President’s Report

Dear Members,

Welcome to the WCSA Newsletter for Fall 2015. I wrote to you in September to put down some priorities for the next year, and would like to take this opportunity to follow up.

1) I’d like to make building membership a priority over the next year. I’d like to hear what you all think but I have some ideas. These include using the website more effectively to recruit; personal approaches to people we know; being far more effective in marketing ourselves at our various conferences. Compare LAWCHA with us at the Georgetown conference where they had a stall everyday promoting the organisation, plenty of recruitment material. Going forward we can potentially use the new journal (see below) to promote the membership and the field. We could create a really eye-catching flyer/poster that people can download with details of membership, as our last leaflet is now out of date. I would like to continue the excellent work we have done in attempting to reach out to new, especially young members. Of course, retaining existing members is also really important. Please renew your membership as early as you can and if you don’t already, and can afford it, consider taking out the three year membership.

2) Website. Our problems with our previous website have now been solved. The website is now active at: https://wcstudiesassociation.wordpress.com

Please try and spread this address as widely as you can. We are looking to add content in the coming year and appreciate your patience as we worked to create a less vulnerable site. I would really like to thank president-elect Michele Fazio for continuing the hard work she has put in to getting us back up online. We really need more help with the website, so if you are interested please contact me.

3) Australian members Sarah Attfield and Liz Giuffre are progressing with creating a new electronic journal for working-class studies. Members with long memories will know this has been discussed before, but Sarah and Liz have put forward a practical and thoughtful proposal which your Steering committee has excitedly endorsed. We hope to have the first edition out in the first half of the coming year.

4) How Class Works at Stony Brook will be our 2016 event; deadline for submissions is 9th December. Contact the conference organisers at:


We are actively working on identifying a venue for 2017. We would really like to hear from members interested in serving on future conference committees and potentially hosting a WCSA conference at your institution.

With Best Wishes
Tim Strangleman,
President
Working Class Studies Association
t.strangleman@kent.ac.uk
Treasurer’s Report

As the new treasurer for the Working-Class Studies Association, I wish to thank Cherie Rankin, our former treasurer, for all that she did to accomplish the transition of funds and paperwork. The treasurer position is a two-year term; Cherie held the position for two terms. Her efforts on behalf of the WCSA were considerable over that time.

WCSA has a combined balance of $22,803.61 in our checking account and in our PayPal account. We expect a payment for $6,727.81 this month as part of a three-way split of the proceeds of $20,183.43 (the other parties including LAWCHA and the Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor) based on our participation with them in the 2015 conference, “Fighting Inequality: Class, Race, and Power.”

Donations to the Travel Grant Fund assist participants who are in need to attend our annual conference. You may donate $10.00 through PayPal. You may donate more if you mail a check directly to my address below and earmark it for the Travel Grant Fund for the 2016 conference at SUNY, Stony Brook, NY. Funds are also used for our Young Scholars and Activists Initiative that supports conference attendance and the participation of scholars, activists, and organizers early in their careers whose work has the potential for advancing Working-Class Studies as a field. My address is:
Ken Estey, WCSA, PO Box 250827, New York, NY 10025
You may also contact me at kenestey@yahoo.com 646.662.3594.

Secretary’s Report

Elections and Current Officers:

On July 1, the Elections

Committee reported the results of the 2015 elections:

Steering Committee

President:
Tim Strangleman
U. of Kent, UK

Past President:
Christie Launius
U. of Wisconsin-Oshkosh

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

Secretary:
Courtney Maloney
Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design

Treasurer:
Ken Estey
Brooklyn College

At-large members:
Matthew Kendrick
William Paterson U.
Tim Libretti
Northeastern Illinois U.
Sara Appel
Independent Scholar Katherine Kidd
U. of Pittsburgh
Initiatives:
The Steering Committee received a proposal by Sarah Attfield and Liz Giuffre for an electronic journal for working-class studies. The committee responded enthusiastically to the proposal.

Conference Matters:
Our 2016 event will be the How Class Works conference at Stony Brook, June 9-11. The CFP is in circulation, and the deadline for proposals is December 9, 2015. The venue for our 2017 gathering has yet to be identified.

Website and Outreach:
The new website is up and running at: https://wcstudiesassociation.wordpress.com. The communications committee invites volunteers who are interested in helping with the site.

Member News

Book Notes

*Joelito’s Big Decision / La Gran Decision de Joelito* (Hard Ball Press), written by Ann Berlak and illustrated by Daniel Camacho

Written in English and Spanish, this children’s book (ages 6-12) uses the Fight for 15 campaign among fast-food workers to spin a tale that makes social justice a matter of personal decision. Joelito is a 4th grader who loves hamburgers at MacMann’s restaurant. One Friday evening he is confronted with a workers’ picket line that asks customers to support their demands for a living wage by foregoing their Mac burger. As the publisher’s notes say: “The invisible becomes visible as Joelito begins to see that his best friend’s family cannot afford the basic things he takes for granted every day because of the low wages MacMann’s pays their workers.” Should he enjoy his Friday-night burger as usual or stand with his friend on the picket line? It may sound like an easy decision to you, but you’re not a 4th grader with a voracious appetite!

