Greetings WCSA members!

The steering committee has been busy and productive. It is a pleasure to be president with such a thoughtful, hard-working, and committed steering committee.

We remain committed to encouraging young people to come to our conferences and to building the youth constituency in the WCSA. Toward this end:
1) We passed and executed our Young Scholars and Activists Initiative (YSAI), whereby we will give seven young scholars or activists a stipend to defray conference costs if they come and present at our conference. This is intended to be an ongoing initiative, to be offered at future conferences as well. 2) We have initiated programming for the conference aimed specifically at newcomers and graduate students. We have planned a pre-conference meet and greet on Wednesday from 5-6 pm, which all are welcome to attend. By offering this event early in the conference program, we hope to begin a conversation about our work and commitment to working-class studies that will continue throughout the weekend. We also still have travel grants and conference scholarships available based on need.

We are looking forward to the 2014 conference at SUNY Stony Brook, as well as our 2015 collaboration with the Labor and Working Class History Association (LAWCHA) at Georgetown University in Washington, DC. Both conferences promise to be very exciting, and also to further our goals of increasing membership of not only young people but of scholars and activists of color, and GLBT scholars as well.

We are delighted that this spring’s conference will include a plenary of scholars of color, led by Aldon Morris of Northwestern University (with scholars Kris Marsh, Rashawn Ray, and Fredrick Harris). Next year at Georgetown, we will give a posthumous lifetime achievement award to GLBT and working class activist Felice Yeskel, once a lively and inspiring WCSA member until she contracted liver cancer and died a few years ago. Felice Yeskel was co-author of Economic Apartheid In America: A Primer on Economic Inequality (2000, revised 2005) with Chuck Collins. Felice founded (and ran) the Stonewall center at U Mass, Amherst, as well as the non-profit Class Action, an organization dedicated to raising awareness of class. She was given an award by the American Psychological Association for raising awareness of class and classism in America. The WCSA is much poorer without her presence.

There is still much work to be done. Our memberships are down and we urge all to renew your memberships and encourage others to join. Remember, your membership dues allow us to give financial aid that enables people to come to conferences who might not otherwise be able to attend. If we really want to grow our organization we need to help those who may not have funds provided by their schools (if they have academic work), or activists and independent scholars who may not work at schools. We also urge you to consider a three-year, institutional or lifetime membership (respectively $60 to $125—based on employment status, $100 per year, or $1000) if possible.

Class in all its forms—economic inequality, income disparity, sociological and psychological disadvantage and disrespect—have reached epic proportions in our larger world. Working class studies, making working class lives visible and
advocating for the rights and respect that working class people deserve, is more important than ever (in our brief history as a field). Our organization needs to expand and to reach out to many more people. It is my hope the our collaboration with LAWCHA is just a beginning of collaborations with other organizations that care about class and the damage it inflicts on human beings and societies.

It has been my pleasure to be a small part of that effort. Finally, I want to thank the membership for the opportunity to be president of the WCSA and the steering committee for their hard work. Working with our excellent steering committee is a joy. Fighting to expand and build our field is very meaningful and rewarding for me personally and I hope I have given the WCSA even just a fraction of what working class studies has given to me over the years.

In solidarity, with inspiration and love,

Barbara Jensen
bjensen@umn.edu

P.S. Let’s be in touch!

We are still dealing with wrinkles in the payment process for subscriptions for New Labor Forum. The last couple checks I sent to NLF, accompanied by subscription information, have not been cashed by the publisher. I/we are working on this, and a new process is in place with a new contact—so subscriptions will be submitted quarterly, beginning at the end of March. In the meantime, I apologize for any confusion or miscommunication. If you think you are subscribed to NLF but haven’t been receiving your journal, please contact me via email: wibblet68@gmail.com Again, I apologize for your trouble.

~ Cherie Rankin

Secretary’s Report

Along with the creation of an online archive of WCSA-related documents and information, the Steering Committee established travel scholarships for emerging scholars and activists in the field of working-class studies to be awarded this June at the SUNY Stony Brook conference. Pre-conference events such as a meet and greet for graduate students and those new to the organization will be offered as well. Support was also given to fund the newly formed Pittsburg Collaborative for Working-Class Studies (PCWCS).

~ Michele Fazio

Treasurer’s Report

The organization has a balance, between checking and Paypal accounts, of $28,505.15. Donations to the travel grant fund, which helps participants in need attend the annual conference, are down significantly from last year. You are encouraged, if you are interested, to send donations earmarked for the travel grant fund, to the Treasurer for this year’s conference.

My address is:
Cherie Rankin, PO Box 264, Emden, IL 62635
Member News


Michele Fazio and Sara Appel co-chaired a roundtable, “Class Vulnerabilities in the Academy,” at the Modern Language Association annual conference held January 2014 in Chicago. Fred Gardaphé served as the respondent.

Michele Fazio appeared on 91.5 WUNC-Radio’s “The State of Things” with Frank Stasio in November 2013 to discuss the documentary, *Voices of the Lumbee*, which explores the economic conditions of rural Southeastern North Carolina and its impact on the Lumbee Tribe. The film, produced by Fazio and Jason Hutchens, will be released in April 2014. For more information, see www.voicesofthelumbee.com.

