President’s Report

Dear fellow members of the Working Class Studies Association,

In my letter to you last fall, I talked about the importance of expanding our membership through a variety of efforts. One specific effort near and dear to my heart entails making way and making space within the organization, including the organization’s leadership, for a new generation of scholars, teachers, and activists. As past president Jack Metzgar has reminded me, my presidency is a part of that generational shift in the leadership. And for the record, let’s just say that I am no spring chicken.

A key part of welcoming a new generation to the organization is our Young Scholars and Activists Initiative (YSAI), and I am pleased to report that, in our second year of making awards to support attendance at the conference, we received over fifty applications. This is an indication that a large number of graduate students and people early in their careers are planning to attend and present at the conference, which is heartening news. The down side is that we are able to support, at least in a material sense, only a small number of them. Treasurer Cherie Rankin recently sent out a message to our membership asking people to consider making a designated donation to the WCSA to support both the Young Scholars and Activists Initiative and our need-based Travel Grants Fund; I would like to echo her request. Having read the proposals of all the YSAI applicants, believe me when I say that as a group, they are doing very interesting work that deserves to be nurtured and supported. Buoyed by the success of last year’s effort at the Stony Brook conference, we are planning a meet-and-greet reception for the Georgetown conference specifically designed to welcome newcomers and graduate students. We are finalizing the details, which we’ll pass along as soon as possible, but please try and join us on the evening of Wednesday, May 27th to meet some new faces and reconnect with familiar ones.

Another possibility for expanding our membership takes a different approach. Prior to the conference, I will be circulating a proposal to the membership via e-mail outlining a plan for the Association of Working Class Academics (AWCA) to join our ranks, functioning as a caucus within the Working Class Studies Association. For those unfamiliar with them, the Association of Working Class Academics advocates for students and faculty of poverty- and working-class origins; strives to implement reforms designed to assure greater class equity within colleges and universities; establishes relationships and connections between poverty- and working-class academics, and serves as an informational resource for those interested in issues affecting poverty- and working-class people. The proposal, which has been approved by the Working Class Studies Association’s steering committee, lays out the details and logistics of the plan to incorporate the AWCA. Please watch your inboxes for this proposal, and be prepared to discuss and vote on it.

As you read further in this issue of the newsletter, please take a few minutes to read Sherry Linkon’s report on the upcoming Fighting Inequality conference. I am hopeful that this joint conference with the Labor and Working Class History Association will result in stimulating and unexpected dialogue between members of our organizations, and I also hope that it will have lingering effects, perhaps in the form of future collaborations on conference panels or research projects. I hope to see many of you there.

Finally, as spring approaches, it is time to begin thinking about our elections process. When the call for nominations goes out to
the membership, please consider getting involved in the organization. Those of us in current leadership positions would be more than happy to speak with anyone considering increasing their involvement. The future health and stability of the WCSA depends on the visionary ideas and dedication of its members.

All my best,

Christie Launius

**Secretary’s Report**

The 2015 Young Scholar’s and Activists Initiative (YSAI) committee is currently considering candidates for this year’s conference. Based on the success of last year’s event, a meet-and-greet reception for newcomers and returning members has been arranged for Wednesday before the opening night film screening at Georgetown. A new membership campaign has been underway since early fall, and the Communications Committee is currently expanding the visibility of the WCSA on social media as well as updating the website regularly to feature various news items. The Steering Committee has approved a proposal for the Association of Working-Class Academics to join WCSA as a caucus; the proposal will be circulated to the WCSA membership prior to our conference in May. Lastly, the Travel Grant application was revised to clarify information for international applicants as well as to determine funding limits for all applicants.

**Treasurer’s Report**

The Association continues to be solid financially, with just over $25,000 in our accounts.

The next significant expense coming up is travel grant funding for scholars in need who are attending our upcoming conference at Georgetown, and funding for the Young Scholars Initiative. In past years, we’ve received several hundred dollars in designated travel fund donations; this year, those donations have been significantly lower.