*Smokestacks in the Hills: Rural-Industrial Workers in West Virginia* (U. of Illinois), Lou Martin

Billed as a corrective to the idea that industrialization is strictly an urban phenomenon, this book tells the story of steel and pottery workers in rural Hancock County, West Virginia. What makes their story different is the access to land in and around the steel and pottery towns, access that allowed them to preserve and develop their rural habits and culture. According to the publisher, Martin assesses the strengths and weaknesses of this rural working-class culture with its intense localism and seemingly passive culture of “making do,” showing how it facilitated a political and cultural conservatism at the same time that it “allowed workers to adapt to the dictates of industrial capitalism . . . on their own terms.” Labor historian James Green says it is “a path breaking book . . . deeply researched and expertly crafted.” Another reviewer calls it “a wonderful book – a sad story that somehow heartens.”

*Vanishing Eden: White Construction of Memory, Meaning, and Identity in a Racially Changing City* (Temple U.), Michael Maly and Heather Dalmage

This book is focused on “the experiences and memories of whites who lived in Chicago neighborhoods experiencing racial change during the 1950s through the 1980s.” The publisher describes it as “a blend of urban studies and whiteness studies” that shows how “race is central to the ways social institutions such as housing, education, and employment function” to shape neighborhood life. It analyzes how “the shifting social, economic, and racial contexts . . . at the local and
national levels shaped organizing strategies of those whites who chose to stay as racial borders began to change.” The book, as a work of both sociology and history, is distinctive in “examining how young people made sense of what was occurring, and how this experience impacted their lives.”

_Apology to the Moon_ (Bat Cat Press), Jim Daniels

Working-Class Studies pioneer Jim Daniels has published his 15th book of poetry, following last year’s book of related short stories _Eight Mile High_. It isn’t clear from the publisher’s notes why Jim thinks the moon needs an apology, but we do find out that the new poems are focused on “the life of a man from his college days to fatherhood.”


Social Gospel Christianity of the sort that Pope Francis has recently been drawing the world’s attention to is commonly thought to have it roots in the U.S. in the early 20th century teachings of middle-class ministers, seminary professors and social reformers. This book digs into the vibrant working-class politics of late 19th Century Chicago to show that it was blacksmiths, glove makers, teamsters, printers and their like who initiated “heated debates over the implications of Christianity for industrializing society.” They also advanced “theological critiques of laissez faire capitalism and protested ‘scab ministers’ who cozied up to the business elite.” Rather than inventing Social Christianity, middle-class preachers and theologians were reacting to working-class thought. According to the publisher, “[Workers’] criticisms compounded church leaders’ anxieties about losing the poor, such that by the turn-of-the-century many leading Christians were arguing that the only way to salvage hopes of a Christian America was for the churches to soften their position on ‘the labor question.’ As denomination after denomination did just that, it became apparent that the Social Gospel was, indeed, ascendant—from below.”

_One of Us_ (Gallery Books), Tawni O’Dell

Kirkus Reviews says of this new Tawni O’Dell novel: “Personal demons, childhood traumas and class warfare add up to a gritty tale of vengeance.” One class war is within Dr. Sheridan Doyle – a well-groomed, TV-friendly forensic psychologist who is the Philadelphia District Attorney’s favorite profiler of twisted killers but who is also “still Danny Doyle, the awkward, terrified, bullied boy from a blue-collar mining family, plagued by panic attacks and haunted by the tragic death of his little sister and the mental unraveling of his mother years ago.” Another class war – fought long ago when a group of miners was publicly executed in Lost Creek, Pennsylvania -- is renewed when Dr. Doyle returns to his home town there at the same time as Scarlett Dawes, whose family owned the mines and was responsible for the hangings. The _New York Times_ reviewer called it a “fearless exploration of the line between mental illness and true evil.”
Common People: In Pursuit of My Ancestors (U. of Chicago), Alison Light

Originally published in England with a different subtitle, Common People is an uncommon book—“a family history but also a new kind of public history” and a meditation on history itself and why we crave knowledge of our ancestral roots as if it might tell us something about ourselves. Alison Light is from a working-class family in Portsmouth, but her relentless digging in archives all over England allows her to trace nearly 200 years of her family as servants, sailors, farm workers, bricklayers, factory hands, shopkeepers, and more. Mostly they are “migrants who travelled the country looking for work,” and Light is somehow able to make them come alive, as individuals and as a complicated string of related families, often from the barest of details in census records and local history archives. The London Times reviewer said, “Light writes beautifully . . . Common People is part memoir, part thrilling social history of the England of the Industrial Revolution, but above all a work of quiet poetry and insight into human behavior. It is full of wisdom.”

South Side Girls: Growing Up in the Great Migration (Duke U.), Marcia Chatelain

Focused on the first Great Migration of African-Americans to Chicago, from 1910 to 1940, Marcia Chatelain adds an entirely new aspect to a story that has tended to be told from the viewpoint of adults, especially men. She argues that black “parents’ and community leaders’ anxieties about urbanization” led black social scientists, urban reformers, journalists and activists to formulate “a vulnerable image of urban black girlhood that needed protecting.” As a result, “Girls shouldered much of the burden of black aspiration, as adults often scrutinized their choices and behavior, and their well-being symbolized the community’s moral health.” Through interviews and a trove of the girls’ letters, Chatelain explores these girls’ experience of the migration and how they reacted to their parents’ and their community’s expectations.

