President’s Report

Friends,

Working-Class Studies as we’ve constituted it in the Working-Class Studies Association never aspired to lead a working-class movement that would change the grinding inequalities of class power, resources, and opportunities in the U.S. But we have hoped to provide educational aid and comfort to such a movement by changing the discourse about class both in American higher education and among the broader public. At the moment prospects may seem dim both for a working-class movement and for changing the discourse about class into one that recognizes and even celebrates the existence, culture, and potential power of working-class people. But the prospects are not so dim as they might seem, and it helps to remember how bad things used to be. As C.S. Lewis once wrote, “day by day nothing changes, but when you look back everything is different.”

Looking back, I remember the late 1990s when I first discovered Working-Class Studies by going to a conference at Youngstown State University. I was in the final stages of publishing a book where I insistently referred to a current-day “working class” (and not just a class that had existed back in the days before almost everybody became “middle class”), and every time I used the term it felt like I needed to provide a rationale and argument for doing so. In speeches and casual conversation, I was constantly asked to define what I meant by “the working class,” and whatever definition I came up with tended to be picked apart for its lack of precision. I eventually stopped using any definition and just listed a string of examples of undeniably working-class jobs – and then threw the definitional challenge back at my challenger, asking them to define what they meant by “middle class.” This was an effective rhetorical response, but still I wondered why the mere use of the term “working class” seemed to engender such defensive resistance among educated middle-class folks. I had some (mostly nasty) speculations at the time, but I’ve stopped thinking about it because it’s been a while since I’ve encountered that kind of resistance. Now I can use the term, with shifting definitions and meanings depending on the context, without being challenged.

Though still not widely used in mainstream (educated middle class) discourse, “working class” can now be used there without the kind of defense required coming into the 21st Century. This is partly the result of a series of books since 2000: most importantly, Michael Zweig’s *The Working-Class Majority* (2001), *New Working-Class Studies* edited by John Russo and Sherry Linkon (2005), *American Working-Class Literature* edited by Nick Coles and Janet Zandy (2006), and now *Reading Classes* by Barbara Jensen (2012). All of these have been nurtured and given a broader audience by Working-Class Studies. But there are other streams of academic work that have contributed to the consciousness of a working class. One such stream includes the work of disciples of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu like Michele Lamont’s *The Dignity of Working Men* (2002) and Annette Lareau’s *Unequal Childhoods* (2004). Another is the discussion of why the white part of the working class doesn’t vote more Democratic engendered by Joel Rogers’ and Ruy Teixeira’s *America’s Forgotten Majority* (2000). These works, and many others published in this still young century, make compelling and substantive arguments that any understanding of American society that does not include a large and important working class is seriously distorted. That idea now has traction in academia. Not so long ago it didn’t.

Just as important for the awareness of a working class is that it has long had a kind of underground existence outside mainstream discourse – namely, in the working class itself. Since 1972
when the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) began asking the question, some 46% of people have consistently identified themselves as “working class,” about the same as self-identify as “middle class.” What’s more, in a 2006 favorability survey by the American National Election Studies, “working class people” were seen more favorably than all 30 other groups on offer – including “middle class people,” “poor people,” “business people,” and “rich people,” in that order. So some progress has been made on making the working class visible in academia and in the broader public. How about the prospects for a broad and powerful working-class movement? If you look just at union membership – which is lower as a percentage of the workforce than it has been in about a century – prospects look very dim indeed. But precisely because unions are under attack visibly and palpably as they have not been for more than 50 years, other forms of worker organization with new tactics and strategies are sprouting like weeds across the American landscape. There are the big highly visible events – the Wisconsin Uprising, Occupy Wall Street, the Chicago Teachers Strike, and the political mobilization of minorities and young people to elect Barack Obama twice. Now there are the Black Friday strikes by Walmart workers across the country, including earlier quickie strikes at Walmart warehouses. Workers centers have spread, organizing mostly immigrant workers who have now upped their game substantially with many new direct-action organizing campaigns, particularly around restaurants and the food chain. Domestic workers, car washers, cab drivers, retail and fast food workers are organizing campaigns for higher wages, respect, and improved working conditions without being formally certified as unions under the National Labor Relations Act. Many of these non-traditional campaigns started on their own, but now have important union support. Others are arms of progressive unions who are using their resources (money and people) to train and organize workers to take action here, there and everywhere on non-workplace as well as workplace issues – most prominently, living wage campaigns and direct action to stop homes from being foreclosed. Anything that organizes working people to defend themselves, protest, or advance their interests is fair game because the goal, for now, is to develop grassroots leaders, organizing skills, and a vibrant culture of organized collective action.

It’s not clear what role Working-Class Studies can play in this new upsurge of worker organizing, but we now have a bit of space in academia to work with. And it’s a discussion we urgently need to have. We will foster that discussion at our June 12-15 conference in Madison, Wisconsin, under the theme “Fighting Forward.” See you there.