At present, we plan to fund both Travel Grant programs at their usual levels, in spite of the lower donation amounts. However, should you be so inclined, you are encouraged to make a designated donation to the travel grant funds. You may do so by making a PayPal payment through the WCSA website, or you may send a donation via personal check (made out to the WCSA) to me at the address below: Cherie Rankin / PO Box 264 / Emden, IL 62635. Thanks in advance for your support of these travel grant funds.
Member News

Helen Diana Eidson, assistant professor of rhetoric and composition at Auburn University, is teaching undergraduate and graduate courses in rhetorical theory and practice this spring. This semester’s theme is working-class rhetoric, and the students are looking at primary sources by and about Alabama sharecroppers and tenant families. One of the main units of study focuses on Nate Shaw (Ned Cobb), a tenant farmer from Tallapoosa County, Alabama. The students are reading Shaw’s oral history All God’s Dangers: A Life of Nate Shaw (1974; compiled and edited by Theodore Rosengarten) and Robin D.G. Kelly’s Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists during the Depression (1990). The students are completing primary research projects, including articles for the Encyclopedia of Alabama (http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/). The primary purpose is for students to understand how to analyze and produce rhetorical texts through a deep understanding of the ways theory and practice inform one another.

Jennifer Westerman, assistant professor of sustainable development at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina, is co-editor of a collection of essays entitled Working on Earth: Class and Environmental Justice. (See “Book Notes” for more.)

Dick Roman’s co-authored book (with Edur Velasco Arregui), Continental Crucible: Big Business, Workers and Unions in the Transformation of North America, will be published in a second edition in April 2015, co-published by PM (U.S.) and Fernwood (Canada).

Book Notes

**Working on Earth: Class and Environmental Justice** (U. of Nevada Press), edited by Christina Robertson and Jennifer Westerman
This collection of essays traces the various connections between modern industrial capitalism and ecological and human health, examining the relationship between environmental injustice and the exploitation of working-class people. According to the publisher, the volume shows “how the use and abuse of nature benefit the wealthy elite at the expense of working-class people and the working poor as well as how climate change will affect cultures deeply rooted in the land.” It calls for “a working-class ecology as an integral part of achieving just and sustainable human development.” Kathy Newman of Carnegie-Mellon University and the *Working-Class Perspectives* blog praises it as “a significant contribution to the literature on class, labor, personal history, and environmentalism. Indeed, it is one of the first volumes of its kind to explain the ways in which class and the environment are powerfully, and sometimes tragically, entwined.”

**New York Hustle: Pool Rooms, School Rooms and Street Corners** (Hard Ball Press), Stan Maron
Stan Maron was a foster child and high-school dropout in Brooklyn who supported himself from an early age as a garment delivery boy, a waiter, a cab driver, and finally, as a street peddler. As the publisher explains: “In the 1950’s and ‘60’s a street peddler could purchase items manufactured right in New York City: umbrellas, toys, Christmas ornaments, ladies undergarments – you name it, somebody was manufacturing it in the city.” In the process Maron experienced a wide variety of workplaces and street life, and in this memoir he reveals both his own journey and the wild cast of characters he met and the institutions he worked around and through, including unions and other social justice groups. Poet David Ferry calls Maron “vividly and courageously observant about himself and his own experience, and everyone around him.” Others describe *New York Hustle* as a “moving and intense memoir,” a “fascinating, compelling autobiography,” and “compelling, heartfelt, and beautifully written.”

**Community Organizing: Fanning the Flame of Democracy** (Polity), David Walls
A sociology professor and community activist, David Walls learned the organizer’s craft as a young man in the 1960s in the central Appalachian coal fields. This brief history of community organizing, from its roots in the 1930s with Saul Alinsky, provides both context and strategic guidance for organizers and students of social movements. Written for use in the college classroom, the brevity of the book combined with the broad scope of its treatment up to the present makes it especially useful for that purpose. But as one reviewer noted, there are benefits for even veteran organizers “who might be wondering how various strands of organizing fit into historical and strategic context.” The book cover inexplicably does not reproduce the “Fanning the Flame of Democracy” subtitle, and that is unfortunate since Walls places community organizing in a broad historical and international framework that roots it in the past two centuries of struggle for both political and social democracy.
The Long Rifle Season: Oklahoma Stories (Mongrel Empire Press), James Murray

This collection of stories, both historical and contemporary, is described by the publisher as standing “among the best of the grit lit / rough South genre: fatalistic in humor, devoid of romanticism, anti-nostalgic, unwaveringly truthful, deeply authentic.” A passage from The Long Rifle Season is quoted on the back cover: “It’s a ghetto, he thought, a rural ghetto. The squalor in a city was all bulldozed together on the wrong side of some railroad tracks. But out here the squalor was spread out over dozens and hundreds of square miles.” Poet Quraysh Ali Lansana says the stories capture “earthen Okie humanity with the vernacular dexterity and quiet lyrical wisdom of a good front porch yarn. A kind of grace. A kind of disgrace. A kind of cheap beer elegance.”