Salvatore and Maria Finding Paradise (Bottom Dog Press), Paul L. Gentile

Salvatore Ciccone left Italy in 1902 as a young man and found work in the mines of Colorado, where he also met and married Maria Grosso. When things go badly at the mines, they move to Aliquippa, Pennsylvania, in the Pittsburgh area, where Salvatore found work in the steel mills. Salvatore and Maria raise five children and “create community despite hardship, making their own private paradise.” Karen Kotrba calls Paul Gentile’s book about them “a compelling read . . . so dense with small, powerful moments you will be impelled to seek out stories from your own forebears.” “Through fine writing and a remarkable level of research . . . Gentile has created a work that richly honors those who came before.”
How the Other Half Ate: A History of Working-Class Meals at the Turn of the Century (U. of California), Katherine Leonard Turner

This book, according to the publisher, is “an unprecedented . . . study of the changing food landscape in American working-class families from industrialization through the 1950s.” Around 1900 working-class families spent about one-half of their income on food, and Katherine Turner begins her book by challenging the reader to imagine: “Imagine how carefully you would buy and cook your food if you spent so much on it: looking for bargains on wilted vegetables and stale bread, walking an extra mile to buy meat at a lower price, fastidiously saving leftovers to make soup. Would you try growing your own vegetables or raising chickens, or would you use that time to work longer hours and earn more money?” Besides either/or decisions like this, working-class families had to invent new ways to cook, combining their various cultural heritages with different tools and foods than were available where they came from, whether as immigrants from other countries or the U.S. countryside. The publisher says How the Other Half Ate “delivers an engaging portrait that shows how America’s working class, in a multitude of ways, has shaped the foods we eat today.”

Voices from the Appalachian Coalfields (Bottom Dog Press), Mike and Ruth Yarrow

Mike and Ruth Yarrow have taped interviews with miners and mining families for many years and have “transcribed” their interviewees’ words into the form of poems. Along with photographs by Douglas Yarrow, the resulting book is a “powerful, compelling collection,” according to Jim Daniels. “These voices have a lot to say about mining life specifically, but also about work and love, and how we all try to balance those things in our daily lives. Their clarity and authenticity, their authority and earned wisdom, and above all, their passion, demand our attention.”

Fields of Resistance: The Struggle of Florida’s Farmworkers for Justice (Haymarket Books), Silvia Giagnoni

Silvia Giagnoni explains in her Introduction that her book is more about Immokalee, Florida, and its people than it is about the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW). It chronicles a 7-month period in 2007-08 during which she lived there, observing events and interviewing people. But the coalition of farm workers who plant and harvest tomatoes in the expansive fields surrounding Immokalee – mostly migrants from all over Latin America, some “legal” some not -- are at the center of her story. And during the time Giagnoni was there, the CIW was in the middle of its campaign to get Burger King to commit to paying the farm-owners more per tomato if they passed the money on to the workers in increased wages. The CIW’s nationwide boycotts eventually forced Burger King as well as McDonalds and Taco Bell to recognize their demands for workers’ rights. Though focused more on “the difficult working conditions and horrifying living conditions” of the workers rather than the campaign, the book must have a lot of how-to as well. Eric Schlosser, for example, says: “In the absence of government that cares about the people at the bottom, here’s a way to achieve change.”
The Tumbleweed Society: Working and Caring in an Age of Insecurity (Oxford U.), Allison J. Pugh

The animating question of this book, according to the publisher, is: “When people no longer expect commitment from their employers, how do they think about their own obligations?” Based on 80 in-depth interviews with parents who have varied experiences of job insecurity, Allison Pugh seeks to understand how contingency at work affects relationships outside of work, especially within our families. Pugh provocatively asserts in her Introduction: “As long as the debate about job insecurity focuses on its effects at work and is largely silent about its impact on intimate life, we will misunderstand the challenges of commitment at home, where gender traps of dependency and disadvantage offer few good options. Our silence about these effects allows employers—and the increasingly hands-off state—to get off scot free.” Barbara Ehrenreich says the book “offers a subtle, brilliant look at how people craft a sense of ethical purpose in an era of laissez-faire institutions, where the community has little to offer and financial security can vanish overnight. It’s also a riveting read, rich with fascinating human stories.”

Wanted: Good Family (Bottom Dog Press), Joseph G. Anthony

Joseph Anthony’s fifth novel in the past decade takes its title from a want ad in 1948: “Wanted: a good family for a Scott County, Kentucky tenant farm.” The plot involves Rudy Johnson and his African-American family answering the ad and deciding to move from nearby Lexington, only to find the farm owner wasn’t expecting a good family to be “colored.” One reviewer says: “The book is masterfully written and well-grounded in Kentucky history and mannerisms. It explores issues of race, class, relationship and the potential for change that are as relevant today as they were when this story takes place more than six decades ago.”