~ Jack Metzgar

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**Treasurer’s Report**

Account balances:

- Checking Account: $3,417.37
- PayPal: $24,992.37
- Total: $28,409.74

Out of that total, we've had donations to the Travel Fund of $840. With the usual $2500 we allot for travel grants, the additional donations leave us $3340 to dispense for travel grants, to aid attendees in need traveling to the conference in Madison.

~ Cherie Rankin
Graduate Committee Report

As the incoming Chair of the Graduate Committee of the Working Class Studies Association, I would like to open by thanking my predecessor, Sara Appel, for all of the work and accomplishments of her tenure. With Sara’s having received her Ph.D. in Literature from Duke University in 2012, the Graduate Committee wishes her all the best in the next stage of her career. We are also happy to report, however, that Sara, rather than having decamped for parts unknown, has transitioned to a seat on the Association’s Steering Committee. We look forward to continuing to benefit from her scholarship and her commitment to Working Class Studies in the years to come.

Much of the Graduate Committee’s recent work has been devoted to preparing for the annual meeting of the WCSA, which will be held from June 12-15 in Madison, Wisconsin. With the recent closure of Youngstown State University’s Center for Working Class Studies, the recent or impending retirement of several leading figures within the Association, and an assortment of other factors, this summer’s conference takes place against a backdrop of momentous change. For this reason, a number of panels and other events are being planned in order to consider what measures might be taken to ensure the continued growth of Working Class Studies. These events will offer an excellent opportunity for graduate students to join the conversations that will help to shape Association policy. Below is a quick rundown of some of the events fitting this description.

Christie Launius, an Associate Professor and Director of Women’s Studies at the University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh and the editor of this newsletter, has organized a roundtable on the subject of mentoring. The guiding premise here is that the mentoring of graduate students and junior scholars by senior Association members represents a key to ensuring the growth and sustainability of Working Class Studies. To that end, discussants will weigh such issues as the professional needs of graduate students and junior scholars, the kinds of help and guidance senior Association members might be able to provide, and the possibility of establishing a formal mentoring program and what that might look like.

In addition to this, Sara Appel has organized a workshop around the ongoing plans to launch a blog from the Association’s official website, www.wcstudies.org. As Sara described in the previous edition of this newsletter, this blog is being envisioned as a space in which Working Class Studies scholars will share and discuss their writings, whether these writings be original works-in-progress, book reviews, or some other sort of pertinent essay. The hope is that such a blog could, by drawing together like-minded scholars from diverse disciplinary backgrounds, help to extend the degree to which the WCSA constitutes an abiding community. The hope is, in other words, that this blog will serve as a vehicle for sustaining the enthusiasm, camaraderie, and enrichment of the annual conference throughout the year. Again for reasons having to do with the long-term vitality of the field, the organizers of this project (the Graduate Committee being one of them) aspire to involve graduate students and junior scholars as much as possible on both the submission and administrative ends of this blog.

As a final note, I would like to also mention that a slot is being provided on the official conference itinerary for an informal graduate student meet-and-greet. I’ll be there to get everyone up-to-date on the topics mentioned above and probably some others, as well. If you’re a graduate student attending the conference, I hope that you can fit this event into your schedule. See you in Madison!

~ Mike Boyle
Member News


Gary Hicks has published a new book, Itching for Combat, with Vagabond Books.

Sonya Huber’s book Opa Nobody was released in paperback by the University of Nebraska Press. The book is a hybrid of memoir, research, and imaged scenes, put together as an attempt to engage a conversation with her dead anti-Nazi socialist labor-activist German grandfather about the ways to keep going and to thrive as an activist.

Lita Kurth’s creative nonfiction piece, "Pivot," about her working-class dad, was published in the anthology Becoming: What Makes a Woman. She is also interested in starting a creative writing caucus/subgroup to share info about places to publish working class work and especially agents friendly to working class themes. If you are interested, please contact her at lakurth@yahoo.com.

Bettina Spencer just received tenure and promotion to Associate Professor of Psychology at Saint Mary’s College.


Pam Sporn’s documentary film With a Stroke of Chaveta tells the unique story of cigars and literature in Cuba and Cuban emigre communities in the United States. The film is 28 minutes long and has English subtitles throughout. For more information about the film, visit www.gritoproductions.com.
Book Notes

**Cooking in Other Women’s Kitchens: Domestic Workers in the South, 1865-1960** (U. of North Carolina Press), Rebecca Sharpless

After slavery ended but while labor markets were severely restricted for both blacks and women, many African-American women went to work as “domestics” in white people’s homes. Among them were those who specialized in cooking, and these workers are the focus on Rebecca Sharpless’ examination of nearly a century of paid “women’s work” for other women. Starting with plantation account books and census records, Sharpless uses letters and memoirs from servants as well as Federal Writers’ Project narratives to reveal the work and family lives of these workers. She shows how “in the face of discrimination, long workdays, and low wages, African American cooks worked to assert measures of control over their own lives and to maintain spaces for their own families despite the demands of employers and the restrictions of segregation.” They also permanently changed and developed Southern foodways and culture. In the 20th Century as opportunities for other kinds of work developed, African-American women “chose to leave cooking for more lucrative and less oppressive manufacturing, clerical, or professional positions.” Oral History Forum says: "Sharpless offers an in-depth and complete portrait of African American cooks and the nature of their work and lives in this period. The cooks' voices are very compelling, and Sharpless does a good job of letting them . . . speak for themselves."