Lita Kurth has been working with Sacred Heart Community Service on affordable housing, namely a Housing Impact Fee to be imposed on developers that do not include any affordable housing. She would love to hear from others about work on affordable housing being done in other cities. She can be reached at lakurth@yahoo.com

Gerald McCarthy’s new poetry appears or is forthcoming in *North Dakota Quarterly, Italian Americana, Third Wednesday, The Chaffin Journal and House Organ*. In 2013 he was selected to participate in an NEH Summer Institute on African American History & Culture in the Georgia Lowcountry at the Georgia Historical Society in Savanna, Georgia.

Elizabeth Seton Mignacca, Ph.D. has joined Holy Family University in Philadelphia, PA as the Assistant Director of Institutional Research and Assessment. Prior to joining HFU, Dr. Mignacca was Program Administrator for the Program for the Advancement of Research on Conflict and Collaboration at Syracuse University. Dr. Mignacca is a Sociologist and specializes in inequality studies, social stratification and class analysis.


Richard Roman (co) edited (with Edur Velasco Arregui) a special issue on the Mexican working class of NACLA Report on the Americas (Spring 2014). More information can be found here: http://nacla.org/naclareport

Larry Smith’s Bottom Dog Press has announced the release of two new books in their long running Working Lives Series. First, award winning fiction writer Robert Flanagan’s *Story Hour & Other Stories* contains 10 stories of
working-class Midwest. Flanagan is a native of Toledo, Ohio, and taught at Ohio Wesleyan University. This is his fifth book of fiction. Rebecca Schumjeida has been writing about the world of the waitress and has just released Waiting at the Dead End Diner: Poems set in a local diner in upstate New York. It is truly a working-class book of poems that reads like a novel. For more details see the website http://smithdocs.net

A number of WCSA members recently edited and contributed pieces for a special issue of the journal International Labor and Working Class History which came out at the end of 2013. Crumbling Cultures, edited by Tim Strangleman, Sherry Linkon & James Rhodes, brought together a range of scholars interested in the political, social and cultural impact and legacy of deindustrialisation and especially the impact of these features on working class families and communities. The articles featured writing on working class community in the USA, UK, Europe and Canada and included a focus on the literature of deindustrialisation, the visual response to industrial change as well as the material and political legacy of change. The issue and most of the articles developed from a series of panels run at the WCSA Chicago conference in 2011. More details of Crumbling Cultures can be found at: http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayJournal?jid=ILW
Book Notes

**Down the Up Escalator: How the 99 Percent Live in the Great Recession** (Doubleday), Barbara Garson

Barbara Garson’s classic *All the Livelong Day* documented the work and lives of a wide cross-section of workers in the late 1970s by travelling around the country interviewing and observing. She uses the same methods in her new book, *Down the Up Escalator*, which her publisher describes as “a sobering picture of what happens to a society when it becomes economically organized to benefit only the very rich and the quick-buck speculators.” Billed as a snapshot of “life in the Great Recession,” it has a broader historical focus, according to reviewers, reaching back decades to show the evolution of today’s much degraded working and living standards. One reviewer calls it “a compassionate, probing, pointillist mural of the Great Recession and of the decades-long erosion of the average American’s economic position that preceded it, all told through the experiences of individual men and women. She has followed some over time, has sought out others whose lives illuminate larger injustices, and has found people whose stories will stick with you.”

**Swear: Poems** (West End Press), Hakim Bellamy

Hakim Bellamy is the inaugural poet-laureate of Albuquerque who has performed his poetry in scores of public venues from the New Mexico State Legislature to Occupy. *Swear* is the first printed collection of his “hard-hitting poems.” According to the publisher: “Bellamy moves from a free-thinking attitude of deliverance to a provocative new space where the reader can reflect on the poet’s inquisition of the 1%, working class life in urban and rural America, and the transcendent value of hip hop as one of our top exports and global contributions.” HBO’s Def Poetry Jam founder Bruce George praises it: “Swear politicizes the human condition in a manner that balances the abstract with the concrete. Bellamy’s work is polemic like Amiri; satiric like Nietzsche; iconoclastic like Mao; passionate like Neruda.” Sante Fe Poet-Laureate Joan Logghe calls Bellamy’s poetry “economic and political blues [with] the same type of urgency [Langston] Hughes felt in the 1930s after the Harlem Renaissance . . . . . Bellamy is a man engaged with the world. His words are more direct than lyrical. His poems are warning signs, headlines and prescriptions. Swear will tell you what’s coming next.”
**Detroit’s Cold War: The Origins of Postwar Conservatism (U. of Illinois), Colleen Doody**

The emergence of a conservative political consensus since the so-called Reagan Revolution has attracted a lot of attention from historians and political scientists, but their explorations have focused mostly on national political leaders and elite intellectuals, and sometimes the Big Money which helped finance them. Labor historian Colleen Doody reverses that order by looking for, and finding, grass-roots origins for postwar conservatism in what at the time might have seemed like the unlikeliest of places. Focusing on Detroit as simultaneously a union town and headquarters for the most important of postwar industries, Doody explores the curbside debates occurring among common citizens across a wide variety of neighborhoods in a starkly segregated urban landscape. What emerges are grassroots conflicts: between blacks and whites; between Catholics, many of recent immigrant stock and overwhelmingly working class, and Protestants, who ranged from white and black working-class migrants from the South to auto executives; between liberals and socialists, on one side, and communists and their “fellow travelers,” on the other. As the Cold War with the Soviet Union emerged in the late 1940s, “Communists” came to be variously defined depending on who was doing the defining. Religious traditionalists tended to include people and organizations they saw as “secularizing,” for example, and small-business conservatives often included not only any variety of socialist, but all New Deal liberals, unionists, and even “corporate liberals” who had resigned themselves to dealing with their powerful labor unions. Thus as she examines the city’s social and political fabric, Doody argues that the domestic anticommunism of those years was “a cohesive, multifaceted ideology that arose less from Soviet ideological incursion than from tensions within the American public” and that we are still living with much of that legacy.