Company Towns of Michigan’s Upper Peninsula (Arcadia Publishing), Christian Holmes

At one time company towns—where “a worker’s boss did extra duty as landlord, store owner and constable”—lined the shores of Lakes Michigan and Superior in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula. The town of Simmons, for example, was named after the furniture company—and Henry Ford owned several towns that served his auto plants further south in the state. This book is about those towns, then and now. John Beck of Michigan State University says: “[Holmes] has done a great job weaving together the stories of a number of mining, timbering and other industry-based towns across Michigan’s sparsely populated land above the Mackinac Bridge. He lays out the chapters, sometimes on individual towns and sometimes on regions, chronologically; this is a masterful way to tell the story since the notion of company town really changes with time and builds on earlier experience.”
Detroit 67: The Year That Changed Soul (Clayton Publishing Group), Stuart Cosgrove

This book takes the reader month by month through 1967 in Detroit – a year when the Supremes broke up and Motown Records imploded against a background of escalating war in Vietnam, police corruption, urban riots, and the rise of both the proto-punk band MC5 and the Revolutionary League of Black Workers. According to John Beck, the book reveals “the huge intersection” of the auto shop floor and the Motown Sound. “Many of Detroit’s male Motown and other Soul label artists worked at Ford or Chrysler or other auto employers before changing into their group outfits to sing in Motor City nightspots.” According to the book, “The year ends in intense legal warfare as the threads that bind Detroit together unravel and leave chaos that scars the city for decades to come.”

Gender and Leadership in Unions (Routledge), Gill Kirton and Geraldine Healy

This collection of essays assesses the state of women in labor unions in the U.S. and the U.K., where women workers now make up 40% and 50% of all union members respectively and more women than men are joining unions in both countries. The authors argue: “There is a compelling argument on social justice grounds for unions to bargain and campaign vigorously at a variety of levels for improvements on behalf of women...The feminization of the labour market in recent decades means that there is also a business case for unions to develop and sustain gendered policies of attraction and retention.” According to reviewer Jane LaTour, the book finds some progress has been made, but for the most part women unionists are “still peddling over the same ground” as women workers detail exclusionary experiences in a wide variety of unions in both countries and “the litany of these behaviors is long and familiar.” But LaTour says the book offers “plenty of insights” and should be “part of the tool kit for workers crafting novel approaches to challenge their working conditions.”

Struggle for the Soul of the Postwar South: White Evangelical Protestants and Operation Dixie (U. Illinois), Elizabeth Fones-Wolf and Ken Fones-Wolf

Operation Dixie was the CIO’s major effort to organize workers in the South in the immediate postwar years. The organizing drive – facing employer intransigence, repression by local authorities, public opposition, white racism, and anti-Communism – failed miserably. But the CIO unions had faced all that in the north as well while meeting with considerable success. This book focuses on the role of religion and the culture clash between union organizers and white workers in the South. Here’s how the publishers sum up the book: “The authors’ nuanced look at working class religion reveals how laborers across the surprisingly wide evangelical spectrum interpreted their lives through their faith. Factors like conscience, community need, and lived experience led individual preachers to become union activists and mill villagers to defy the foreman and minister alike to listen to
organizers. As the authors show, however, all sides enlisted belief in the battle. In the end, the inability of northern organizers to overcome the suspicion with which many evangelicals viewed modernity played a key role in Operation Dixie's failure, with repercussions for labor and liberalism that are still being felt today.”

*No Way Out: Precarious Living in the Shadow of Poverty and Drug Dealing (U. of Chicago)*, Waverly Duck

The publisher’s notes emphasize how this book “challenges the common misconception of urban ghettos as chaotic places” by showing how “residents are knit together by long-term ties of kinship and friendship and . . . base their actions on a profound sense of community fairness and accountability.” One reviewer, Megan Comfort, strikes a somewhat different note, however: “Through this lucid portrait of daily life forged under the unfathomably harsh conditions of poverty in America, we come to understand the individual and collective strategies people develop to bear the unbearable by creating a sense of order and community. Yet resilience and fortitude cannot conquer the powerful societal forces that keep generation after generation confined to these oppressive territories. *No Way Out* is a haunting, thought-provoking read that lingers long after we turn the final page.”

*Workers’ Guide to Health and Safety (Hesperian Health Guides)*, Todd Jailer, Miriam Lara-Meloy, and Maggie Robbins

Based on ten years of work and field-tested in a number of countries, this book is intended for workers, union and nonunion, to help them organize around issues of health and safety. According to Kim Scipes, it is “primarily oriented to those producing for world-market factories, particularly in developing countries,” but it is widely applicable to any workplace in its emphasis on grassroots organizing both at work and in the larger political arena. In addition to chapters on traditional H&S topics like ergonomics, chemicals, machine injuries, and falling objects, the book includes chapters on “working too much, too fast, for too little” and the health impacts of stress and mental health, of reproductive and sexual health, and of a decent place to live.
Book Reviews


Review by Allison L. Hurst, Oregon State University

During a very hectic summer, I have to admit that I read Jessi Streib’s book on cross-class marriages when I should have been doing other things. It was that compelling. Anybody interested in class, particularly the lived experience of class, will find this book hard to put down. There are excellent theoretical points and important empirical findings. Particularly pleasing was how she took to task those authors and researchers who would have us solve inequality by having the poor benefit by hanging out with the middle class. As her research illustrates, no amount of shoulder rubbing will override the “stickiness of class sensibilities.” Even in long-standing marriages, people’s sense of how to be differs by class origin. If nothing else, this book is worth reading because it makes that often-overlooked point.