**The Production of Difference: Race and the Management of Labor in U.S. History** (Oxford), David Roediger and Elizabeth Esch

The history of workplace management in the U.S. and elsewhere has usually been portrayed as a relentless and rational search for efficiency, cost savings, and productivity – epitomized by Frederick Winslow Taylor’s monomaniacal “scientific management” and its disciplined pursuit of “the one best way.” The Production of Difference presents a very different history, with race, migration, and empire at its core. “Ranging from the antebellum period to the coming of the Great Depression, the book examines the extensive literature slave masters produced on how to manage and ‘develop’ slaves; explores what was perhaps the greatest managerial feat in U.S. history, the building of the transcontinental railroad, which pitted Chinese and Irish work gangs against each other; and concludes by looking at how these strategies survive today in the management of hard, low-paying, dangerous jobs in agriculture, military support, and meatpacking.” Rooted in the received wisdom of slave-holders, capitalist managers developed detailed racial stereotypes that purported to reveal what kinds of labor different racial and ethnic groups were best suited for and their relative value compared to others. David Roediger and Elizabeth Esch show that even in factories supposedly governed by scientific management theories, “the impulse to play races against each other, and to slot workers into jobs categorized by race, constituted powerful management tools to enforce discipline, lower wages, keep workers on dangerous jobs, and undermine solidarity.” Historian Michael Honey says the book “puts new light on how slavery and westward expansion helped to embed racial thinking in ‘labor management’ and . . . requires us to rethink root causes of the persistent perpetuation of racism in American life.”
Back to School: Why Everyone Deserves A Second Chance at Education (The New Press), Mike Rose

About 45 percent of college students in the United States today do not enroll in college directly out of high school, and most of those attend part-time while working full-time jobs. Mike Rose, the author of the classic Lives on the Boundary, The Mind at Work, and Possible Lives, turns his attention to these “nontraditional” collegians and the places that provide educations for them. According to the publisher: “Rose crafts rich and moving vignettes of people in tough circumstances who find their way; who get a second . . . or third . . . or even fourth chance; and who, in a surprising number of cases, reinvent themselves as educated, engaged citizens. Rose reminds us that our nation’s economic and civic future rests heavily on the health of the institutions that serve millions of everyday people—not simply the top twenty universities in U.S. News and World Report—and paints a vivid picture of the community colleges and adult education programs that give so many a shot at reaching their aspirations.”

Buoyancy on the Bayou: Shrimpers Face the Rising Tide of Globalization (Cornell), Jill Ann Harrison

Once a luxury food, shrimp is now a low-cost consumer staple, and most of the shrimp we eat today is imported from shrimp farms in China, Vietnam and Thailand. This flood of imported shrimp has devastated domestic shrimp fishers, particularly in Louisiana, and Jill Ann Harrison tells the stories of 50 of them in the small town of Bayou Crevette. Through these portraits of diverse individual shrimpers, she shows how they carefully calculate both economic and noneconomic costs and benefits as they figure out what to do. “Many willingly forgo opportunities in other industries to fulfill what they perceive as their cultural calling. Others reluctantly leave fishing behind for more lucrative work, but they mourn the loss of a livelihood upon which community and family structures are built.” Vicki Smith of the U. of California at Davis says the “stories of the shrimp fishers . . . are moving and told with great compassion [and] should be read by everyone who is concerned with globalization and its implications for our lived experiences.”

Conflicting Commitments: The Politics of Enforcing Immigrant Worker Rights in San Jose and Houston (Cornell), Shannon Gleeson

Under U.S. law basic labor standards apply to all workers regardless of their immigration status, but undocumented workers are vulnerable to exploitation by employers who can disregard those laws and selectively threaten the enforcement of immigration laws, which they are themselves breaking. Based on interviews with workers, community organizers, and government officials from all levels, Shannon Gleeson contrasts two immigrant gateway cities and their very different approaches to addressing the exploitation of these workers. Doris Marie Provine, author of Unequal Under Law, evaluates the book as “clearly written, insightful, . . . grounded in empirical investigation and focused on law as it is actually experienced by people.”
The Working Class in Mid Twentieth Century England: Community, Identity and Social Memory (Manchester U. Press), Ben Jones
Brighton, on England’s southern coast, is better known as a resort town for day-trippers from London, but it is a working-class city as well, and Ben Jones takes it as his focus for exploring the broader changes in English working-class life in the middle years of the 20th Century. As in the U.S., this was a period of dramatic improvement in the material conditions of life and of expansive public policy immediately after World War II. Slum clearance and massive new developments of public housing (called “council housing” in England) largely succeeded there, as did “socialized medicine.” And suburbanization transformed home life, leisure, and patterns of association in the working class. Based on research that combines life histories with contemporary social surveys and a fresh dive into archival materials, Jones shows the continuities in social networks and cultural practices, as well as in material poverty, during these transformative middle years of the last century.