The Tunnel (e-penguin), Dennis McIntosh

This memoir has a long subtitle on its cover: “How an ex-shearer with a fear of closed spaces turned his seven years of working underground into something remarkable.” McIntosh was a skilled sheep shearer in Australia from the ages of 19 to 27, but had left that trade as the result of a labor dispute, and was desperate for work when he found a job digging a deep tunnel near Melbourne. He had panic attacks and hyperventilated at this new job, was an alcoholic, and his eldest daughter was on an intensive brain-retraining program due to a childhood injury. The Tunnel is the story of how he learned to control his panic attacks on long lonely nightshifts, achieve sobriety, overcome disputes with management and other men on his crew, and survive the breakup of his marriage. According to the publisher’s notes, McIntosh’s “epiphany came with the recovery of his daughter, and the realization that he too could retrain his brain.”

Crossing Broadway: Washington Heights and the Promise of New York City (Cornell), Robert W. Snyder

Washington Heights is on that far northern slice of Manhattan Island across from the Bronx and has long been a working-class neighborhood attracting waves of immigrants – Irish, Jewish, Greek, African American, Cuban, Puerto Rican, and most recently, Dominican. Broadway snakes through the neighborhood and has traditionally been a racial/ethnic boundary separating blacks from whites, Jews from Irish, Dominican-born from American-born. Robert Snyder’s narrative begins in the 1980s when residents feared the neighborhood might collapse in a crack-fueled, gang-ruled epidemic of crime and racial/ethnic antagonism, but goes on to show how people there came together to combat their collective problems after first learning how to “cross Broadway.” Ramona Hernandez, director of CUNY’s Dominican Studies Institute, comments: “With a photographic sensibility, Snyder vividly sets the scene and describes how groups fought and stigmatized each other, and then ended up rubbing elbows with one another, either because these groups managed to undermine their ignorance and lost their fear of each other or because they simply had no choice.” Others praise Crossing Broadway as “a strong, engaging narrative that covers a long sweep of history, balancing big themes with closely told stories of everyday life” and “a testament to the tenacity, dynamism, and vitality of the people who have made Washington Heights their home.”
Time Served: Poems (West End Press), Carlos Contreras

National Poetry Slam Champion Carlos Contreras facilitates the Voces youth writing program at the National Hispanic Cultural Center and is a cofounder of Just Write, a prison and public writing program in New Mexico. He also teaches incarcerated adults at the Metropolitan Detention Center in downtown Albuquerque, and Time Served comes out of that experience. The publisher calls it “a conversation in two parts: one, a monologue-style musing on working in a correction facility told from an insider/outsider perspective; and two, an homage to veterans of other kinds of war who must learn to live inside and outside their own prisons of mind and body.” One reviewer praises Contreras as “a major voice of the American Southwest” and another as “a respectful and honest witness to painful struggles, dark corners, unexpected art, and honest humanity that exist in and outside correctional facilities . . . in and outside of not-so-perfect, but loving families . . . and most definitely reside within all human beings.”

The Daily Grind: How Workers Navigate the Employment Relationship (Lexington Books), Marquita R. Walker

This book roots its analysis of today’s workplace in a broad economic and historical context, exploring “how the American work ethic of the early nineteenth century helped shape the current perspective on the labor-management relationship, and how, over time, the Protestant and patriarchal influences of that period have countered the collective actions of workers in profound ways.” Marquita Walker argues that today “societal, cultural, and economic structures, both global and local, . . . limit workers’ ability to achieve the ‘American Dream’ and result in depressed economic conditions and discouraged workers.” Veteran labor educator Helena Worthen praises Walker for keeping “her eye on the central theme of working people’s experience as she tackles the big questions of what creates an economy and the history of production.”