There is more here, however. Sometimes the sheer terrain that Streib tackles overwhelms. Part III of the book, which comprises more than half of the text, surveys five “domains of married life” – money, work and play, housework and time, parenting, and “feeling rules.” Based on interviews with thirty-two middle-class couples of different class origins (specifically one partner who grew up in a blue-collar family and one partner who grew up in a professional white-collar family), Streib attempts a comprehensive examination of the myriad ways class background affects “the intimate lives of married couples.”

I looked forward to reading each chapter and being surprised by what Streib’s interviews uncovered. Were these couples aware of the power of class in their marriages and their lives? Did they ascribe attraction, conflict, and parenting styles to their class of origin? Not so much. They *did* parent differently, have different orientations to time and savings, think about work and its impact on one’s identity very differently, etc. But it took Streib to connect this to class of origin. The couples were most aware of class differences in contexts where they were prompted to think about their parents and make comparisons, and less so in more personal and intimate domains such as self-identity, work ethic, and planning for the future. Couples were more likely to ascribe those differences to personality differences, or character. There are gems and insights in every chapter, although sometimes you may have to wade through an abundance of anecdotes to get to them. In chapter seven, Streib delineates a “laissez-faire” and a “managerial” parenting approach, somewhat similar to the framework Annette Lareau developed in *Unequal Childhoods.* Streib also shows how class complicates previously facile understandings of gender. For example, she argues that emotional displays are more anchored in class origin than gender. She also demonstrates that gender conflicts matter less to cross-class couples than styles and practices related to their particular class-of-origin. Of course, the couple may not recognize this. Which made me wonder if class consciousness might not also be a great therapeutic tool for troubled marriages, as well as a necessary ingredient for political mobilization against exploitation!

Throughout, Streib provides numerous examples and stories. Weeks later, I remember some of these stories very clearly, and will be able to pull them from my pedagogical knapsack when making a point in class. Although there are too many couples to remember by name (a hazard when doing qualitative research and trying to be as generalizable and thorough as possible), the stories will remain with you. The power of the past has a long reach indeed. It is time we all recognize this.
Watch out, Taylorism-loving business moguls, David LaBounty is back with a new batch of *Tales From the Cubicle*. Workers caught in the surreal environment known as corporate America have written about their work lives, and, surprisingly, the stories are not all laments. Just 90% of them.

Miles Stearns opens the book with a poignant tale about how for years he went to his father’s office after school, sometimes becoming lost in the chalk gray “maze of four floors” that seemed endless. “No one ever got upset that a little boy was walking around a large floor filled with boxes.” Eventually a kind worker would take him by the hand and lead him to his dad’s cubicle, where the child played games on his dad’s desktop computer.

Angela Sparandera traces the natural evolution of the starry-eyed new hire who is delighted with the corporate perks – “Free coffee!” - but in short order becomes disillusioned. She realizes, “This is it. Every morning you will wake up and come to this seat...You will wonder just how long you can hold out...And then it hits you: Your parents, the people in your office, society at large are not giant sold-out tools. They are you. Older.”

Jennifer Jackson writes about the joy of working on a Friday as she looks forward to a weekend away from the tedium of the job. Jen Knox describes enduring a vulgar, sexist co-worker’s degrading jokes and comments until the boss finally fires the creep, bringing her no solace, only sadness. William Verdigris writes about an ineffective manager who struggles to win financial support for his department amidst budget cutbacks and medieval inter-departmental jousting.

An amazing tale by Jennifer Butchart follows the travails of a young woman caught in the office gossip machine, which churns out stories that she is pregnant by a co-worker, who she knows is gay. She is not expecting, she has the flu. And Shawn Johnson writes eloquently about ... “a maze of sadness and sameness...of those who shuffle through the halls with the dread of what is to come,” while Ashley Borodin tells of her efforts to keep her hopes and dreams alive by secretly writing an anti-corporate book on company time. “I wasn’t really a compromised, hapless drone,” she tells herself. Finally she types out a letter of resignation on her ancient work computer. As she hits the send button, the old PC freezes and loses the data, for which she is deeply relieved, as she needs the job.

The stories are complemented by a bevy of poems that find humor, pathos and love among the sharp right angles and blank walls of corporate life. All in all, this slim collection is a delightful antidote to the blues readers may feel as they labor in the bowels of the profit-seeking machine. If you want to get even with your boss, slip a copy onto his desk; you may find him or her gone the next day.