The White Working Class Today: Who They Are, How They Think, and How Progressives Can Regain Their Support (The Democratic Strategist Press), Andrew Levison
The Democratic Strategist is an “insiders” political blog mostly by and for people with direct and continuing political and policy experience as operatives, staffers, researchers and think-tankers. It tries to foster discussion between progressive Democrats and what is left of the Clintonian “New Democrats” of the 1990s and to influence the programmatic ideas and political strategies of Democratic politicians and candidates. The progressive wing of the Strategist has long argued that Democrats can achieve a dominant majority if only they could “regain the support” of white working-class voters, not by appealing to their whiteness but to their economic class interests. Andrew Levison, author of a book titled The Working-Class Majority in the 1970s, has been a leader in this wing, publishing a string of detailed research-based “strategy memos” available on the blog. In this soon-to-be-available book Levison has developed this previous work into a comprehensive analysis with up-to-date data from the 2012 election. Early chapters include “The Surprising Size of ‘White Working Class’ America – Half of all White Men and 40 Percent of White Women Still Work in Basically Blue-Collar Jobs” and one that explains why “The Working Class Seems Invisible in Daily Life.” The middle chapters are about how working people think about politics, the government and the economy based on a wide range of sociological and political survey research, and the book ends with five chapters that combine policy, messaging, and strategy advice for Democrats. The argument seems to be that Democrats can, if they want to, heal the huge racial divide in how Americans vote by appealing to working-class unity with a much stronger grassroots effort around good jobs, higher wages, and a more expansive social wage.
**Raising Expectations (and Raising Hell): My Decade Fighting for the Labor Movement** (Verso), Jane McAlevey with Bob Ostertag

Jane McAlevey is an organizer who spent a decade working on several of the most innovative union organizing campaigns for more than one of what are usually considered the most progressive unions in the U.S. Part of this book is a tell-all account of how McAlevey and other organizers have been frustrated by national union leadership in a variety of ways, from overweening bureaucracy to big-ego personality conflicts that end up as institutional turf wars. But mixed in with settling scores with her bosses is a theory of labor organizing that McAlevey has developed based on her experience in campaigns from Connecticut to Las Vegas. Van Jones praises the book: “This book renews my faith that organizing works. It calls for a new kind of unionism and makes a compelling case for a new vision for the American labor movement. In the ‘whole worker theory’ that McAlevey tested and retested in real life campaigns, all the issues negatively impacting the poor, working and middle class become the cause of unions, not simply wages and narrowly defined workplace conditions.”

**“That the People Might Live”: Loss and Renewal in Native American Elegy** (Cornell), Arnold Krupat

An elegy is a mournful poem or song usually expressing grief at a death or other loss, and sometimes suggesting how grief might be overcome through restoration and renewal. This book examines Native American elegiac expression across several centuries. It ranges from the Condolence Rites of the Iroquois and the memorial ceremonies of the Tlinglit among oral traditions to the retrospective autobiographies of Black Hawk and Black Elk. It continues to contemporary authors, including Linda Hogan, N. Scott Momaday, Gerald Vizenor, Sherman Alexie, Maurice Kenny, and Ralph Salisbury. One reviewer says: “Arnold Krupat’s central argument . . . is that there is a fundamental difference between the individualistic orientation of Western elegy and the expressions of a collective sense of loss and exile, which is designed not just to mourn but to allow the community as a whole to continue.”

**Phone Clones: Authenticity Work in the Transnational Service Economy** (Cornell), Kiran Mirchandani

“Transnational customer service workers” is the fancy name for people who work in call centers and whose job it is to help frustrated customers with problems they are having with products or services they have purchased. Kiran Mirchandani examines this work through the experiences of the men and women who work in Indian call centers in Bangalore, Delhi, and Pune. According to the publisher, “Unlike outsourced manufacturing jobs, call center work requires voice-to-voice conversation with distant customers; part of the product being exchanged in these interactions is a responsive, caring, connected self.” One reviewer called the work both “bizarre,” in its hybrid accents and created identities, and “mundane” because the work is routinized. The book is praised as a “nuanced account . . . marked by her eye for cultural subtleties, which are not secondary to economic concerns but rather tied up with them.”
At Work: The Art of California Labor (Heyday Books), edited by Mark Dean Johnson; Forward by Gray Brechin; Afterword by Tillie Olsen