Rednecks, Queers, and Country Music (U. of California), Nadine Hubbs

Described as a “powerful combination of music criticism, cultural critique, and sociological analysis of contemporary class formation,” this book “challenges the conventional wisdom and historical amnesia that frame white working folk as a perpetual bigot class.” According to the publisher: “Nadine Hubbs zeroes in on flawed assumptions about how country music models and mirrors white working-class identities. She particularly shows how dismissive, politically loaded middle-class discourses devalue country’s manifestations of working-class culture, politics, and values, and render working-class acceptance of queerness invisible.” The reviewer for the Times Literary Supplement praises the book for making “a strong plea for the redneck and the queer - not necessarily always different people - as significant actors in American life.” (114)
Songs of the Factory: Pop Music, Culture, and Resistance (Cornell), Marek Korczynski

Based on his ethnographic fieldwork in a British Midlands factory that makes window blinds, Marek Korczynski reveals how “workers make often-grueling assembly-line work tolerable by permeating their workday with pop music on the radio.” More than that, however, he argues that the music not only helps workers “fulfill their social roles in a regimented industrial environment,” but also helps them sustain “extensive forms of informal . . . collective acts of resistance.” According to the publisher, “As well as providing a rich picture of the musical culture and associated forms of resistance in the factory, Korczynski also puts forward new theoretical concepts that have currency in other workplaces and in other rationalized spheres of society.” One reviewer calls it a “beautifully written and often moving account [that] demonstrates that we learn a huge amount, not only about the neglected place of pop music in the creation and maintenance of a workplace culture and its subtle linkages with resistance but also about the structure of the pop song and the history of popular music.”

Saint Cole (Fantagraphics Books), Noah Van Sciver

This book is cartoonist Noah Van Sciver’s first graphic novel, following on the success of his graphic biography of Abraham Lincoln, The Hypo. According to the publisher: “Saint Cole depicts four days in the life of a twenty-eight-year-old suburbanite named Joe, who works at a pizzeria to support his girlfriend Nicole and their infant child – and then Nicole invites her troubled mother to move into their two-bedroom apartment until she lands on her feet again. Joe reacts by retreating into alcohol: he wants out, and he’s angry. He’s in a position to act rashly - and he does.”

With Our Loving Hands: 1199 Nursing Home Workers Tell Their Story (Hard Ball Press), edited by Tim Sheard

WCSA member Tim Sheard teaches writing workshops where he encourages workers to write about their work and other parts of their lives, read their stories aloud, and discuss them with their fellow worker-writers. This volume collects more than 50 of the stories generated by this process, all by nursing home workers who care for the elderly and infirm in New England and are represented by Local 1199 NE. As the publisher comments: “These essential caregivers are too often ignored or disrespected. Yet their stories show us how their challenging work is so often motivated by love. Family members and friends who are admitted for long term care, and perhaps for the last stage of life, are comforted by these courageous workers whose loving hands hold them in their long, lonely night.”
*Out in the Union: A Labor History of Queer America* (Temple U.), Miriam Frank

Based on interviews with queer labor activists, this book recounts the “continuous story of queer American workers from the mid-1960s though 2013” and shows how queer caucuses in local unions fighting for domestic partner benefits in union contracts spearheaded the formation of larger alliances between unions and LGBT communities. According to the publisher, Miriam Frank “chronicles the evolution of labor politics with queer activism and identity formation” and “documents coming out on the job and in the union as well as issues of discrimination and harassment.” One reviewer says of *Out in the Union*: “This is not a book that provides a dry and complete overview of queer-labor activism, but instead is a love letter to the victories and efforts of the people who lived that activism.”

*Workers Write! More Tales from the Cubicle* (Blue Cubicle Press), edited by David LaBounty

Blue Cubicle Press publishes two literary journals, *The First Line* and *Workers Write!*, and a chapbook series, *Overtime*. The press describes itself as “dedicated to giving voice to writers who realize their words may never pay the mortgage but who are too stubborn to stop trying . . . artists trapped in the daily grind.” This book is a collection of stories and poems by office workers from Blue Cubicle’s *Workers Write!* journal. Some titles include “Office Musing,” “Our Buddha of the Personalized Cups,” “Demotion,” “An Evening in Call-Center Land,” and “Batch Failure.”

