President’s Report

Dear fellow members of the Working Class Studies Association,

It is with great pleasure that I write to you as president of the Working Class Studies Association. I am truly honored to have been elected to the office, and hope to spend my time engaged in projects and efforts that will make lasting change, however modest, for the years to come. More specifically, I am interested in shoring up and strengthening our foundation so that we can continue to strive toward the goals we articulated at our founding in 2005.

In case you haven’t look at those goals in a while, they include promoting critical conversations, dialogues, and debates about issues important to the field of working class studies and its practitioners, as well as providing opportunities and spaces for people to share their work. When I think about those goals, one of the things that concerns me more and more is our responsibility, as an organization, to make sure that the voices of the next generation of academics, artists, activists, independent scholars, workers, and students are represented in those conversations and have a place at the table, so to speak. We need their presence and their contributions, and we should not expect that the process of attracting and retaining them will occur without concerted, thoughtful effort on our part.

We made a very concrete gesture toward this end at the 2014 How Class Works conference, organized by Michael Zweig and held on the campus of SUNY-Stony Brook, by hosting a meet-and-greet reception for graduate students and newcomers prior to the formal opening of the conference. According to WCSA secretary and steering committee member Michele Fazio, who greeted attendees along with Alicia Williamson, Katherine Kidd, and Sara Appel, the event was a rousing success, attended by around 50 people, newcomers and “old-timers” alike. She attested to the value of the event, saying that it was a great way for people to make connections and network before the conference began, in ways that paid off in the number, quality and depth of conversations that occurred across the subsequent three days. Less tangibly, perhaps, but no less importantly, it conveyed the message that the organization is welcoming to all. We hope to do something similar at the 2015 conference at Georgetown, and into the foreseeable future.

Along similar lines, this year we will be continuing the Young Scholars and Activists Initiative begun last year during Barbara Jensen’s presidency. We awarded seven grants, to Chase Bollig, Robin Brooks, Alana Glaser, Heidi Jones, Meadow Jones, and Raul Perez, all of whom are graduate students or recent graduates whose work represents a variety of disciplines across the humanities and social sciences. The awards were made based on the merit of the proposals they submitted to the Stony Brook conference; their work represents the future of the field, and it is important to recognize and nurture it. It is my firm belief that both the YSAI
awards and the meet-and-greet reception are efforts that help us work toward multiple of our goals, both materially and symbolically. More importantly, I hope that these efforts will strengthen our organization by increasing and deepening ties among our members.

For these (and myriad other) reasons, I hope to see many of you at next year’s conference, scheduled for May 28-31. In one sense, the 2015 conference represents a return to the familiar, being organized as it is by Sherry Linkon, founding member and first president of this organization. Sherry, along with John Russo, former directors of the Center for Working-Class Studies at Youngstown State University, organized and hosted many working-class studies conferences at YSU, with the last one being held in 2005. We are extremely pleased that Sherry spearheaded efforts to host the conference at her current institution, Georgetown University, where she is Professor of English and Director of Writing Curriculum Initiatives. But this conference also takes the Working Class Studies Association into new territory, because it is being organized as a joint conference of the WCSA and the Labor and Working Class History Association. This is an exciting opportunity to explore our shared intellectual and political interests, and perhaps to discover new ones; I, for one, am looking forward to it.

All my best,
Christie Launius

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**Treasurer’s Report**

The WCSA has a total of $22,539.73 in our accounts, with the membership drive approaching. Please note that you can renew your memberships online at the WCSA website through PayPal, or you can also print the form and mail a check to me at:

Cherie Rankin
PO Box 264
Emden, IL 62635

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**Secretary’s Report**

The Elections Committee reported the results of July’s election: Tim Strangleman, President Elect; Michele Fazio, Secretary; Tim Libretti and Matthew Kendrick, Steering Committee members; and Jack Metzgar, Elections Committee. Since then, the Steering Committee has been engaged in a number of initiatives, including membership outreach and establishing the 2015 Young Scholar’s and Activists Initiative (YSAI) committee, which will be composed of Tim Strangleman, Matt Kendrick, and Christie Launius. The Communications Committee (Michele Fazio, Tim Strangleman, Alicia Williamson, and Christie Launius) is making progress in revitalizing the website and will consult with Sherry Linkon, former website editor, to increase visual content and incorporate elements of the newsletter. Alicia Williamson will now serve as the WCSA’s new website editor.
Member News

Ken Boas has been elected chair of the board of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions—USA, an organization founded ten years ago in Jerusalem, now with chapters around the world, that advocates and educates for Palestinian rights and the end of the Occupation. In September Ken presented a paper, “Reframing the Conflict: A New Narrative for a Just Peace” at the US Campaign to End the Occupation Conference in San Diego.

Jeanne Bryner has a new chapbook of poems coming out this fall – Early Farming Women published by Finishing Line Press in Georgetown, Kentucky.

Jim Ray Daniels recently published a new book of short stories, Eight Mile High (Michigan State U. Press), about growing up in a working-class community on the edge of Detroit. (See “Book Notes” for more.)

Michele Fazio’s Voices of the Lumbee has won two awards – the North Carolina Folklore Society’s Brown-Hudson Award and first place in the Broadcast Education Association’s District 2 Faculty Video Competition. The documentary film, written and co-produced by Fazio, also was featured in the New York-based arts program Bare Feet with Mikela Mallozzi.