Review by Jessica Wiederspan, University of Michigan

“A stable, two-parent family has become a luxury that only the well-off can afford,” write law professors June Carbone and Naomi Cahn (henceforth C&C) in *Marriage Markets.* While 25-34 year-old Americans who hold at least a bachelor’s degree are still likely to marry and raise their children in a two-parent household, marriage has “all but disappeared” among the most economically disadvantaged and is increasingly less common for those in the middle, defined as high school graduates without a bachelor’s degree (3). C&C argue that the key to understanding these trends is recognizing that growing economic inequality in the United States has led to the creation of class-stratified marriage markets where the ratios of marriageable men to women are not the same. They draw on the work of sociologists Marcia Guttentag and Paul Seccord to argue that these sex ratios actively shape the cultural norms around marriage in each market, which has resulted in elite markets where marriage is viewed as the norm, and less-advantaged markets where it is increasingly viewed as something not worth the effort (51).

A key reason economic inequality has increased (and, in turn, resulted in class stratified marriage markets) is the U.S.’s transition from an industrial to a knowledge-based economy. Deindustrialization wiped out many stable blue-collar jobs, which were mostly replaced by low wage positions in the service sector or high wage positions that required at least a college diploma. As a result, the salaries of the highest male earners have increased significantly since the early 1980s, further exacerbating the inequality between men at the top and bottom (64). For women, the widespread availability of contraception led to an increase in economic opportunity, and they were able to delay having children until they completed their education and/or began a career (40). This meant that women across the economic spectrum were able to increase their earnings while a significant number of men watched theirs decline. These trends have resulted in today’s class stratified marriage markets, which provide vastly different opportunities for men and women to form stable partnerships. C&C note that according to sex ratio theory, marriages are much more likely to materialize in markets where there are higher numbers of available men than women, as men are more willing to commit when the women are scarce. In markets where there are more women than men, however, men are less likely to commit and more likely to play the field or cheat, which often leads women to distrust them and reject marriage altogether (50-53). This means that women without a college degree face significant challenges in finding a man they deem marriageable, as women prefer to marry men who are employed (72) and there are fewer steady jobs available for men without college diploma. On the other hand, C&C argue that college educated women are advantaged in this system because employed men with college degrees outnumber women, which is why these men are willing to commit. They note that the top 5% of female earners are especially advantaged when it comes to marriage options: they are the only group whose rates of marriage have increased since the 1970s (14).

C&C acknowledge that sociologists, in particular William Julius Wilson, have been writing for decades about the challenges that economically disadvantaged women face in finding a marriageable partner. Yet they argue that their theory goes beyond this body of work by using sex ratios to explain the mechanisms through which economic inequality leads to contemporary
patterns of family formation (73). While their theory is complex, it does provide a convincing explanation for why so many people in the middle and bottom groups do not marry. It is less effective, however, in explaining the family formation patterns of college graduates, chiefly because, as C&C acknowledge, there are actually more women than men in this group (66). The authors assert that women still have an advantage because there are more (white) male college graduates who are working full time than women, but this explanation is not particularly convincing since it is unclear that high earning men limit their options to college educated women who work full time. In addition, it is unclear how well their theory describes the experiences of African American women with at least a college degree, as the authors acknowledge that they “radically outnumber” college educated black men (68).

A key strength of the book is C&C’s inclusion of several chapters on how the system of family law in the U.S. is designed to disadvantage adults and children who do not live in “traditional” two-parent families, a topic often not included in books about families and economic inequality. In addition, C&C provide a comprehensive list of suggestions for how the U.S. can decrease economic inequality and improve the circumstances of those who are unable to access the benefits of a two-income household. While many of their suggestions are unlikely to be realized in the current political climate, the list provides a useful starting point for evaluating the kinds of policies that would be most effective in improving the lives of families across the economic spectrum.
Report on 2015 joint WCSA/LAWCHA conference

Sherry Linkon

Fighting Inequality: Class, Race, and Power

Georgetown University’s Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor (KI) hosted the WCSA’s 2015 conference, a joint effort with the Labor and Working-Class History Association, with additional support from the Center for Working-Class Studies Legacy Fund. More than 500 people attended this year’s conference, which included presentations by students, activists, workers, and academics from a dozen countries. The conference planning committee brought together members of both organizations, with support from local volunteers and the incredible staff of the KI, especially Vail Kohnert-Yount and Jessica Chilin. Along with plenary sessions on the future of labor organizing, the relationship between high-stakes testing and inequality in K-12 education, and the arts as activism, participants had access to special tours of area labor archives, a DC labor tour, film screenings, and workshops. The conference banquet included music from Mike Honey and Elise Bryant, poetry from Sarah Browning of Split This Rock, and awards from both the WCSA and LAWCHA. Despite the challenges of an expensive city and lots of construction at Georgetown, the conference went smoothly, and the joint effort worked out well.

Center Reports

Stony Brook’s Center for Study of Working Class Life

- The Center welcomed Rev. William Barber, president of the North Carolina NAACP and founder of the Moral Monday Movement, to Stony Brook for the inaugural Distinguished Lecture in Working Class Studies on April 28, 2015, titled “The Moral Foundation of Worker Rights.” Since that was also Workers' Memorial Day, we included a special commemoration of the day at the start of the program. See the video of the full program here:


- The Center will host Bill Fletcher, Jr. to give the upcoming Distinguished Lecture in Working Class Studies in February 2016, as part of Black History Month. The event will be co-sponsored by Stony Brook’s Department of Africana Studies, Humanities Institute, and College of Arts and Sciences.