*The Workplace Constitution from the New Deal to the New Right* (Cambridge U.), Sophia Z. Lee

Perusing the Table of Contents, this book is clearly a sophisticated political history of American labor law since the 1930s when both the National Labor Relations Act and the Fair Labor Standards Act were passed. During that period, the book contends, “advocates across the political spectrum - labor leaders, civil rights advocates, and conservatives opposed to government regulation - set out to enshrine constitutional rights in the workplace.” This initial effort was enhanced by equal employment opportunity and health and safety laws in the 1960s and ‘70s, but has since been unravelling. The publisher comments: “Today, most Americans lack constitutional rights on the job. Instead of enjoying free speech or privacy, they can be fired for any reason or no reason at all. This book uses history to explain why.”
Passion’s Pride: Return to the Dawning (Hard Ball Press), Cathie Wright-Lewis

The protagonist of this novel, Mecca Freeman, is a high school teacher who has lost her faith in people, in the future, and in the promise of racial equality and understanding. Her mother is Passion. When Mecca and her students witness the attack on the World Trade Center on 9/11, she begins a journey of discovery that leads to her understanding of why her mother “abandoned the fight for civil rights in Brooklyn and took her children out of the movement.” She also comes to understand “the connection between the Twin Towers, symbols of American wealth and power, and the slave trade that led so many African slaves to their death and burial at the foot of the Towers.”

Seizing Freedom: Slave Emancipation and Liberty for All (Verso), David Roediger

In his latest book, David Roediger tells the story of African-American slaves’ self-emancipation during the Civil War and Reconstruction. According to the publisher: “Reinstating ex-slaves’ own ‘freedom dreams’ . . . Roediger creates a masterful account of the emancipation and its ramifications on a whole host of day-to-day concerns for Whites and Blacks alike, such as property relations, gender roles, and labor.” One reviewer calls the book “a useful corrective to overly simplistic, top-down emancipation narratives.” Another praises it for showing how “this massive self-emancipation from below set in motion ‘radiating impulses toward freedom,’ promoting literacy for freedmen, a pursuit of family ties and a new sense of social motion.”

Hand to Mouth: Living in Bootstrap America (Putnam), Linda Tirado

In this widely praised book, Linda Tirado tells what her days are like as a low-wage worker and mother of two children. She has worked as a manager at Burger King, a night cook at Ihop, and a voting rights organizer for a disability nonprofit, among numerous other jobs. A college graduate, she “went from lower-middle class, to sometimes middle class, to poor and everything in between,” and a core purpose of her book is to explain why “poor people don’t always behave the way middle-class America thinks they should.” According to a wide range of reviewers, Tirado achieves her aim. Matt Taibbi calls her “a terrific writer” and says: “Linda asks why we all can’t at least agree that someone has to do the grunt work, and that there’s dignity in that, too. With this strong and unembarrassed account of her life on the edges of poverty Linda single-handedly re-takes some of the dignity that has been stripped from people without means . . . . Honesty has its own power and this is a most honest book.” Huffington Post blogger Bob Creamer draws similar conclusions: “For those who have never had the experience, Tirado’s book allows you to hear, smell, taste, feel and visualize life as a minimum wage worker. It also leaves you with two inescapable conclusions. First, poverty can happen to anyone - even if you are born into the middle class. Second, you can educate people until you are blue in the face, but as long as there are jobs that require sweeping floors, flipping burgers, or waiting tables, we will never eliminate poverty until everyone who works is paid a living wage.”
**Racism, Class and the Racialized Outsider** (Palgrave Macmillan), Satnam Virdee

A sociologist at the University of Glasgow, Satnam Virdee combines history and sociology in developing his perspective on the significance of both racism and anti-racism in the making of the English working class. Here’s how the publisher describes Virdee’s argument: “While racism became a powerful structuring force within this social class from as early as the mid-Victorian period, this book also traces the episodic emergence of currents of working class anti-racism. Through an insistence that race is central to the way class works, this insightful text demonstrates not only that the English working class was a multi-ethnic formation from the moment of its inception but that racialized others - Irish Catholics, Jews, Asians and the Africa diaspora - often played a catalytic role in the collective action that helped fashion a more inclusive and democratic society.”

**Pretty Boy** (Mongrel Empire Press), William Cunningham

Charles “Pretty Boy” Floyd was a bank robber during the Great Depression, robbing small-town banks throughout the Midwest and Southwest. When he was killed by police officers near East Liverpool, Ohio, in 1934 he was the FBI’s “Public Enemy #1,” having been accused of killing several policemen in Kansas City and elsewhere. Due to the FBI’s public relations campaign against gangsters, Floyd received a lot of publicity, but much of it turned out to be positive because he destroyed mortgage documents as he robbed banks, freeing many people of their debts. Originally from Oklahoma, Floyd was sometimes called “Robin Hood of the Cookson Hills” in that state. This book is described as a “classic proletarian novel” based on Floyd’s life and written by William Cunningham in 1936.