Emma Howes has successfully defended her dissertation, “Down From the Mountain and into the Mill: Literacy Sponsorship and Southern Appalachian Women in the New South,” at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. This fall, she joined Coastal Carolina University as an Assistant Professor in English (Composition and Rhetoric).

Lita Kurth’s essay, “This is the Way We Wash the Clothes” won a Best Essay prize in the 2014 Diana Woods Memorial Essay Award contest sponsored by Antioch University’s Master’s in Fine Arts program. The essay was originally presented at the WCSA 2013 Conference in Madison, Wisconsin. You can read it here.

Christie Launius’ has co-authored a new textbook, Threshold Concepts in Women’s and Gender Studies: Ways of Seeing, Thinking, and Knowing. It will be published by Routledge in January 2015.

Tim Libretti’s essay, “Beyond the Innocence of Globalization: The Abiding Necessity of Carlos Bulosan’s Anti-Imperialist Imagination,” has been published in Kritika Kultura No. 23. He has also begun writing for the website PoliticusUSA, focusing on issues of income inequality.

David Walls’ new book, Community Organizing: Fanning the Flame of Democracy, will be released in November by Polity Books.
Book Notes

Eight Mile High (Michigan State U.), Jim Ray Daniels
This is the fourth book of Jim Daniels’ stories set in working-class Detroit and its “lower peninsula” environs. According to reviewers, it has the same “mordant blue-collar humor,” characters with “hardscrabble working-class sensibilities,” and “poignant, marvelously observed stories” as earlier volumes. But Eight Mile High focuses on that territory between inner-city Detroit and the affluent suburbs, and the stories are linked to one another through recurring characters and shared places (like Eight Mile High School, of the title; The Clock, a restaurant that never closes; a local bar, Eight Miles High; and Stan’s, a store that sells misfit clothes). There is also a mix of classically structured stories with more experimental narratives, including “a bleak, multi-narrator story in which a convict offers different explanations of why he killed someone.” A reviewer comments: “That Daniels wields all this sophisticated technique while maintaining his deceptively conversational tone is all the more impressive.” Jennifer Haigh says the stories have “all the texture of brave young life furiously lived,” and Rosellen Brown declares: “This is a wonderful book, Daniels’s best, so clearly a labor of intense and complicated feeling.”

Blue, Too: More Writing by (for or about) Working-Class Queers (FourCatsPress), edited by Wendell Ricketts
Wendell Ricketts was the editor of a 2005 collection of short stories by working-class queer, gay and bisexual men, Everything I Have Is Blue, now out of print but still available in the used-book market. Blue Too is a more expansive follow-up that includes the entire LGBTQ community with memoir, performance pieces and prose poems as well as short fiction. Among the 20 writers are Renny Christopher, Rigoberto Gonzalez, Tara Hardy, and Keith Banner, as well as a 1978 Judy Grahn story, a new translation from Italian, and excerpts from John Gilgun’s unpublished autobiography. It also includes extensive resources for exploring and teaching both working-class and queer studies: a reader’s guide to examining the interlocking issues of queerness and social class; “an extensive annotated bibliography of 500 items . . . related to queers and class”; and “a theoretical and critical essay that reviews the history . . . of working-class queers in literature, media, and pop culture.” In addition to being informative, entertaining and challenging, Ricketts promises a volume that “provides a touchstone for queer working-class writers and readers, illuminating our realities, our struggles, and our resistance to assimilation and mental gentrification.”
This anthology gathers forty original essays by authors from different classes, genders, races, ethnicities, ages, and occupations in the U.S., and organizes them by their self-identified social-class origins: poverty class, working class, middle class, owning class, and mixed class. Each author describes their individual class journeys by telling one or two stories that illustrate their growing awareness of class and their place, changing or stable, within the class system. Former WCSA President Jack Metzgar praises the result: "The stories in Class Lives all engage the reader at a directly personal level that both stimulates and guides self-reflection on the role of class and the awareness of class in one's own life. The overall class framework—poor, working class, middle class, and owning class—is intuitively compelling in itself, and the individual essays bring that framework to life in a way that is even more compelling and memorable."

No Country: Working-Class Writing in the Age of Globalization (Columbia U.), Sonali Perera
Arguing for “a rethinking of the genre of working-class literature,” Sonali Perera focuses on a variety of international authors including: Indian writer and bonded-labor activist Mahasweta Devi; South African-born Botswanan Bessie Head; Dabindu, the collective signature of a group of garment factory workers and feminist activists in Sri Lanka; Sri Lankan Tamil/Black British writer and political journalist Ambalavaner Sivanandan; and Tillie Olsen. By connecting anticolonial and postcolonial fiction to the literary radicalism of the 1930s and the “feminist recovery projects of the 1970s,” Perera hopes to present “a new portrait of the twentieth century’s global economy and the experiences of the working class within it.” Ellen Rooney calls it a “timely, intellectually ambitious, and original piece of work,” and says: “It hopes both to reinvigorate critical interest in a complex genre/period category and, in the same movement, to provoke new thinking about such major categories as class, history, and literature itself.”