- The Center has issued its call for proposals for presentations at the How Class Works - 2016 conference (June 9-11, 2016 at Stony Brook). Proposals are due no later than December 9, 2015. See the call, including conference themes and instructions for submissions, here:


Please do not schedule other conferences or meetings on or around June 9-11, 2016.
The Center is hosting and helping to organize three events in the fall 2015 semester:

- A talk by Aida Touma-Silwan, Palestinian-Israeli Member of Knesset, first Palestinian to chair a standing committee of the Knesset;

- From The Color Line to the Carceral State, a conference;

- Progressive Visions for Long Island: Organizing for Success, a conference. Details on these programs are at <www.stonybrook.edu/workingclass>.

- The Center has formed a Steering Committee of Stony Brook faculty to guide its activities. They are: Robert Chase (history); Lori Flores (history); Nancy Hiemstra (Cultural Analysis and Theory); Zebulon Miletsky (Africana Studies); Christopher Sellers (history); Michael Zweig (economics).

- Information about the Center's activities, and updates on our activities, can be found at: http://www.stonybrook.edu/workingclass

Michigan State University’s Our Daily Work/Our Daily Lives

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 20th year in September.

Fall 2015 has been wonderful. We had cake to celebrate both the 20th year of our lecture series and the 200th brown bag. Don “Doop” Duprie returned to our brown bag line-up to do the 200th talk – “Making It in Detroit: Songs of Working Class Life” - a musical presentation which included songs from his forthcoming CD, “The Corridor.” Other presentation topics in the Fall schedule include the Sailors Union and Pacific annexation, General Motors's anti-union actions in the 1960's and 70's, “craftivism” against sweatshops and the early Detroit “open shop” movement at the dawn of the 20th Century among others.
Our MSU Museum exhibit, “Iron Hulls and Turbulent Waters: Ore Boats, Workers and Great Lakes Shipping” opened in mid-September and will remain open until January 24th. The exhibit has a variety of on and off-campus programs occurring during its tenure. The impetus for the exhibit is the 40th anniversary of the Lake Superior sinking of the ore carrier Edmund Fitzgerald and we will run a night time panel focusing on iron ore, lake shipping and the history of Great Lakes shipwrecks. We co-sponsored a reading by poet Cindy Hunter Morgan who has two poems each in this exhibit and in a companion exhibit on shipwrecks at the MSU Library; Ms. Morgan’s collection of Great Lakes poems, Harborless, is under contract with Wayne State University Press. We are welcoming Jim Brozek to the Museum to do both a gallery talk and a brown bag in our series; Brozek worked for six years as a winter laborer doing repairs on the ore boats and photographing the ships and his co-workers while he did the work. Twenty-four of Brozek’s photographs form the strong core of the exhibit.

Cindy Hunter Morgan’s reading was the first in the Fall 2015 semester work-themed writer series we co-sponsored with MSU’s Poetry Center. One pair of the subsequent writers and performers will focus on Appalachian work and culture. Nathan Bell, a former Our Daily Work/Our Daily Lives brown bag speaker and performer will return to the Poetry Center to do a joint appearance with his father, noted poet and former head of the Iowa Writers’ Workshop, Marvin Bell. Nathan Bell’s new CD which focuses on work, “I Don’t Do This for Love, I Do This for Love,” will be released soon in the US (it is already available in Europe).

Texas Center for Working-Class Studies

The Texas Center for Working-Class Studies hosted documentary filmmaker Anne Lewis for the Center’s annual Labor Day kick-off event. Lewis showed excerpts from her film ¡Ya Bastal! about the 1938 Texas pecan shellers’ strike. The Center is also gearing up for its annual conference, which will take place on Friday, March 31, 2016, at Collin College’s Spring Creek Campus. Scholars from all disciplines are invited to submit proposals; the Call for Papers is attached. For more information, please contact Dr. Lisa Kirby, Professor of English and Director of The Texas Center for Working-Class Studies, at LKirk@collin.edu.

New website on the class cultures of social justice activists; www.activistclasscultures.org, features the ideas from WCSA member Betsy Leondar-Wright’s book Missing Class: Strengthening Social Movement Groups by Seeing Class Cultures, second runner-up for the 2015 WCSA book award.

From grassroots community groups to international environmental nonprofits, from unions to anarchist collectives, groups rooted in different class backgrounds often have different approaches to activism. Leondar-Wright studied 25 social justice organizations and looked for class cultures and patterns within them. She found not only that class differences are a source of conflict within and between organizations, but also that understanding class cultures can be a major asset in working for progressive causes. The findings in the book, also taught in Class Action’s Bridging Activist Class Cultures workshops, are now available free online in the Activist Class Cultures Kit (bit.ly/classcultures.) The Activist Class Cultures Kit, full of animated videos, quizzes, tips and stories about real progressive activist groups facing class culture challenges, offers tools to benefit activists by helping them see and understanding class cultures.
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

The Texas Center for Working-Class Studies
Second Annual Conference

Living Legends Conference
Center Collin College, Spring Creek Campus Plano, Texas
Thursday, March 31, 2016

The Texas Center for Working-Class Studies, housed at Collin College, a two-year institution serving Collin County, is pleased to announce a one-day Working-Class Studies conference for interested scholars and students. The conference will consist of panels in a range of disciplines and on a variety of issues related to social class and labor issues, both historical and contemporary. The keynote speaker will be noted Working-Class Studies scholar Dr. Sherry Linkon, Professor of English at Georgetown University. Dr. Linkon is the author of several books, including New Working-Class Studies, Steeltown U.S.A.: Work and Memory in Youngstown, and Teaching Working Class.