This picture book begins with a statement about work being “at the core of human existence” and that through “work we find fulfillment, dignity, and affiliation” as well as “dissatisfaction . . . degradation and alienation.” It provides a visual labor history of California from the rise of organized labor at the turn of the 20th century and in the 1930s through the wartime workforce and the postwar farm workers’ movement to “the disenfranchisement of workers in the service economy” and “the potent effects of globalization” today. One reviewer praises the volume as “an outstanding contribution to the history of twentieth-century art in general,” with its numerous illustrations “reproduced with outstanding quality,” and “a wonderful book for both scholars and general readers.”

The Good Temp (Cornell), Vicki Smith and Esther B. Neuwirth

Temporary workers are now employed in just about every kind of workplace you can imagine, from offices to warehouses, from professional and management positions to entry-level jobs in manufacturing. They are most often employed by agencies and not by the company whose work they are doing. In interviews with temp workers, the most frequently cited reason for taking a temp job is “the hope that it will lead to a permanent job,” a hope that is dashed more often than it is fulfilled – even though many “temporary” workers work full-time for years at the same workplace. It’s not clear from the publishers’ materials what the authors consider a “good temp,” but it is clear that temp agencies are busy implementing “operating practices” that they think can create “good temps.”

Troublemakers: Power, Representation, and the Fiction of the Mass Worker (Rutgers), William Scott

Early 20th century social science, with the best of intentions, tended to view the massive numbers of industrial workers as a nameless, faceless mass that worked in terrible conditions in the huge factory agglomerations that were still relatively recent arrivals in urban landscapes. But fiction tried to go beyond and within the mass to imagine workers not only with names and faces, but also with thoughts and feelings, and agency of one sort or another, whether as individuals and through organized collective action. William Scott examines iconic novels of the time, including Upton Sinclair’s The Jungle, Ruth McKenney's Industrial Valley, and Jack London’s The Iron Heel, to help us “rethink our understanding of modern forms of representation through its attempts to imagine and depict workers’ agency in an environment where it appears to be completely suppressed.”

The Grand Tikal Futura is a shopping mall in Guatemala that uses Mayan themes and iconography to differentiate itself from such malls in Phoenix or Milwaukee. Outside its shopping paradise, it is ringed with gated communities on one side and shantytowns on the other. J.T. Way takes the Grand Tikal Futura and its environs as a vivid, one-stop illustration of the way “capitalist development . . . has dramatically reshaped the country’s physical and social landscapes – engendering poverty, ethnic regionalism, and genocidal violence.” Tracing the creation of modern Guatemala from the 1920s to the present, Way shows how Guatemala is far from being “underdeveloped,” but rather has been developed exactly as “globalized capitalism” intends. Deborah Levenson says of the book: “In striking and vibrant detail, he skillfully traces the history of neighborhoods and individuals from the first half of the twentieth century to today, and he uses this history to open up a remarkable and original discussion of the play of ethnicity and modernity in the making of a cultural texture and urban political economy that uses the 'Mayan' in the absence of Mayas, or worse, in the presence of their oppression.”

Retirement on the Line: Age, Work, and Value in an American Factory (Cornell), Caitrin Lynch

Vita Needle is a family-owned factory with an unusual business model. A maker of needles, stainless steel tubing and pipes, and custom fabricated parts, Vita Needle seeks out older workers. The average age of employees is 74. Caitrin Lynch worked at Vita Needle as part of five years of field research there, and Retirement on the Line is the result of both observation of and interviews with the workers, some of them in their 80s and 90s. According to the publisher, the book “offers an intimate portrait of the people who work there, a nuanced explanation of the company’s hiring practices, and a cogent analysis of how the workers’ experiences can inform our understanding of aging and work in the twenty-first century.”
Book Reviews

By Sherry Linkon, Georgetown University

Very few academic books bring tears to the eye (except, perhaps, in frustration with turgid prose), but Christine J. Walley had me crying at the end of her lovely “autoethnography,” *Exit Zero*, as she described her father’s death. Throughout the book, Walley tells stories of her family’s experiences in Southeast Chicago, from the immigration of one grandfather from Sweden and the migration of another from Appalachia, through memories of how the shutdown of local steel mills changed both her family and the local community, from her own uncomfortable journey to an elite boarding school and on through graduate school to tenure at MIT. She describes how steelmaking remained in her body through pollution that was generated during the “good times” and how it continues to poison the air and water of her hometown, and she explores the challenges deindustrialized communities face in trying, and mostly failing, to redefine themselves.