The Walmart Republic (Mongrel Empire Press), Quraysh Ali Lansana & Christopher H. Stewart
Two poets, one black, one white, but both originally from the American Bible Belt and now well-travelled across a diverse American landscape, Quraysh Ali Lansana and Christopher Stewart engage in a unique collaboration in this book of poetry. Writing separately but in a dialogue that emphasizes both contrasts and harmonies, Lansana and Stewart share a notion of a “Walmart republic” where, as the Poets’ Quarterly explains, “chain megastores not only crush smaller shops but also take on a civic role: town hall, meeting place – shopping as public entertainment and engagement.” The poets create a wide range of characters who meet in this 21st century public square, exploited as both workers and shoppers, but devising their own worlds within the Walmartized one – and the poets react empathetically but differently to these make-a-day worlds. “These differences,” says Poets’ Quarterly, “do not create discord. . . Instead, Lansana and Stewart have created harmonic chords from their different lives and voices. The harmony reveals what remains, if not of uncomplicated beauty, then at least of humanity that has not entirely fled an America dominated by commercial interest.”
**All I Want Is a Job! Unemployed Women Navigating the Public Workforce System (Stanford U.), Mary Gatta**

This is a book that evaluates the federal Workforce Investment Act’s One-Stop Career Centers, which are supposed to combine an array of financial, educational, and employment resources for unemployed workers. Mary Gatta, an ethnographic sociologist, however, did her evaluation research from the bottom-up, going undercover at a New Jersey One-Stop Career Center and afterwards interviewing both jobless women and Career Center caseworkers. Gatta concludes that women are “particularly vulnerable in the current economy” because “they are routinely paid less than their male counterparts” and “are more easily tracked into available, low-wage work in sectors such as retail or food service.” While she found some success stories where “clients got intensive career counseling, new jobs, and social support,” she also found severe weaknesses in the new system, and recommends a series of changes in workforce policy as a whole as well as for the Career Centers.

**Life Interrupted: Trafficking into Forced Labor in the United States (Duke), Denise Brennan**

As this book makes clear, human trafficking into forced labor occurs not just among young women sex workers, but also among domestic workers, construction workers, farm workers and other low-wage jobs in the U.S. Based on first-hand accounts with trafficked women and men who have escaped their abusers, Denise Brennan examines the root causes of trafficking in “global economic inequities and under-regulated and unprotected workplaces that routinely exploit migrant laborers in the United States” and argues that “today’s punitive immigration policies undermine efforts to fight trafficking.” Morgan Spurlock says the book paints “a vivid and painful picture of the trauma and cruelty of forced labor and the struggle of these migrants to rebuild their lives afterward. These very personal histories shed light on lives in the shadows of our globalized economy. *Life Interrupted* is a must-read for anyone who cares about fairness and justice for workers.”
**The Chain: Farm, Factory, and the Fate of Our Food (HarperCollins), Ted Genoways**

The “chain” of the title refers to the overhead chains that convey dead pigs past meatpacking workers who disassemble each animal into various “pork products.” According to the publisher’s notes, “the chain conveyors that set the pace of slaughter have continually accelerated to keep up with America’s growing appetite for processed meat.” Investigative journalist Ted Genoways focuses on Hormel Foods and its most well-known product, Spam, to tell a broader story about the state of the meatpacking industry, including the growth of factory farms, the exploitation of immigrant labor and its impact on small towns in the Midwest, and the hazards these developments pose for consumers of pork and other meat products. Genoways interviewed hog farmers, local politicians and community activists, workers and union leaders, and the picture that emerges includes “sick or permanently disabled workers, abused animals, water and soil pollution, and mounting conflict between small towns and immigrant labor.” Tracie McMillan, author of *The American Way of Eating*, calls it “an unflinching, intimate portrait of America’s industrialized meat system, centered on pork but conveying lessons that go beyond it” and “a must-read for anyone concerned with our nation’s food system, and the phenomenal cost—animal, human, and environmental—of cheap meat.”

**Crucibles of Black Empowerment: Chicago’s Neighborhood Politics from the New Deal to Harold Washington (U. of Chicago), Jeffrey Helgeson**

Covering five decades of neighborhood politics from the 1930s through the election of Chicago’s first black mayor in 1983, *Crucibles of Black Empowerment* recounts the efforts of “housewives who organized their neighbors, building tradesmen who used connections with federal officials to create opportunities in a deeply discriminatory employment sector, and the social workers, personnel managers, and journalists who carved out positions in the white-collar workforce.” According to Clarence Lang, by chronicling “the community-based struggles waged by black Chicagoans against an unholy trinity of racial, class, and gender inequalities,” Jeffrey Helgeson “champions the durability of black Chicago’s pragmatic liberal tradition.” Eric Arneson calls *Crucibles* “a model study of black community politics and protest that should be required reading for anyone interested in Chicago’s—and the country's—troubled racial past.”
Brown in the Windy City: Mexicans and Puerto Ricans in Postwar Chicago (U. of Chicago), Lilia Fernandez

This book is described as “the first history to examine the migration and settlement of [both] Mexicans and Puerto Ricans” in a postwar Chicago that was undergoing social and economic transformations – including white flight, the Second Great Migration of blacks, declining industrial employment, and massive urban renewal projects. Carmen Teresa Whalen says of it: “With astute attention to the parallel trajectories and overlapping nature of Mexican Americans’ and Puerto Ricans’ histories, Lilia Fernández paints a rich portrait of neighborhood life, moving beyond broad strokes and the white-black racial binary.” Adrian Burgos Jr. calls Brown in the Windy City “a rich, historically-nuanced examination of the social, political, and cultural forces that . . . unveils how Puerto Ricans and . . . Mexicans disturbed the racial hierarchy and destabilized the rigid housing color line in Chicago.”