**Labor’s Love Lost: The Rise and Fall of the Working-Class Family in America** (Russell Sage Foundation), Andrew J. Cherlin

This book focuses on the radical change in prospects for families with only high school educations to take into the workplace. Low wages and precarious employment cause many young adults to forego marriage but not child-rearing, leaving many young mothers with both low wages and tenuous relationships. According to the publisher, “Labor’s Love Lost provides a compelling analysis of the historical dynamics and ramifications of the growing number of young adults disconnected from steady, decent-paying jobs and from marriage. . . . . To address this disparity, Cherlin recommends policies to foster educational opportunities for children and adolescents from disadvantaged families. He also stresses the need for labor market interventions, such as subsidizing low wages through tax credits and raising the minimum wage.”
Spheres of Influence: The Social Ecology of Racial and Class Inequality (Russell Sage Foundation), Douglas Massey and Stefanie Brodmann

Heavy-duty social science, this book is full of facts and figures on racial and class disparities in the U.S. and opens with a sophisticated theory of human development that combines traditional psychological stages with social and economic “spheres of influence” which the authors call “social ecologies.” According to the authors, their aim is to reveal “the huge range in exposure to ecological advantages and disadvantages that adolescents face in American society, and how this variation in exposure is structured simultaneously by race and class.”

The 1937 Chicago Steel Strike: Blood on the Prairie (The History Press), John F. Hogan

There had never been a book focused on what is known as the Memorial Day Massacre at the Chicago Plant of Republic Steel in 1937. Now there are two. John Hogan, a former Chicago journalist and broadcaster, is more strictly focused on the events of that day, when police shot and clubbed ten strikers and supporters to death and seriously injured at least a hundred more. Long seen now as a “police riot” revealed by eight minutes of newsreel footage, both local and Congressional investigations immediately afterwards reached very different conclusions about what happened and why. According to the publisher, this book “sifts through the conflicting reports of all those entangled in that fateful day, including union leaders, news reporters and an undercover National Guard observer revealed after seventy-six years.”

Blood on Steel: Chicago Steelworkers and the Strike of 1937 (John Hopkins U. Press), Michael Dennis

Michael Dennis’ book places the Memorial Day Massacre in a larger historical context, first as part of the Little Steel Strike of which Chicago was only one locale and then in the larger context of rank-and-file union organizing and other forms of protest, civil disobedience, and strikes that both spurred important labor legislation and were then spurred by that legislation. According to the publisher, “Dennis’s wide-angle perspective reveals the Memorial Day Massacre as not simply another bloody incident in the long story of labor-management tension in American history but as an illustration of the broad-based movement for social democracy which developed in the New Deal era.”
Class Lives is a powerful, welcome and timely collection of personal reflections. The narratives are powerful in three ways. They are deeply focused, as the writers never stray from the core of the book’s mission. They are engaging, as the writing and editing maintain the very personal experiences the authors shared. The pieces done by “real” writers in the volume are artful, and all of them are expressive and thoughtful and often uncomfortable to read.

The book is a meaningful testament to the late Felice Yeskel and her important work. Her introduction explores the experiment that gave birth to this book - a six-and-a-half-year project of consciously bringing together people from a variety of class backgrounds to interrogate their own classed lives and how social class lives. The personal risks they took, the difficult conversations they had, and the friendships they made are the backbone of the book and offer a blueprint for similar experiments.

Organized into five categories, “Poor and Low Income,” “Working Class,” “Middle Class,” “Owning Class” and “Mixed Class,” the essays give the reader the chance to see the strengths and weaknesses that the authors find in their own class positions. The poor are not heroes, the rich not villains. Instead the writers remember micro moments that served as class markers in their lives. The moments shared are often about knowing and not knowing. The authors explore knowing your kin, knowing every inch of your neighborhood, knowing how to use cloth napkins and not knowing how to dress, how to fit in, how to see your own blindness to your own privilege.

