Proposals must be received by December 11, 2013. After review by the program committee, notifications will be mailed on January 17, 2014. The conference will be at SUNY Stony Brook June 5-7, 2014. Conference registration and housing reservations will be possible after March 3, 2014. Details and updates will be posted at http://www.workingclass.sunysb.edu.

Conference coordinator:
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