**Waiting at the Dead End Diner: Poems (Bottom Dog Press), Rebecca Schumejda**

Nearly two of every 100 workers in the U.S. is a waiter or waitress, on average making a little less than $10 an hour. Rebecca Schumejda was one of them, and as she explains in the introduction to her new book of poems, she was “inspired by the decade I spent waiting tables and all the amazing coworkers and customers who became my second family. Last year, I put an apron back on for a short time and realized my respect for the industry remains unwavering. Reminded of just how vital, yet under-appreciated, food industry workers are, I feel proud to pay homage to them.” Widely praised for reading like a novel, Waiting at the Dead End Diner tells the story of a waitress who, as she waits, discovers herself and what is truly important in life. Amanda Oaks of Words Dance praises Waiting for its “exquisite storytelling rich with magnificent metaphor & razor-sharp insight;” its “brilliant cast of characters,” and for the riveting way it puts the reader in the waitress’ shoes: “When your shift ends, you won’t walk away with an empty plate, your heart will be full of love for that perfect imperfection that you are served with any family, whether it’s blood or ketchup pumping through your veins. There should be a display of these books on every counter at every diner across America!”
Love and Money: Queers, Class, and Cultural Production (New York U.), Lisa Henderson

Lisa Henderson argues that contemporary queer cultures cannot be understood without reference to social class, and she is especially alert to puncturing the pop culture stereotype that equates “gay” with rich, white professionals detached from politics and communities. According to the publisher, “Through ethnographic encounters with readers and cultural producers and such texts as Boys Don’t Cry, Brokeback Mountain, By Hook or By Crook, and wedding announcements in the New York Times, Love and Money sees both queerness and class across a range of idioms and practices in everyday life.” One reviewer calls it “at once fiercely intellectual and full of heart, formidable and invitingly funny.” Another praises Henderson for grounding “queer cultural criticism in the liminal movements and moments of everyday life.” The publisher asserts: “With an eye to the nuances and harms of class difference in queerness and a wish to use culture to forge queer and class affinities, Love and Money returns class and its politics to the study of queer life.”

Save Our Unions: Dispatches from a Movement in Distress (Monthly Review Press), Steve Early

Since he retired as a field rep and organizer for the Communications Workers a few years back, Steve Early has become labor journalism’s most prolific writer. As a reporter he favors rank-and-file voices and actions, but he has sources throughout all levels of the labor movement, giving his reporting both an informational and analytic advantage over other progressive journalists, let alone even the best of mainstream reporting on unions. Save Our Unions is the third collection of his writings, and like the earlier volumes, it includes not just on-the-scene reporting, but book reviews, profiles, and most importantly, longer essays where Early critically assesses various campaigns and strategies and develops his own vision for a revitalized labor movement. According to the publisher: “The author illuminates the challenges facing U.S. workers, whether they're trying to democratize their union, win a strike, defend past contract gains, or bargain with management for the first time. [He] writes about cross-border union campaigning, labor strategies for organizing and health care reform, and political initiatives that might lessen worker dependence on the Democratic Party.”
Working Lives: Work in Britain since 1945 (Palgrave Macmillan),
Arthur McIvor

This history of work in postwar Britain is organized thematically rather than chronologically. The result is that for each chapter’s topic—general employment patterns, “meanings of work,” gender, racism, health and safety, and union power—the reader is provided with a synoptic historical analysis of the subject across the entire range of the second half of the 20th Century. What emerges is a general pattern of dramatic progress followed by equally dramatic decline for the UK working class, similar to the U.S. But within that general pattern, Arthur McIvor finds complicated crosscurrents and counter-patterns depending on the topic. Tim Strangleman calls it “a real tour de force in the way it deploys oral testimony collected by both the author and a variety of other scholars. Its real achievement comes from McIvor’s ability in linking general societal and economic trends to the particulars of the shop floor. In the process he reveals the complexity and power of workplace culture as a dynamic and fluid property which both enables and constrains action.”

Lines the Quarry (Omnidawn Press), Robin Clarke

This book of poetry meditates on the deaths of 29 miners from the Massey Energy coal mine explosion in April 2010 in West Virginia and those of 11 oil rig workers from BP’s Deepwater Horizon explosion 15 days later in the Gulf of Mexico. “Weaving together autobiography, lies, half-truths, corporate horror stories and labor’s radical past,” according to the publisher, “this book seeks to articulate both our devastation and our possibility in very human terms.” In language “familiar yet strange,” the poems are composed of fragments, multiple speech registers and broken syntactical arrangements that suggest both explosion itself and the aftermaths of disasters of all kinds. One reviewer says: “One of the most compelling first books I’ve read in years. If there is a literary equivalent to the financial cliff, Robin Clarke’s Lines the Quarry represents the mountain of wreckage at the bottom of the free fall.”