While much of the ground Walley treads has been complexly and extensively mapped by historians and sociologists studying immigration and deindustrialization and by working-class academics reflecting on the conflicted experience of going to college and becoming professionals, Walley offers some important new insights and an elegant model of Working-Class Studies scholarship. Scholars of working-class culture will not be surprised to read that working-class people feel ambivalence about telling their own stories, but they will appreciate Walley’s explanation of how writing provided her with both a “refuge” and sense of power (109). By connecting her experience with the ways her family tried to tell their stories, including a discussion of a memoir written by one of her grandfathers but left hidden in the attic, “The Struggle for Existence from the Cradle to the Grave” [sic], Walley reminds us that ambivalence has not entirely silenced working-class voices. We may, however, have to listen with special care.

Walley uses personal and family stories to illustrate how deindustrialization did not merely leave individuals without work but also eliminated a “central rung of the ladder of the American dream” (158). A changing economic structure, she argues, requires that we develop a more capacious, flexible definition of class, one that can serve as “both a critical analytical tool for understanding the world and a frame of action necessary for changing it” (168). To root the development of such a theoretical perspective in the history of industrial work, deindustrialization, and the experience of a working-class academic is an important, productive strategy.

In the early years of Working-Class Studies, I worried that we sometimes valorized the personal without demanding that it generate political and scholarly analysis. With Walley’s book, we see that this field has developed a signature genre: the hybrid of autobiography and scholarly analysis previously illustrated most effectively by Jack Metzgar in *Striking Steel* and Barbara Jensen in *Reading Classes*. Such books go beyond telling working-class stories to demonstrate the critical practice of constructing theories of class through the analysis of experience. *Exit Zero* offers us both an engaging story and insightful analysis.

By Jeanetta Calhoun Mish, Oklahoma City University

The Pattern Maker’s Daughter is Sandee Gertz Umbach’s first collection of poetry, yet it already shows signs of facility with metaphor—extended metaphor, in particular—, a good sense of line breaks, and a sensibility capable of working within received forms while making the form serve the content.

In The Pattern Maker’s Daughter, a series of poems about the Johnstown Flood of 1977 seem to be the emotional and metaphorical center of this collection. The Flood poems are of two types, one narrative and the other a narrative-lyric hybrid that sometimes lingers in the surreal, a combination that is very popular in today’s poetics, but is not always as well-executed as it is in The Pattern Maker’s Daughter. The poem “Stationary Front” (25) is a good example of Umbach’s use of the narrative-lyric poem. The poem begins with a mostly narrative account of the Flood, then turns to a meditative consideration of the people of Johnstown and how the topography of the area has affected its human inhabitants and the town’s propensity for inundation, both of the emotional and meteorological kind. Moreover, the sixth stanza’s opening lines reveal one of this collection’s most significant themes, and they also reference Umbach’s most remarkable recurring metaphor:

Folded into the crevice of those mountains, we are remote and hidden, yet the storms keep finding us, our city’s history a collective memory.

Our city’s history a collective memory. More than anything else, The Pattern Maker’s Daughter is an unveiling of the patterns of collective memory, of History and of history, personal, family, community. To figure collective memory, History, and history, Umbach taps a formidable metaphor not utilized for this purpose, so far as I know, since Muriel Rukeyser’s *The Book of the Dead*: she uses geological terms and concepts as recurrent, extended metaphors for the working-class culture and history and poet-speaker’s place within them. What might be surprising from an early-career poet is that Umbach wields her geological metaphors and references with great skill, in large part because she is obviously knowledgeable (enough) about the geological structures and materials of Western Pennsylvania to use them.

Not only does Umbach put the geological metaphors to work, she is capable of creating the prophetic tone found in Rukeyser’s Book and the great, communal “I am” of Whitman’s work—both of which depend on concrete imagery as a launching point, and which are difficult things to do without sounding ridiculous. Witness this section from “Part of this Earth” (31-32):

I am shale, common and conglomerate, (the dirty inside of a purse, caked over lipstick torn receipts and dried gum) skeletons of organisms drifting. I am rapidly moving streams. Carbon rich, organic, coal, compressed.
In addition to their use in the more philosophical poems in the collection, I found it delightful that Umbach’s geological metaphors and language appear in unexpected places in the poems, and in doing so, solidify the metaphorical relationship between the working-class people of Johnstown and the geology around and beneath them—the analogy runs all the way through, like a vein of ore.

There are many more delights to be found in The Pattern Maker’s Daughter, among them a series of work poems (using Jim Daniel’s categories of “work” poems and “working-class” poems), several coming-of-age poems, and a scattering of poems in form. Sandee Gertz Umbach has created an extraordinary set of patterns in this collection, and we are fortunate that she has shared them, so we, too, can be tied to this earth and its people.