Conference organizers invite scholars from all disciplines to take part in this conference and submit proposals for individual papers or full sessions. Graduate and undergraduate students, in particular, are encouraged to submit their work. Proposals for full sessions will also be accepted.

Potential topics might include:

- Working-Class Literature
- The Worker and the Modern Workplace
- Understanding Working-Class Studies
- The Future of Working-Class Studies
- Working-Class History
- Connections among Race, Class, and/or Gender
- Class Representations in the Media and
- Popular Culture
- The Complexity of Social Class
- The Pedagogy of Social Class

Those interested should submit an abstract of no more than 150 words to Dr. Lisa A. Kirby, Director of the Texas Center for Working-Class Studies and Professor of English, at LKirby@collin.edu, by January 29, 2016. Please write “WCS Conference Proposal” in the subject line. Abstracts should also include name, e-mail address, phone number, requests for technology, and a brief biography. For more information, please contact Dr. Kirby.
HOW CLASS WORKS - 2016

A Conference at SUNY Stony Brook

June 9-11, 2016

CALL FOR PRESENTATIONS

The Center for Study of Working Class Life is pleased to announce the How Class Works – 2016 Conference, to be held at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, June 9-11, 2016. Proposals for papers, presentations, and sessions are welcome until December 9, 2015, according to the guidelines below. For more information, visit our Web site at <www.stonybrook.edu/workingclass>.

Purpose and orientation: This conference explores ways in which an explicit recognition of class helps to understand the social world in which we live, and the variety of ways in which analysis of societies can deepen our understanding of class as a social relationship across the globe. Theoretical and historical presentations should take as their point of reference the lived experience of class in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, within nations and internationally. Presentations are welcome from people outside academic life when they sum up and reflect upon social experience in ways that contribute to conference themes and discussion. Formal papers are welcome but are not required. All presentations should be accessible to an interdisciplinary audience.

Conference themes: The conference welcomes proposals for sessions and 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 how the social lives of working, middle, and capitalist classes are structured by various forms of power; to explore ways in which class dynamics shape power structures in workplaces and across broader societies.

Class in an age of income inequality: To explore the implications and consequences of the growing income gap between top earners and the rest for the lived experience in class in different corners of the world.

Class, Community, and the Environment: To explore ways in which class informs communities and environmental conditions where people work as well as where they live; also to consider questions of “home,” community formation and sustenance, and environmental justice.

Class in a global economy: To explore how class identity and class dynamics are influenced by globalization, including the transnational movements of industry, capital, and capitalist elites; the experience of cross-border labor migration and organizing; and international labor and environmental standards.

Middle class? Working class? What’s the difference and why does it matter? To explore the claim that the U.S. and other developed nations have become middle class societies, contrasting with the notion that the working class is the majority; to unpack the relationships between the middle class and capitalist, working and other subordinate classes both in the developed and the developing world.
**Class, public policy, and electoral politics:** To explore how class affects public deliberations and policy in a variety of nations around the world, 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 cultures and subcultures transmit, sustain, and transform class dynamics around the world.

**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 – 2016 Conference:** We encourage proposals for panel sessions (three or four papers) and roundtables that bring diverse perspectives and experiences into dialogue: scholars with activists; those working on similar themes in different disciplines; as well as those working on similar issues in different parts of the world. Proposals for individual presentations are also welcome.

**Proposals for presentations must include** the following information [for session proposals this information must be included for all proposed presentations, as well as indication of presenters’ willingness to participate]: a) short descriptive title; b) which of the conference themes will be addressed; c) a maximum 250 word summary of the main subject matter, points, and methodology; 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 twenty-minute or four fifteen-minute principal presentations. Sessions will not include official discussants.

**Submit proposals** as an e-mail attachment to michael.zweig@stonybrook.edu or as hard copy by mail to the How Class Works - 2016 Conference, Center for Study of Working Class Life, Department of Economics, SUNY, Stony Brook, NY 11794-4384.

**Timetable: Proposals must be received by December 9, 2015.** After review by the program committee, notifications will be mailed by the end of January 2016. The conference will be at SUNY Stony Brook June 9-11, 2016. Conference registration and housing reservations will be possible after March 7, 2016. Details and updates will be posted at [http://www.stonybrook.edu/workingclass](http://www.stonybrook.edu/workingclass)

**Conference coordinator:**

Michael Zweig Director, Center for Study of Working Class Life Department of Economics State University of New York Stony Brook, NY 11794-4384 631.632.7536 michael.zweig@stonybrook.edu