Making Good Neighbors: Civil Rights, Liberalism, and Integration in Postwar Philadelphia (Cornell), Abigail Perkiss

This book tells the story of the West Mount Airy neighborhood in Philadelphia and of its neighborhood association from the 1950s to the present. Against the tide of white flight, real estate agents’ manipulations, and the hostility of municipal officials, West Mount Airy became one of the few neighborhoods in the nation “where residents came together around a community-wide mission toward intentional [racial] integration.” The author, Abigail Perkiss, grew up and still lives in the neighborhood, and according to Kelly McFall: “Perkiss has both an instinctive sympathy for the residents of the neighborhood and a thorough understanding of the cultural, economic and demographic challenges facing the city. Her study reflects this familiarity while remaining analytically rigorous. As a bonus, she writes beautifully.”

Scalawag: A White Southerner’s Journey through Segregation to Human Rights Activism (U. of Virginia), Edward H. Peeples

Ed Peeples grew up working class and white in the 1930s and ‘40s in Richmond, Virginia, where he was taught both “the ethos and lore of white supremacy” and that “as the child of a wage-earning single mother, he was destined to be a failure.” Scalawag is Peeples’ account of how he became a “traitor to the race,” a civil rights activist and community organizer, and eventually a professor of preventive medicine and community health. David Roediger describes the book as both “a remarkably intimate account of a youth misspent learning how to be white and therefore how to ignore the miseries caused on both sides of the color line by segregation, poverty, and violence” and “an arresting personal and political account of the transformative power of freedom movements.” Jacquelyn Dowd Hall praises it as “a memoir that illuminates a whole landscape of local activism too often eclipsed by a popular narrative focused on a few iconic events and individuals.”
**Class Warfare: Class, Race, and College Admissions in Top-Tier Secondary Schools** (U. of Chicago), Lois Weis, Kristin Cipolione, & Heather Jenkins

Given its focus on elite prep schools, this study likely has little to do with working-class life, about which Lois Weis has written insightfully in the past. But the publisher’s notes may be interesting for Working-Class Studies nonetheless: “Drawing on deep and sustained contact with students, parents, teachers, and administrators at three iconic secondary schools in the United States, the authors unveil a formidable process of class positioning at the heart of the college admissions process. They detail the ways students and parents exploit every opportunity and employ every bit of cultural, social, and economic capital they can in order to gain admission into a “Most Competitive” or “Highly Competitive Plus” university. Moreover, they show how admissions into these schools—with their attendant rankings—are used to lock in or improve class standing for the next generation. It’s a story of class warfare within a given class, the substrata of which—whether economically, racially, or socially determined—are fiercely negotiated through the college admissions process. In a historic moment marked by deep economic uncertainty, anxieties over socioeconomic standing are at their highest. Class, as this book shows, must be won, and the collateral damage of this aggressive pursuit may just be education itself, flattened into a mere victory banner.”

**New Labor in New York: Precarious Workers and the Future of the Labor Movement** (Cornell U.), edited by Ruth Milkman and Ed Ott

With a higher rate of unionization among major cities and very high levels of income inequality, New York City today is home to a large precariat – “workers with little or no employment security who are often excluded from the basic legal protections that unions struggled for and won in the twentieth century.” Workers centers have been at the forefront in helping precarious workers fight back. This volume presents thirteen case studies of recent campaigns by workers centers and unions, “each of which is based on original research and participant observation.” Some of the campaigns studied involve taxi drivers, street vendors, domestic workers, and “middle-strata freelancers,” all of whom are excluded from basic employment laws. Other cases focus on supermarket, retail, and restaurant workers, who are nominally covered by such laws but who often experience wage theft and other legal violations. Still other campaigns are not restricted to a single occupation or industry. According to Jennifer Gordon: “As the labor movement continues to grapple with the new challenges of the twenty-first century, the case studies in this volume will offer both inspiration and valuable lessons.”
How to Jump-Start Your Union: Lessons from the Chicago Teachers (Labor Notes), Alexandra Bradbury, Mark Brenner, Jenny Brown, Jane Slaughter, & Samantha Winslow

This "how to" book by reporters for Labor Notes, the monthly chronicler of the rank-and-file labor movement in the U.S., uses the experience of the Chicago Teachers Union to show how union members can build their own organization within their union to shape the direction the union takes. It promises readers “will learn how to run for office, work with their communities, build a stewards network, train new leaders, run a contract campaign, and strike.” Steve Ashby calls it “a manual on how all unions can revamp to win justice, with lessons every union can apply to their own situation.” Available from Labor Notes.

What Did You Learn at Work Today? The Forbidden Lessons of Labor Education (Hardball Press), Helena Worthen

An experienced labor educator, Helena Worthen contends that to answer the vital questions workers face at work – questions like “How do workers make a bad job into a good job?” and “Where do they get the power to do their jobs right?” – they cannot do it “the way we learn at school, where people study alone, take tests, and succeed or fail as individuals.” Rather, the “lessons of labor education are learned collectively, through practice and discussion.” She goes through these lessons using illustrative case studies from factory workers, engineers, health care workers, teachers, and construction workers. The publisher promises: “This book is written for everyone who works from high school students to labor leaders. No previous knowledge of the labor movement required.”