**Eyes on Labor: News Photography and America’s Working Class**


Through its six substantive chapters *Eyes on Labor: News Photography and America’s Working Class* tells the story of the representation of labor and labor issues in the mainstream media, as well as in union and corporate publications. Quirke highlights the way different parts of the media developed their understanding of how images could be used in an increasingly visual age. The chapters here operate as essays which build our understanding of this visual literacy and the sheer power of photographs to provoke response and shape popular ideas of the working class. Through its various chapters *Eyes on Labor* meticulously records the way images were doctored, edited and framed in the mass media – often but not always - to portray organized labor in a negative light. There is a tendency to want to believe that ideological manipulation is overstated, or that conspiracy is overblown, but Quirke’s book illustrates the ways in which those hostile to workplace organization constructed a powerful narrative of union violence and intimidation.

Quirke organizes her book broadly chronologically through the first half of the twentieth century. In turn she reflects on the place of labor photography before mass photojournalism emerged, the role of photo-driven magazines such as *LIFE*, the role of photography in the Hershey corporation, and the news reels of the Memorial Day Massacre. Later chapters show the way the union movement sought its own visual narrative. Chapter five explores *Steel Labor*, the newspaper of the United Steel Workers of America, while the next chapter deals with Local 65 Wholesale and Warehouse Employees Union’s *New Voices*. It is worth pausing to reflect on the scale and reach of these types of journals. As Quirke notes, “By 1950 some thirty million Americans received a labor paper in their home” (14). Noteworthy is the largely unexamined legacy of these papers, with Local 65 having left some 30,000 images in its archive. *Eyes on Labor* represents an important contribution both to our understanding of this period visually as well as in part legitimizing the study of work and labor through contemporary images.
One of the visual tropes that flows through the volume is the everyday use of photography to illustrate the domestic, work-a-day world of ordinary people. One of the criticisms one could make of the literature on the visualisation of labor is the way in which writers and commentators are drawn to images of the ‘industrial sublime.’ The result is that arguably disproportionate attention has been paid to the ‘beautiful images’ of labor and work in the portfolios of documentary photographers such as Lewis Hine and Dorothea Lange. While iconic images such as these have powerfully framed an era, Quirke reminds us that we should not neglect the mass of image making of the era that, while not aesthetically rich, was equally powerful and important in its own terms.

If I had a criticism of *Eyes on Labor* it is that this reader was frustrated that the cumulative argument built up through the chapters of the book is not fully explored in the conclusion. The result is that the chapters act more as standalone case studies rather than developing a stronger thesis. This reader wishes that the author had had greater confidence in her ideas and arguments. That criticism aside, Carole Quirke has produced a fine book that will be a real asset for anyone interested in the portrayal of labor. In recent years there has been a growth in the number of publications that draw on visual material in understanding and interpreting working class life. *Eyes on Labor* is an important new addition to this field. At the same time, it’s possible to see the book as both building on and contributing to the field of working class studies.

Tim Strangleman, University of Kent, UK
Center Reports

Chicago Center for Working-Class Studies

Our spring calendar has included two events of note. On March 7, 2013 Chicago Working-Class Studies hosted AFL-CIO president Richard Trumka and legal scholar Charles Morris for an all-day discussion of "pre-majority unionism," the opportunity for collective action that can happen legally under the National Labor Relations Act before an election. The two were joined by the Warehouse Workers for Justice, the Fight for 15, Making Change at Walmart and OUR Walmart as well as ARISE Chicago and the USW campaign for Car Wash Workers.

For a preregistered crowd of over 100 activists and union staffers, Trumka told the audience that the American labor movement needed to embrace an expanded definition of what "employee" means and to think creatively about organizing strategies. He pointed to recent campaigns in home health work and the Writers Guild as recent examples. Legal scholar Charles Morris discussed the "pre-majority" activities that can go on within the confines of the NLRA. While there has yet to be a definitive case before the Board, Morris argued that when workers act like a union prior to an election, employers have a duty to bargain.

Workers and organizers from Walmart, restaurants and car washes in Chicago also spoke about creative strategies and opportunities for building alliances and finding new ways of putting pressure on employers to bargain even outside of union contracts.

On April 13, Chicago Working-Class Studies in partnership with the Field Museum will be hosting a screening of a new film, EXIT ZERO, about deindustrialization in Southeast Chicago. The rough cut premiere will be followed by a conversation with the filmmakers, Christine Walley and Chris Boebel and tours of The Field Museum’s Restoring Earth exhibit featuring the Calumet region. The event will also include panel discussions with area heritage, environmental justice and labor activists, including panelists from People for Community Recovery, Southeast Environmental Task Force, Alliance For American Manufacturing, and the United Steelworkers Union.

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 screenings, fiction and poetry readings, museum exhibits, and the ODW/ODL brown bag series, which entered its 18th year in September. We are in the second year of engaging meetings with our on-campus and off-campus advisory councils who advise us on programming, promotion and wider connection of Our Daily Work/Our daily Lives with the broader communities. We will have the two advisory councils meet together during the opening of our next exhibit, “From Sun Up to Sundown: Selections from the Our Daily Work/Our Daily Lives Collection” (more on the exhibit below).