The Chicken Trail: Following Workers, Migrants, and Corporations across the Americas (Cornell), Kathleen C. Schwartzman

After reading this book, you are unlikely to enjoy eating chicken as naively as you may once have done. Kathleen Schwartzman goes deep into the globalization of poultry production to explain the degraded condition of poultry workers today, many of them Mexicans in the southern U.S. Though the story is a complex one beginning before the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), Schwartzman pays special attention to the role NAFTA played in pushing small-hold farmers off their land in Mexico, many of whom then migrated to the U.S. as highly exploitable “undocumented workers” who often displaced African-Americans from chicken-factory jobs. In Schwartzman’s analysis, this was not an “unintended consequence” of NAFTA, but rather testimony to the ability of corporations, in this case the chicken industry, to shape trade arrangements to their benefit with the explicit purpose of cheapening labor. One reviewer calls it “a fascinating account of the serious negative impacts of globalization on workers on both sides of the U.S./Mexico border.” Another says it does “a masterful job of illuminating the important role played by the chicken industry in shaping America’s labor market, patterns of immigration, race relations, international trade, and globalization.”
Cleaning Up: How Hospital Outsourcing Is Hurting Workers and Endangering Patients (Cornell), Dan Zuberi

One of the numerous ways the Affordable Care Act (“Obamacare”) tries to reduce the growth of health care costs is by changing the incentive structure for hospitals so they readmit fewer patients due to infections contracted in the hospital. In Cleaning Up Dan Zuberi makes a compelling argument that hospital-acquired infections have increased dramatically in recent decades because of outsourcing such tasks as cleaning and food preparation to private contractors. Drawing on field work in Canada as well as research in the U.S. and Europe, Zuberi reveals how outsourcing as a means of cutting labor costs actually increases overall costs – for patients, governments and insurance companies if not for hospitals themselves, who often make money treating the people their infections have made sick. According to the publisher: “Zuberi’s interviews with the low-wage workers who keep hospitals running uncover . . . serious concerns about the quality of the work due to understaffing, high turnover, poor training and experience, inadequate cleaning supplies, and on-the-job injuries.” What’s more, besides endangering the physical health and well-being of both workers and patients in health care settings, Zuberi places hospital outsourcing within the broader context of “the trend towards low-road service-sector jobs that threatens to undermine society’s social health.”

Schistsong (Bordighera Press) and L is for Lion: An Italian Bronx Butch Freedom Memoir (State U. of New York), both by Annie Rachele Lanzillotto

The past year must have been an especially good one for Annie Rachele Lanzillotto, who teaches master classes in solo performance at the Actors Theatre of Louisville. Lanzillotto published her first book of poetry, Schistsong, and a widely praised memoir, L is for Lion. The poetry is billed as “an urban songline of New York,” including “a panegyric of the geology of Manhattan.” The publisher characterizes it as a collision between “grit and stardust,” with its stories of icemen, fish peddlers, heart butchers, meter maids, “San Gennaro, the magic of grandmothers’ hands, the vision of the oldest living tree in the city, immigrants who fell out of windows and died in explosions, Italian phrases that link the essence of the sun to a rose to a heart, crushed tomatoes, sunsets, supermarkets, the glory of hot tar, the lessons of marines and lesbians.” L is for Lion is a coming of age story of an Italian-American lesbian growing up in the Bronx as an “asthmatic scholar athlete” who at the age of 18 learns of “a giant cancerous tumor flailing around her chest.” As an adult she journeys to Italy and Cairo and back to New York, and the memoir observes a diverse group of characters including “neighborhood nuns, a linebacker, a corporate executive, the King of Hearts, the Joker, [and] a battered housewife survivor hairdresser.” One reviewer says: “Annie shares her life story in a colorful and candid way that will . . . leave you inspired. [She] did not give in to adversity, illness, stereotypes, or rejection. Annie fought those demons and went on to get an Ivy League education, survive cancer, learn to fly . . . [and] perform at the Guggenheim Museum with her 96-year-old grandmother. If you are an Italian American, know an Italian American, or watched a movie about Italian Americans, you must read this book! It made me laugh, cry, and really, really hungry!”
Mother’s Unite! Organizing for Workplace Flexibility and the Transformation of Family Life (Cornell), Jocelyn Elise Crowley

This book is not an abstract call for mothers to unite around workplace flexibility, though Jocelyn Crowley does make the case for a “mother’s movement.” Nor is it simply an argument for a package of policies to advance worklife-homelife balance, though it does present such a package. Rather it is an analysis of five national mothers groups, their different focuses and histories of organization, and a specific case for how these groups could unite around a common program with the potential to ignite a mother’s movement. The groups are Mocha Moms, a support group for mothers of color; Mothers of Preschoolers (MOPS), which “stresses the promotion of Christian values”; Moms Rising, an online advocacy group; Mothers & More, with focuses on supporting those moving in and out of the paid workforce; and the National Association of Mothers’ Centers (NMAC), which furthers community-based networking. One reviewer says: “Mothers Unite! takes us beyond the Mommy Wars to paint a picture of hope: the prospect of diverse mothers’ groups coming together to work for a better future. [It] intelligently unpacks abstract ideas about flexibility and mothers’ solidarity (or lack thereof) to provide a clear road map for moving forward. [This] book will open endless avenues for activism on behalf of families.”