In Solidarity: Essays on Working-Class Organization in the United States (Haymarket Books), Kim Moody

Kim Moody has been studying, participating in, and writing about the American labor movement for some four decades, including as one of the founders in the 1980s of the still lively monthly magazine Labor Notes. He is now a Senior Research Fellow at the University of Hertfordshire in England. This wide-ranging collection of his recent essays begins with one on “Marx’s Theory of Class and the World Today”; continues with two essays on what he calls “the rank-and-file strategy” that was and still is promoted by Labor Notes and several on recent organizing strategies; and ends with an epilogue on “Civil War, the ‘Great Recession,’ the Aftermath, and Beyond.” Both a big thinker and a reporter with a wide array of sources across the American movement, Moody has been designated by Robin D.G. Kelley as “one of the leading intellectuals of the labor movement.”
Tell Tchaikovsky the News: Rock ‘n’ Roll, the Labor Question, and the Musicians’ Union, 1942-1968 (Duke), Michael James Roberts

For more than two decades, the musicians’ union made a huge strategic mistake as it disdained rock ‘n’ roll as illegitimate music played by amateurs and never actively tried to organize this group of musicians. Michael James Roberts explains how the union undermined its own power because both leaders and rank-and-file members – most of whom were classical or jazz performers – had an elitist bias against rock ‘n’ roll and its creators and performers. According to the publisher, Roberts addresses “issues of race and class, questions of what qualified someone as a skilled or professional musician, and the threat that records, central to rock 'n' roll, posed to AFM members, who had long privileged live performances.” Stanley Aronowitz praises the book for “breaking down the categories of labor studies and aesthetics,” and Kathi Weeks calls it a “wonderfully engaging analysis of the class textures of popular music and the cultural politics of the labor movement.”

Book Reviews

Rebecca Schumejda, Waiting at the Dead End Diner (Bottom Dog Press, 2014)
By Nathaniel Heggins Bryant, Lycoming College

In Waiting at the Dead End Diner, poet Rebecca Schumejda draws on her decade-long waitressing experience to explore the “geography of fate” associated with working in a small-town diner. The collection is a poetical study of a familiar institution (in this case in upstate New York), and the people who frequent it. The poetry itself is drawn from the rhythms of ordinary, daily encounters between waitress and patron, cook and waitress, restaurant owner and staff. Through the collection’s narrator, we work the major holidays, wait on the same group of drunken college students, commiserate over unwanted pregnancies, and largely measure the day according to the tools of the trade:

453 plates
  376 bowls
  17 racks of cups
  8 racks of utensils
went through the dishwasher today
before it stopped working again (“Washing Dishes on the Dark Side of the Moon”).

But this is not to say that the poetry itself is tedious. Far from it.
One of the strengths of this collection is Schumejda’s ability to crystallize diner lingo as a dynamic poetry on its own. She helps us to understand what it feels like to be “in the weeds” (overwhelmed by orders and tables). She holds up waitstaff argot as an efficient, traditional shorthand wrought through generations of waitresses before her. “Order Up” is the finest, most compact example, reproduced here in its entirety:

On my way out,
I overhear
Edna shouting orders
to Tommy:
*Eddie’s usual.*
*A cowboy
with spurs for Al.*
*2 OE with crispy pigs
and whiskey down
for Mabel.*
And I know
everything is
fine with the world.

Impressive too, is how thoroughly the proliferation of work-related metaphors populate the collection, but these metaphors and figures of speech rarely feel forced, overwrought, or belabored. Take “Cashing Out” as an example. At a funeral for a beloved waitress, the mourners are “all waiting for her to kick / the funeral doors open with one foot and / carry in the remedy for our grief on plates, / stacked all the way up both of her arms.”

It is tempting to read the collection autobiographically. Certainly Schumejda’s experience informs the narrator’s voice. We follow her as she learns more about herself, the job, the cast of small-town coworkers and patrons that populate her poems, all characters (in the small-town sense of the word) that come and go and come in again. But it might be useful to think of the narrator as someone charged with gathering the collective wisdom of all waitresses who have ever served up a meal. The narrator has a name (a diminutive—“Beck”) and she is an individual with her own quirks and personality, but she also functions as a loremaster of the Diner Down the Street. She is a storehouse of kitchen slang, a poetical archivist of racial, ethnic, gender, and classist insults that are part of the common discourse of waitressing. She is politically cognizant, cringing every time the cooks call the two Pakistani kitchen-workers “Mexicans,” and she documents the casual sexism of patron and cook alike, at one point calling upon the workplace-forged feminism of a deceased coworker:
Before Lillian died
she told a man who kept
using cliché pickup lines
to ask me out, Not all
waitresses are looking
for someone to save them (“Coffee Steam and Pickup Lines”).

We follow the narrator poetically through a perspective that evolves about the work and the
diner. In early poems the diner is a trap; by the end of the collection, the narrator has left for
what turns out to be a brief sojourn to Alaska only to return to the diner, unable to escape the
pull of its orbit. This movement—advancement through repetition, revelation through tedium
(tedium that is often punctuated by surprise)—is one of Schumejda’s dominant aesthetic motifs
in Dead End Diner.