We just finished co-hosting an exhibit by Detroit-based artist Nora Chapa Mendoza at the Michigan State University College of Law. Ms. Mendoza is most famous for her extensive body of work, which examines the experience of farm workers in the fields and in union organizing efforts (captured very dramatically in a Fall, 1995 article which featured seventeen of her works in the now defunct Labor’s Heritage magazine). Many of the new works featured in the exhibit just ended looked at the politics of immigration and the damages of militarism.

Our upcoming exhibit at the MSU Museum, “Sun Up to Sundown: Selections from the Our Daily Work/Our Daily Lives Collection,” will be
open from April 15 to June 15 of this year and will feature a wide range of paintings, textiles, “government work/homers” (items made on the job from scrap materials often in downtime moments which are artistic or utilitarian in design), carvings and sculptures made by workers or focused on the work experience. The exhibit will include two works by the most famous labor/worker artist Ralph Fasanella. Works from other nations will also be shown, especially a number from South Africa (including a wonderful painting by artist and former gold miner Nkoali Nawa).

One of the ODW/ODL co-directors, John Beck, is coming to the end of his year as State Scholar for the Michigan Humanities Council’s tour of the Smithsonian Institution’s traveling exhibit of National Archive historical photos of people at work in America, “The Way We Worked” (http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/twww/). The exhibit is touring six small towns of Michigan: Rogers City, Dowagiac, Hartland, Escanaba, Clare and Hart. Each of the small town museums or libraries hosting the exhibit have created local exhibits, oral history efforts, documentation projects and other wrap-around programming to augment the six-week local showings of the traveling exhibit.

Plans for the 19th year of the brown bag series are nearly complete. We are nailing down dates and locations for nearly twenty speakers next year. Topics this year will include: 1870’s-era strikes in the US and Canada; religion and the auto factories in the 1950’s; organizing a union for Chicago couriers; the labor culture of the beauty shop; Cesar Chavez and the United Farmworkers; women and work in the art of Winslow Homer; a Great Lakes maritime disaster; tea workers in the Himalaya mountains; and working at the zoo among others. We’ll have a number of brown bags which will be connected to two wider MSU Museum and MSU initiatives, “Detroit Resurgent” and “60/50,” detailed below.

French photographer Gilles Perrin, assisted by his wife Nicole Ewenczyk, will have two photographic exhibits at the MSU Museum: “A Document of the Extraordinary World” and “Detroit Resurgent” which are co-sponsored by Our Daily Work/Our Daily Lives. The first exhibit is a selection of Perrin’s photographic portraits of working people and others across the world. The second exhibit is a body of portraits specifically created for the MSU Museum of people from all works of life who are working to rebuild the City of Detroit and secure its future: urban farmers, union leaders, designers, visionaries, artists and activists. Gilles Perrin and Nicole Ewenczyk will be featured in one of the September brown bags coinciding with the opening of the two exhibits at the MSU Museum.

In 2014, there will be a campus-wide exploration/celebration/commemoration/critical reflection across Michigan State University of two key anniversaries – the 60th anniversary of the US Supreme Court decision in Brown v. Board of Education, which ended the legal doctrine of racial inequality based in “separate but equal,” and the 50th anniversary of the 1964 Civil Rights Act which was passed by the US Congress and signed by President Lyndon Johnson and designed to broadly end discrimination based on race, age, religion, national origin and gender. Our Daily Work/Our Daily Lives will have a number of events in the 2014 calendar year that reflect on the themes of “60/50,” including a brown bag with Dr. Ysaye Barnwell, one of the founders of the iconic singing group and force for social change, Sweet Honey in the Rock.

We are continuing the monthly recording and cataloging of all of our Our Daily Work/Our Daily Lives brown bags by the Vincent Voice Library (http://vvl.lib.msu.edu/) which makes them available through the Library’s on-line catalog free to listeners anywhere. We are always happy to hear about people who should be making presentations in our series. Please contact John Beck at beckj@msu.edu if you want to make programming suggestions.
Annual Award Update

The annual WCSA Awards contest drew a strong field of submissions, including fifteen books published in 2012 and nominated for the CLR James prize for the best book for academic or general audiences. We also award a Constance Coiner prize for best dissertation, a CLR James prize for best article for academic or general audiences, a Studs Terkel prize for media and journalism, and a Tillie Olsen prize for creative writing, which this year attracted a diverse array of working-class poetry. The winners will be announced late April and prizes will be awarded at the WCSA banquet at the "Fighting Forward" conference in Madison, Friday June 14. Our thanks are due to the fifteen judges (three for each category) who volunteered to read and assess the submissions. The award process is a testament to the strength and diversity of work in our field(s). The contest is coordinated by the WCSA past-president, and I have found it a privilege and an education to be involved in it. -- Nick Coles