According to the Sloan Foundation, the U.S. is the only advanced economy in the world that does not legislatively require any form of paid leave for its nation’s workers. When the Family and Medical Leave Act was passed in 1993, it required employers to rehire mothers who left work to have babies as long as they returned to work within 12 weeks, but it did not require that employers pay employees while out of work for this or a number of other disruptive family medical events. Ten years later, however, California required that employers pay workers for being off work for these reasons. This book examines how the California law has worked for families, workers and employers and to what extent a national law could be modeled on the California experience. Unsurprisingly, the law has been a great boon for workers and families who have used it. For employers, the effect has been either “negligible or positive.” But many California workers are not aware of the law and, therefore, are not using it. As the publisher notes, “those who need the program’s benefits most urgently – low-wage workers, young workers, immigrants, and disadvantaged minorities – are least likely to know about it, [and thus] the long-standing pattern of inequality in access to paid leave has remained largely intact.” Milkman and Appelbaum provide remedies for this problem, both in California and for new national legislation that has now been proposed in Congress.
Literature by the Working Class: English Autobiographies, 1820-1848 (Cambria Press), Cassandra Falke

Early in 19th Century England, rising literacy rates and falling book prices created a literate majority among the working classes. After reading about other people’s lives, many workers began to write their own autobiographies, revealing worlds not seen or only seen from outside (and above) within literature. Social and labor historians have mined these working-class autobiographies for what they reveal of workers’ lives at the time, their world views and politics, their social manners and mores. In this volume Cassandra Falke proposes to evaluate a group of these texts for their literary merit and their innovations in form. She finds that they “reject notions of autonomous selfhood and linear self-creation that characterize other Romantic period autobiographical works,” thus also rejecting “autobiography as a narrative of rational progress toward occupational success and autonomous selfhood.” According to the publisher, “Falke argues that the historical limits placed on working-class authors inspired them to try inventive literary techniques such as non-narrative autobiographies, non-chronological structure, and symbolic plots—techniques that autobiographers are being lauded for experimenting with today.”

Global Unions, Local Power: The New Spirit of Transnational Labor Organizing (Cornell), Jamie K. McCallum

Based on detailed analysis of a transnational labor campaign that played out across nine countries on four continents, Global Unions, Local Power provides a broad critical assessment of the potential of transnational unionism. The campaign McCallum narrates started with the Service Employees (SEIU) in the U.S. organizing private security guards at G4S, a global security services company that is among the largest employers in the world. SEIU reached out for assistance from other unions representing G4S workers around the world, and the result was not only a successful organizing drive in the U.S., but wage gains, benefits increases, new union formations, and an end to management reprisals in many countries, most particularly in South Africa and India. According to the publisher, McCallum reveals two important paradoxes: “Although global unionism is typically concerned with creating parity and universal standards across borders, local context can both undermine and empower the intentions of global actors, creating varied and uneven results. At the same time, despite being generally regarded as weaker than their European counterparts, U.S. unions are in the process of remaking the global labor movement in their own image.”

All That Remains (Unbound Content), Brian Fanelli

The publisher says very little about this volume of poems, but what is said marks it clearly as of potential interest to Working-Class Studies. “Brian Fanelli’s first full-length collection is an exploration of life and love, and all the attendant glories and troubles, in the working class. His direct language and concrete imagery allow his characters to live beyond the page. His short poems tell their own stories within the bigger story.”
Steel Barrio: The Great Mexican Migration to South Chicago, 1915-1940 (New York U.), Michael Innis-Jimenez

By some counts Chicago is now the second largest “Mexican city” in the United States. While most of that city within a city is of relatively recent origin, the Mexican-American community in South Chicago first established roots there nearly a century ago, as Mexicans were hired into the steel mills during World War I to do some of the most difficult and dangerous jobs. Steel Barrio traces the development of that distinctive community, arguing that while the neighborhood was physically defined by the steel mills of four different companies, the mills were “neither the center of community life nor the source of collective identity.” Rather Mexican-Americans created a “physical and imagined community not only to defend against the ever-present social, political, and economic harassment and discrimination, but to grow in a foreign, polluted environment.” David Roediger calls it a “richly documented history [that] tells textured human stories of the work, play, and solidarity that created and recreated an enduring community, snatching life from discrimination and hardship.”

Dangerously Sleepy: Overworked Americans and the Cult of Manly Wakefulness (U. of Pennsylvania), Alan Derickson

Dangerously Sleepy should get a prize for the best match between its title and its cover photo of ironworkers sleeping on an I-beam high above New York City. The book reveals the deep historical roots of the “I’ll sleep when I’m dead” work ethic that Alan Derickson argues is a public health hazard. Built around three extended historical essays on the role of sleep and wakefulness among steelworkers, Pullman Porters, and truck drivers, the book argues that industrial-era entrepreneurs shrewdly tapped into a strain of working-class masculinity that “encouraged American men to deny biological need” and to identify resisting sleep as “a challenge of masculine strength.” Always an instrument of capitalist speed-up, this work ethic now transcends gender, as Derickson brings his study up to today where unsustainable work schedules and work/life imbalances lead to high levels of sleep loss, sleep disorders, and their related morbidity and mortality. One reviewer praises Dangerously Sleepy for telling a grim story with “pace, power, and a wonderful sardonic sense of humor.”
Betsy Leondar-Wright, *Missing Class: Strengthening Social Movement Groups by Seeing Class Cultures* (Cornell) 
by Tim Strangleman, Sociology, University of Kent, UK

Many of us involved in Working Class Studies will recognize ourselves and others in the pages of *Missing Class*, a new book by Betsy Leondar-Wright. The essential premise of the volume is that while groups often pay close attention to issues of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and disability, they often miss the importance of social class. That blind spot is crucial in getting at fundamental differences between and within groups. There is, Leondar-Wright argues, class misrecognition in cultural cues, patterns of speech, taken for granted norms and values. At best these misunderstandings create tensions; at worse they lead to the breaking down of groups, ill-feeling or what Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb long ago described as the hidden injuries of class.