However, the narrator’s final return is not solely about her inability to resist gravitational pull, to
return to the comfortable if stultifying effects of service labor. This collection is not just about
being nickeled and dimed. Instead, that final return is informed by a deep love, appreciation, and
respect for the work and the people: the diner’s “counter congregation” of widowers, cat-ladies,
truck drivers on one side of the counter and the “family by vocation” on the other. Schumejda’s
appreciation of the work and the people put me in mind of other texts about waitressing—Mike
Rose’s chapter on his mother in The Mind at Work; the recent country song “Blowin’ Smoke” by
Kacey Musgraves; Jan Beatty’s waitressing poems—and her poetry is a worthy addition to this
constellation because it simultaneously affirms and also complicates our common-sensical ideas
about the job.

Elizabeth A. Armstrong and Laura T. Hamilton, Paying for the Party: How College
Maintains Inequality (Harvard University Press, 2013)
By Sara Appel, University of Pittsburgh

“College,” write sociologists Elizabeth A. Armstrong and Laura T. Hamilton, “is the
accumulation of many inequitable contests, in which the affluent have presumably
justified their position at the top of the heap.” And it would be difficult to find a
more convincing critique of college as an egalitarian project than Paying for the Party: How
College Maintains Inequality. Given that Armstrong and Hamilton conduct their research at a
large, “only ‘moderately selective’” Midwest state flagship university—which they refer to
suggestively as “MU”-- their conclusions are especially damning. Not only are state flagships
failing to make good on their ostensible commitment to serving as avenues to socioeconomic
mobility, but the “party pathway” is making it so that students from less privileged backgrounds
are increasingly better off skipping the big state “U” experience. Hungry for tuition dollars, such
schools now cater to the priorities of affluent out-of-state students who come “primed to party,”
which lowers the value of a flagship university education for those who need college most.
Gender is also central to this study, as the authors focus exclusively on a group of 53 women, mostly first-year students, housed on one floor of a “residence hall with a reputation as a ‘party dorm’” (6). The authors lived on the floor during the 2004-2005 school year, inaugurating the first of their five-year ethnographic and interview study of this cohort. Though Armstrong and Hamilton divide their research into an investigation of three discrete educational “pathways” that state flagship U’s tend to foster— party, mobility, and professional—they are most interested in how the party pathway intersects with, and compromises the viability of, these other two pathways.

The Greek system, not surprisingly, is central to both the dominance of the party pathway at MU and young women’s relationship to the “college experience” more generally. For women who get “stuck” in a party dorm (rather than those who choose to be there, who tend to be wealthy “socialites”), the pressure to participate in sororities and the frat party scene is immense (67). Greek life largely controls access to friends, sexual and romantic partners, and professional opportunities. Indeed, the language the authors use to describe the party pathway’s saturation of MU undergraduate culture is telling. Relative to dorm “isolates” who don’t make (or care to make) the Greek cut, they speak of a “vampire effect” where “social climbers sucked up the emotional energy on the floor” (104); and for party path women, Greek life exerted an especially “greedy” influence, demanding time, energy, and sacrifice of non-party-related priorities (i.e. academics).

The book’s evocation of vampiric socialites and Greek greed also underscores its greater relevance to conversations about class stratification in the U.S. In the post-college portion of the research, the authors contrast the employment prospects of affluent students with mediocre college records with those of both high and relatively low-achieving middle-class and working-class students (136-141; 169). Affluent students tracked into what the authors refer to as “easy majors” handily secured glamorous, “personality”-oriented jobs through their social networks and family connections. Though many of their positions were entry-level, these graduates could afford to live in the major metropolitan areas where one must be to succeed in such careers because their parents continued to subsidize their incomes. However, for party path students lacking connections and parent subsidies, middling GPAs and easy majors spelled a rude awakening post-college. Exposed to the energy-draining culture of the party dorm as well as a lack of institutional investment in all but the most high-achieving working-class students, those who came “motivated for mobility” seldom maintained this momentum (43). Consequently, students who left MU to pursue vocational degrees or specified training at regional or community colleges often fared better in the job hunt than those who stayed (168-179).

As compelling as Armstrong and Hamilton’s research is, their study could have been strengthened on a few significant fronts. Their reliance on market-based language— “positioning in labor and marital markets,” “human capital,” etc. — suggests that their criteria for what counts as post-college success may be limited by the logic of capitalism (10, 251). Moreover, though they do discuss “alternative” and other MU residence halls that can function as “protective
“segregation” from the Greek party scene for women of color, queer students, and others (18), an additional chapter featuring students from such communities could have provided a point of resistance to the assumption that Greek cultural hegemony overwhelmingly imperils the college experience for more marginalized students. Not once do we hear from a student who is willfully critical, in a politicized way, of Greek life or its trappings.

Ultimately, *Paying for the Party* suggests that the value of a college degree from a state flagship university may only be as good as the party. For the affluent, the party may never end; and everyone else, to varying degrees, is left nursing the hangover.

Kevin Corley. *Sixteen Tons*. (Hardball Press, 2014)

Review by Tim Libretti, Northeastern Illinois University

What does it take to bring a pot of water to boil, to light a lamp, to heat a home?