*Missing Class* is unapologetic in drawing on contemporary sociological ideas, and in particular the theories of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu’s ideas have come to dominate the revival of class analysis in the UK and parts of Europe. Especially important have been his concepts of “cultural capital” and “habitus” that Leondar-Wright uses here to great effect. Cultural capital can be thought of as types of intellectual and cultural resources we have gained through our families and education. Habitus refers to our learned social habits. These are relatively permanent and routine ways of life which often shape our life chances. Leondar-Wright deploys these concepts in interpreting her observations of twenty-five groups across a range of social movements in the U.S. She creates four typologies to group the variety of class trajectories she finds: Lifelong working-class and poor; Lifelong professional middle class; Voluntarily downwardly mobile; and Upwardly mobile, including “straddlers.” Readers will have fun, or angst, spotting where they fit in here.

Leondar-Wright’s book is full of detailed accounts of groups and meetings where she unpacks the lived reality of class interaction, examining small acts of kindness or indifference and how they are interpreted or felt. She builds here both on Bourdieu’s ideas, but also other on scholars from the broader field of working class studies such as Annette Lareau’s Unequal Childhoods and Barbara Jensen’s *Reading Classes*. Like both those books, *Missing Class* finds value in the different class dispositions she observes. There are no cheap shots at exposing middle-class double standards, nor simplistic siding with working-class victimhood. Rather *Missing Class* is a pragmatic attempt to understand how class works in order to help groups and individuals recognize strengths and weaknesses, to better see what and how things are said and enacted across the class divide.

*Missing Class* will be especially useful to activists and social movements struggling with issues of representativeness. It could act as a powerful starting point for some collective, if not always comfortable, discussions about what is often unspoken in group interaction. More broadly Betsy Leondar-Wright’s *Missing Class* is another important reference point for the maturing field of Working Class Studies in that it draws on and adds to existing work that focuses on working-class experience. To read *Missing Class* is to witness a field being built unaflraid to draw on ideas and theories from a wide range of disciplines and sources.
A Bitter Pill is the sixth book in Timothy Sheard’s Lenny Moss mystery series. The amateur detective at the center of the novels is an unassuming custodian and union steward in a Philadelphia hospital, whose mild manner belies his tenacity when defending his fellow workers from unfair labor practices, administrative intimidation, and sometimes their own poor judgment. Lenny was drawn into his first murder mystery, in This Won’t Hurt a Bit, in order to defend a union member who was falsely accused of the crime. The author’s experience as a nurse and shop steward allows him to show the structure of an urban hospital from the workers’ perspective, and to cast the union in a positive light. In this latest book, the mysterious demise of a character named Louie is possibly linked to the new administration’s effort to decertify the union. While readers may wonder how the dialysis technician came to be hanging dead in the electrical closet, it is clear that the real story in A Bitter Pill is not so much about murder as it is about solidarity.

When Lenny’s workplace comes under the ownership of a for-profit medical group, the new administration will go to any lengths to cut costs. While this sounds like a classically ominous setup for a murder mystery, the real world consequences of for-profit medicine are detailed in a harrowing subplot—unrelated to the murder—that dominates the first third of the book. When Mrs. Mudge falls out of her bed and breaks her hip, the author reveals the numerous missed communications that can occur between departments responsible for her care when well-meaning doctors and nurses are stretched to their limit. In the carefully elaborated details of Mrs. Mudge’s journey to orthopedics, neurology, surgery, and the ICU, the reader sees the myriad, mundane ways that the pressure to generate profits endangers patients’ safety and sets them on the path to hospital-acquired injuries...and death.

The administration’s cost cutting provokes the central drama of the novel, which is the decertification drive that threatens the union. Lenny and his friends suspect the petition was secretly drafted by the administration, rather than employees, but a certain number of workers are signing on nonetheless, influenced by threats to outsource their jobs in departments such as housekeeping, laundry, and food services. Another issue is lack of solidarity among the rank and file. When questioned by one of Lenny’s friends about the petition, a worker replies: “What’s the union ever done for me? Nothin’. They got their favorites, same as the bosses. Us Jamaicans get the worst every time” (66). The ethnic divisions among workers, in combination with the administration’s strong-arm tactics, cause workers to think they may have to swallow the “bitter pill” of giving up their union in order to keep their jobs.

Despite the threat, a new opportunity for solidarity emerges from some of the nurses, who are so beleaguered by the administration’s excessive control and increasing patient loads that they initiate a drive to organize with a division of Lenny’s union. Sheard shows us the challenges, as well as the transformative possibilities, of organizing professional and non-licensed workers together. While some nurses worry that joining the same union as laundry workers and custodians would seem “unprofessional,” others are open to it. “Throughout the hospital, nurses and aides, ward clerks and housekeepers were looking at each other in a new way . . . The greatest threat to the new bosses was cross-discipline unity. The bosses had known it for years. Now the workers were learning it, too” (174).
Sheard’s novels have been used in union steward training curricula, and for good reason. Throughout the series, readers have watched many times as Lenny defends a coworker in a disciplinary hearing with his quick thinking and dog-eared employee handbook. In *A Bitter Pill*, Lenny and his friends’ efforts to save their union and organize the nurses give readers access to nuanced strategizing sessions, conversations between unionists and their anti-union coworkers, and subtle demonstrations of ways to make all members feel valued in the struggle. Sheard does not shy away from tricky issues such as conflicts between Caribbean and African American workers, and even has his steward learn from tactical mistakes, such as when Lenny approves a union flyer that likens the head of the hospital to a Nazi, thus opening the union to allegations of libel. Sheard renders his diverse cast of working-class characters multidimensionally and pays attention to how people experience the intersection of race, gender, and class. The struggles his workers face in their daily lives never feel generalized, but they are situations many working-class readers would recognize as their own.

To complement the explicit call for solidarity in the union drive is an implicit demonstration of solidarity between Lenny and his friends. Lenny routinely takes his lunch in the sewing room, where he meets up with close comrades Moose, Birdie, Regis and Little Mary. Whether they are collecting money for the deceased’s widow, strategizing to save the union, or parsing clues to the suspicious death, Lenny and his friends are working together. This more subtle form of solidarity even extends, in one instance, to management. When the head of Human Resources—Lenny’s opponent in many a grievance procedure—is fired, “Lenny [feels] a surge of sympathy for the man” (174). While there are a few purely villainous characters in the hospital, notably Lenny’s nemesis, head of security Joe West, most of the characters are drawn so that one can understand their point of view, and see them each pressured differently by the interests of corporate medicine.

The solidarity expressed in the novels is manifested in real life by Sheard’s Hard Ball Press. Through the press, Sheard mentors working-class writers and publishes or helps them self-publish their books. He also helps unionists set up writing circles so that workers can tell their own stories, building union solidarity and pride. Hard Ball explicitly promotes working-class writing as an antidote to the denigrating representations of workers and unions by the “One Percent.” Given this sense of purpose and the relatively small operation Sheard runs, one can forgive the occasional lapse of continuity or dubious plot point in his mystery narrative. It is clear that the union story is the one that matters in *A Bitter Pill*. This reader, as one who enjoys detective fiction on its own terms, wondered about the possibilities for these books, and Hard Ball Press’s mission—to promote “working-class literature in schools, unions and the general public”—if the mystery part of the story received as much loving attention as the union part. Working-class readers and those who are invested in working-class stories will find much to love in the Lenny Moss novels, but a member of the general public who picks up *A Bitter Pill* solely to read a good mystery might be disappointed. If the mystery plot were as carefully rendered as the union drama, a reader who has no interest in working-class solidarity could find themselves drawn in, and her eyes opened.

Nonetheless, *A Bitter Pill* and the Lenny Moss mystery series offer a perspective on working-class life not often found in genre fiction. Engaging characters, a knowledgeable view of the inner workings of a large urban hospital, and a drama that asserts why unions are necessary are the key pleasures of *A Bitter Pill*. In writing a series that is not only about solidarity, but embodies it in its mode of production, Timothy Sheard and Hard Ball Press make a valuable contribution to working class literature.
Reviewed by Kathy Newman

The 1950s is a hard decade to dislodge from mythology in the American imagination. The thirties and forties were radical (plus or minus a World War), and the sixties and seventies were radical, too, but the fifties were for some reason conservative, placid, middle class and lily white. Tracy Floreani takes on the task of challenging our notions about this decade by trying to make us see that diversity was right under our noses, in *Fifties Ethnicities: The Ethnic Novel and Mass Culture at Midcentury*. She needed to write this book, in many ways, because the very project itself was confounding to those around her. Friends and colleagues would say to her: "There was ethnicity in the fifties?"

Of course there was ethnicity in the fifties! Between 1880 and 1960, more than 32 million immigrants came to the US from hundreds of countries. The ethnic and national identities of these immigrants did not magically melt away, just because *Leave it to Beaver* debuted as a sitcom on CBS in October of 1957. But for many Americans, there is "white ethnicity," which is any ethnic heritage from Southern or Eastern Europe, and then there is racial identity, which is associated more strongly with slavery, genocide, and internal colonialism. Floreani rejects this binary, by choosing novels and films that feature a variety of identities, from African American (*Maud Martha, Invisible Man, Imitation of Life*), Latino-American (*I Love Lucy*), Asian-American (*Flower Drum Song*), Russian American (*Lolita*), and Armenian-American (*Rock Wagrum*). Floreani argues that these texts did not simply appear against the backdrop of the 1950s, but that they helped to shape our images of, and our nostalgia for, the decade (7).

Floreani mixes and matches the texts above, pairing them to make arguments about what each says about ethnic identity and mass culture. *Lolita* and *Flower Drum Song*, for example, are paired together because they each show how important mass cultural forms were to establishing ethnic identity. *I Love Lucy* and *Maud Martha* are paired together because they each say something about how sex and consumer identity intertwine with ethnic identity. Floreani uses William Saroyan’s novel, *Rock Wagrum*, to argue that identity itself is a contradictory and unstable category. Finally, Floreani pairs *The Invisible Man* with *Imitation of Life* to argue that the characters in these stories do their best to make poetry out of invisibility, and to negotiate “new identities through public performance” (104).

Floreani proves that race and ethnicity were viable subjects for mainstream American texts in the 1950s, and that men and women who bore the markers of ethnic and racial difference were protagonists, even stars, of literary and popular culture. 10 years before the Civil Rights movement became nightly news, before Black Power fists and marches, before the radical Ethnic Studies movement, and before multi-racial student protests and demonstrations on college campuses, there novels, films and television shows that addressed the often painful contradictions of being ethnic and becoming American.