When read in light of this simple question, Kevin Corley’s novel *Sixteen Tons* pushes us to interrogate the humanity of the U.S. dominant culture’s values as they have historically been realized in the way we organize our economy to meet our basic collective needs, such as bringing the proverbial pot of water to boil. What stands out in Corley’s rich and intimate, yet epic, portrayal of working-class lives across generations as he narrates the larger history of class struggle in the U.S. coal industry from 1898 to 1948, is the constant violence and brutality workers and their families endured—and also engaged in. Indeed, the work can be read as a novelistic counterpart to Louis Adamic’s 1934 history *Dynamite: The Story of Class Violence in America* – though Corley focuses exclusively on coal mines and really brings the history to life with well-developed characters across classes, as he explores in layered ways the social, psychological, and historical factors that condition character and behavior. *Sixteen Tons* represents violent behavior on all sides, urging us to reflect on the circumstances in our class culture that foster brutality. The novel opens portraying the Virden Massacre of 1898 in which workers shot African Americans being brought in as strikebreakers. It then moves through particularly bloody landmark moments in U.S. labor history in the coal industry, including the massacre of striking workers in Ludlow, Colorado in 1914, the Battles of Matewan and Blair Mountain in West Virginia in 1920 and 1921, the Herrin Massacre in Illinois in 1922, up through struggles in the 1930s when workers organized the Progressive Miners of America as an alternative to John Lewis’s United Mine Workers union.

The violence is murderous, and it doesn’t simply punctuate this history; it pervades and indeed defines it. When reading the novel, I was reminded of Paula Gunn Allen’s
characterizing of Native American women’s writing as a war literature that has “articulated and rendered the experience of being in a state of war for five hundred years,” even if “non-Indians are largely unconscious of this struggle.” *Sixteen Tons*, in its representation of the relentless violence of class struggle, particularly against workers and their families, underscores that we can also accurately characterize U.S. working-class literature as similarly rendering the experience of living in a constant state of war, of being constantly under attack. And, certainly, U.S. culture as a whole is “largely unconscious” of this fact and history. One character in the novel, in commenting on the Battle of Blair Mountain, says, “Fifteen thousand of us there were, the biggest army on American soil since the War of Succession,” highlighting the magnitude and reality of this class war that rages on in our history and culture without acknowledgment. Part of Corley’s achievement is in making the class war visible in the most human of terms as we follow the lives of working-class families for the most part simply wanting to earn a living wage and live with and raise their families in loving and cooperative ways.

Corley’s representation of the Ludlow Massacre is particularly unrelenting, as we see the tent city where workers’ families live under fire from corporate-backed snipers and militia at all hours of the night, killing children and parents. Finally, the tent city is burned to the ground and the workers and their families are hunted. It is sheer brutality, and it makes us ask if this is really the best way we can devise for producing the energy to bring a pot of water to boil. As another character says, speaking of the mine bosses at Blair Mountain, “. . . they’re just sleek, dignified church-going gentlemen who would rather pay fabulous sums to kill men for wanting to join a union than pay those same men for delving into the subterranean depths of the earth and producing the wealth for them.” The novel makes visible and forces reflection on the murderous brutality towards workers, towards people generally, in our economic system designed to produce profit rather than meet human need. Typically, it is conceived that feudalism differs from capitalism in that it employs non-economic forms of coercion to extract value from workers while capitalism relies on impersonal market forces to determine wages and so forth. *Sixteen Tons* invites us to re-think capitalism by focusing on the brute violence employed by capital to reduce wages and production costs at the expense of worker safety. And it asks us to imagine a better, a more humane way to bring a pot of water to boil.
Center Reports

Texas Center for Working-Class Studies
Housed at Collin College in Plano, Texas, the Texas Center for Working-Class Studies will be hosting a conference on Working-Class Studies and Labor History at Collin’s Spring Creek Campus on Friday, April 10, 2015. For more information, visit the conference website at http://iws.collin.edu/lkirby/index.htm or contact Dr. Lisa Kirby at LKirby@collin.edu

Class Action
Class Action (www.classism.org) has had a year of growth and breakthroughs. In general, Class Action is reaching more and more people. The annual number of Class Action workshops tripled this year. The numbers are also way up on our listserv, in visitors to the Classism Exposed blog, in ‘likes’ on our Facebook page, and in literature sales from our online store.

Our second annual northeast First-Generation College Student Summit had 23 college programs and student groups as sponsors and participants. The third Summit, scheduled for March 2015, promises to be even bigger. We have launched UU Class Conversations project (http://www.uuclassconversations.org/), raising awareness of class diversity and classism in Unitarian Universalist congregations and organizations.

As Program Director Betsy Leondar-Wright hit the road to promote her new book, Missing Class: Strengthening Social Movement Groups by Seeing Class Cultures (Cornell, April 2014), Class Action sponsored 14 of Betsy’s workshops in 11 cities, including a weekend for Appalachian activists at the historic Highlander Center. Twelve of our 24 other trainers have learned the new workshop modules and co-facilitated them, greatly expanding the national reach of our new Activist Class Cultures Program.

At eight of the book tour stops, Betsy presented a Cross-Class Bridge Builder award to the local organization winning the most votes from people in that area as best exemplifying the ideal of raising the voices of working-class and poor people, working across class, and drawing on the strengths of all class cultures.

A long-awaited dream of our late co-founder Felice Yeskel is finally coming true: in December, Cornell University Press will publish Class Lives, Class Action’s anthology of 40 first-person stories by people all along the class spectrum. (See “Book Notes” in this issue of the WCSA Newsletter.)

John Beck, Our Daily Work/Our Daily Lives, Michigan State University
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 19th year in September. The year is off to a great start. Robert Morris kicked off the year with a talk on his book on the rise of the UAW at Briggs manufacturing in Detroit, Built in Detroit. Other fine talks so far this year have included work on the 1969 Charleston Hospital Strike, the 1937 Hershey Chocolate sit-down strike, and Cape Verdean
and African American women in skilled jobs in the textile industry. In coming weeks and months we will have presentations by Mike Honey on labor troubadour John Handcox; Eric Nordberg on worker housing for miners in Michigan’s copper country; Maria Cotera on the lives of Latina activists, and Peter Cole’s work comparing US and South African longshoremen.

Our recent photographic exhibit at the MSU Museum, “Detroit Resurgent,” which was co-sponsored by Our Daily Work/Our Daily Lives, is currently on display in Detroit at MSU’s center on Woodward Avenue. The exhibit, the work of French photographer Gilles Perrin, assisted by his wife Nicole Ewenczyk, is a body of portraits specifically created for the MSU Museum featuring people from all walks 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. The exhibit photographs, interviews and related essays are in a new book of the same name, Detroit Resurgent, published by Michigan State University Press in April of this year. For more on the book, go to http://msupress.org/books/book/?id=50-1D0-3435#.UxelRM55GUI.

We are nearly two-thirds through our yearlong campus and community-wide conversation, exploration, commemoration and celebration of two key anniversaries – the 60th anniversary of the US Supreme Court decision in Brown vs. School Board, which ended discrimination based on race, religion, national origin, and gender. Our Daily Work/Our Daily Lives has had and will have a number of events in the 2014 calendar year which reflect on the themes of “60/50,” including our Fall 2014 brown bag series and two exhibits, one of Chilean arpilleras done during the Pinochet regime (many based in labor and workplace struggles) and an exhibit of Chicano/Latino posters from the United Farmworker drives for justice, the fight for Puerto Rican independence, and the Brown Power movement. We are also co-sponsoring a MSU Museum exhibit on Latino workers in the auto industry and two films in the upcoming East Lansing Film Festival.

Planning is underway for a major Fall 2015 semester work-themed writer series co-sponsored with MSU’s Poetry Center and a MSU Museum exhibit on maritime trade and worklife to be held in conjunction with the 40th anniversary of the Lake Superior sinking of the ore carrier Edmund Fitzgerald. In addition, Our Daily Work/Our Daily Lives has recently launched a website, still in construction, to commemorate the centenary of the birth of labor painter Ralph Fasanella; you can check out the site at www.Fasanella.org.

Chicago Working-Class Studies
Chicago Working-Class Studies is preparing to host a mayoral candidates’ forum, Election 2015: Chicago’s Working People and the Mayor’s Race. All mayoral candidates will be invited to attend, including current Mayor Rahm Emmanuel, to discuss their positions on important issues for Chicago’s working class. Questions for the candidates will be prepared by faculty and activists from several universities and local workers’
campaigns. The event is scheduled for 3 to 5 pm Friday, November 21, at the University of Illinois at Chicago. CWCS is sponsoring two book talks this Fall – one on The Walmart Republic, a book of poetry by Quraysh Ali Lansana and Christopher Stewart, in September co-sponsored with the Guild Complex, and one on Jeffrey Helgeson's new book, Crucibles of Black Empowerment: Chicago’s Neighborhood Politics from the New Deal to Harold Washington, October 23 co-sponsored with the St. Clair Drake Center for African and African-American Studies at Roosevelt University.

Center for Study of Working Class Life - SUNY Stony Brook

Our How Class Works 2014 conference was the largest and most international yet. Over 250 people attended. Nearly 200 people presented in over 50 sessions, including 38 presenters from 20 countries outside the United States. Many graduate students presented. The full conference report, as well as a conference photo slide show, videos of almost all sessions, and links to many papers presented are available on the conference Website: http://www.stonybrook.edu/commcms/workingclass/hcw2014.html The How Class Works 2016 conference will be held at Stony Brook June 9-11, 2016. The call for presentations will go out beginning in the spring of 2015.

The Center is inaugurating a Distinguished Lecture in Working Class Studies series, jointly sponsored with the College of Arts and Sciences. Initial funding has been provided by now-former CAS Dean Nancy Squires, a consistent supporter of the Center's work. We hope to establish similar relations with our new CAS Dean, Sacha Kopp, who has come to Stony Brook from the University of Texas, Austin. The Center has released a new 9-minute video, "Iraqi Marshes: Beauty and Civilization in Danger" www.stonybrook.edu/workingclass. The Center's Website also features a photo slide show from the September 21, 2014 People's Climate March in New York City, featuring many of the labor contingents in the march.

We welcome Deng Yuanyuan, a fifth-year economics graduate student, as the Center's graduate assistant this year and thank Gregory Rosenthal for his service in that position last year.
Call for Annual Award Submissions

The Working-Class Studies Association (WCSA) invites nominations (including self-nominations) for awards covering the year of 2014. 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, 2014 and December 31, 2014.

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, 2015**. Submit nominations to:

Barbara Jensen  
3435 Columbus Avenue South  
Minneapolis, MN 55407  
bjensen@umn.edu

For more information and electronic submissions, contact Barbara Jensen, WCSA Past-President, at **bjensen@umn.edu**

Winners will be announced at the 2015 WCSA conference in Georgetown, Fighting Inequality May 28-31. Winners will receive free conference registration and a plaque.