In terms of methodology, Floreani uses mostly close readings of narrative plot. Floreani does, however, integrate mass culture into her interpretations. Alongside her reading of Saroyan’s novel, *Rock Wagrum*, for example, she highlights the career of Danny Thomas, a Lebanese American comedian and actor who starred in one of the longest running sitcoms of the post war period, *The Danny Thomas Show*. She uses Thomas’s real life stardom to help us think about the fictional stardom of the character Arak Vagramian, who struggles with both fame and his Armenian identity throughout the novel. In other words, Floreani uses mass culture to explain the fictional texts, and she uses fictional texts to explain how gender roles, consumerism, American identity and desire were being reconfigured in the 1950s.
Surprisingly, perhaps, Floreani does not connect race and ethnicity to questions of class—especially working class—identity. Floreani argues that film and television rarely represented working class people in a realistic or respectful manner. In truth there were ethnic, working class people portrayed with surprising realism on both film and television (think _Marty_, _Salt of the Earth_, _A Man is Ten Feet Tall_ _Edge of the City_, _A View From the Bridge_, _On the Waterfront_, _Raisin in the Sun_ and _The Pajama Game_, for starters), but this is yet another 1950s—another cultural history yet to be written.

I do wonder how much novels—in the age of electronic mass culture, adaptation, and media saturation—have to tell us about who we are. But I think Floreani’s larger argument is crucial, which is that narrative, in all of forms, is fundamental to the process of identity formation. One ever has to “become American,” and we need novels, television, film, magazines, and, now, digital media to tell us who we are, who we might become, and to help us argue against those who would oppress, segregate and exclude.

### Center Reports

The Murphy Institute part of CUNY School of Professional Studies has launched a new Scholarship in Labor Studies, designed to promote diversity of leadership in the labor movement and in the academic field of Labor Studies. The Institute is now accepting applications for the 2014-15 academic year. The scholarship is substantial: up to $30,000 for graduate students and up to $20,000 for undergraduates. It is also very competitive, designed to provide rigorous education and training to our most promising potential leaders.

Click on the links for the on-line [application](#), and for details [about the scholarship](#).

### John Beck, Our Daily Work/Our Daily Lives, Michigan State University

Our Daily Work/Our Daily Lives is a joint program at Michigan State University drawing on the mutual interest at the MSU Museum and in the MSU Labor Education Program in workers culture, labor history and working class life. This collaboration has promoted the preservation, promotion and presentation of workers culture through a variety of activities including film showings, fiction and poetry readings, museum exhibits, and the ODW/ODL brown bag series which entered its 18th year in September. We are beginning to put together the 2014/2015 and it looks to be a great year. We are currently in negotiation to have presentations on labor troubadour John Handcox, worker housing for miners in Michigan’s copper country, the early days of the UAW, folklorist Alan Lomax’s work among Michigan timber workers, Midwestern surveyors in the 1800’s, the labor culture of the Caterpillar strike, Ironworkers and their festivals, and the working class and the early recording industry to name a few topics. This year we worked in cooperation with the Poetry Center at MSU to bring North Carolina poet Barbara Presnell to
campus (Piece Work). We also worked with the local folk music organization, Ten Pound Fiddle, to utilize three of their performers, Andy Cohen, Noah Shull and Ysaye Barnwell (a recent retiree from the iconic Sweet Honey in the Rock) in our speaker series.

Our recent photographic exhibit at the MSU Museum, “Detroit Resurgent,” which was co-sponsored by Our Daily Work/Our Daily Lives is moving to the Motor City where it will be on display in two venues in the city. The exhibit, the work of French photographer Gilles Perrin, assisted by his wife Nicole Ewenczyk, is a body of portraits specifically created for the MSU Museum featuring people from all works of life who are working to rebuild the City of Detroit and secure its future: urban farmers and food entrepreneurs, workers and union leaders, designers and business owners, visionaries, artists and activists. The exhibit Photographs, interviews and related essays are in a new book of the same name, Detroit Resurgent, published by Michigan State University Press and available on April 1. For more on the book, go to http://msupress.org/books/book/?id=50-1D0-3435#.UxelRM55GUI.

Starting on Martin Luther King Jr. weekend 2014, we launched the campus-wide conversation, exploration, commemoration and celebration across Michigan State University and our broader community of two key anniversaries—the 60th anniversary of the US Supreme Court decision in Brown vs. School Board, which ended the legal doctrine of racial inequality based in “separate, but equal,” and the 50th anniversary of the 1964 Civil Rights Act which was passed by the US Congress and signed by President Lyndon Johnson and designed to broadly end discrimination based on race, religion, national origin and gender. The yearlong exploration of human rights and civil rights will look at the legal milestones as well as putting the anniversaries in the context of rights still to be won both nationally and globally. Planning is underway across campus for various speaker series, a major conference on Brown, and a number of campus-community collaborations which will see the theme played out across the state. Our Daily Work/Our Daily Lives will have a number of events in the 2014 calendar year which reflect on the themes of “60/50,” including many of the presentations in our Fall 2014 brown bag series and two exhibits, one of Chilean arpilleras done during the Pinochet regime (many based in labor and workplace struggles) and an exhibit of Chicano/Latino posters from the United Farmworker drives for justice, the fight for Puerto Rican independence, and the Brown Power movement among others. We also will be working with the campus unions at MSU to coordinate a series of conversations on the topic, “Labor Rights Are Human Rights.” For more on Project 60/50, check out the website: http://inclusion.msu.edu/Project6050/.