In her essay “North American Peasant,” Fisher Lavell lyrically illuminates her migration into a middle-class world and the ongoing emotional and financial toll she feels expected to pay from family members still struggling. Monica Crumback in her essay, “Finding Myself in the Middle,” presents that awkward moment when a preteen’s class identity crumbles under the weight of the wider world, and her confidence in her class privilege is shattered by a cold house and a pair of awesome legwarmers. Among the “Owning Class” essays, Catherine Orland makes an accounting of all that her privilege has given her but also the guilt and awkwardness and insensitivity that comes when that privilege is laid bare.

The editors note that their efforts to find more voices from the farthest ends of the spectrum were not always successful. The super-rich and those who hold the power of the ruling class were not inclined to participate. Nor were those who did not have the opportunity to look back on poverty as part of the past and not the present. While the book includes voices of Latinos and African Americans, there are no voices from Asian Americans. Frankly, the brevity of the reflections was the one thing that frustrated me about the book. Most of the entries are between four and six pages. I wanted more from many of them.

Class Lives is a moving and consistently strong bundle of personal snapshots. They capture a lot of raw emotion, and some make clear statements about the political and economic systems that hold class together. As faculty at a university with a majority of first-generation college students, I am eager to use this book and especially the essays in the sub-section “Working Class and College.”
Review by Katherine Kidd, University of Pittsburgh

In *Love and Money* Lisa Henderson explores the intersection of working-class status and queer identity. She employs a diverse multi-media archive, ranging from mainstream television programs and feature films like *Modern Family* and *Brokeback Mountain,* to the independent films *By Hook or by Crook* and *Desert Motel,* as well as her transcripts of readings by Dorothy Allison and interviews with Allison's audience members. Through these texts, Henderson explores the various ways that working-class queer people engage with various forms of queer cultural production. Through a primarily queer and affective theoretical framework, she makes explicit the class issues in queer life that many queer theorists merely gesture toward, and she does so while working to resolve her own class in-betweenness, as a child of "genteel poverty" and a queer with the cultural capital of higher education. Throughout the text, she reflects on her own class experience to position her analysis on a spectrum of recognition from queer class experience to queer class cultural production.

Henderson clarifies the stakes of her project early on: "to reinvigorate queer accountability to class" (3). She deals, like many working in the "crossroads of queerness and class" (1), with how homonormativity (the phenomenon wherein mainstream LGBT politics has been steered toward middle-class and consumerist belonging, rather than toward anti-capitalism and solidarity with other marginalized groups) and contemporary neoliberalism have obscured the best of queer creativity. Because *creativity* is at the heart of her analysis, she takes a step out of mere textual analysis to look at the scene of cultural production, rather than cultural products alone. This is a project that involves both textual close-reading and fieldwork, and it values "informal scenes" of culture-making as much as final products and completed texts.

The strengths of this text are supported by Henderson's careful definition of several key terms in the introductory chapter. For instance, much of this exploration springboards from her "commercial repressive hypothesis," borrowed from Foucault's "sexual repressive hypothesis," wherein she refuses the notion that Americans don't have the language to talk about class. She argues that "Queer class projects are everywhere" if we look closely (18). For Henderson, this means expanding our conception of queerness itself. Henderson presents a surprisingly convincing queer reading of Miranda July's film *You and Me and Everyone We Know,* which is outwardly about heterosexual love. Her reading focuses on the film's expression of how economic precarity creates queer affect, emphasizing class and queer survival tactics performed through small moments of kindness and tenderness.

Additionally, Henderson introduces "queer relay," the revelatory claim that, contrary to the viewpoint of most critics, there is not a sealed boundary between media forms and everyday life (32), and that both mainstream and more independent or underground texts that deal with queerness "draw from the same deep well of class discourse and value" (32). This means that television shows like *Will and Grace* are working with the same cultural material as more low-budget or independent queer representations, such as the brilliant and decidedly working-class transgender friendship film *By Hook or by Crook.* She further contends that relay "refers to an ongoing, uneven process of cultural passing off, catching, and passing on...it is not assimilation... although it shares with those ideas a mediating impulse and a lively aversion to
hardened categories in cultural analysis” (103). The major weakness of the text comes from an unconvincing articulation of this concept through her discussion of the production process of Desert Motel, a short film about butch anxiety in the face of transgender masculine expression. She tries to link the low-budget nature of its independent production to queer class experience, but she doesn't go far enough to connect the lack of queer project funding to the everyday experience of class for queer people.

Despite this point of weakness, Henderson's discussion of class and queer recognition in Dorothy Allison's writing and public appearances pointedly expresses the inextricability of queerness from the working-class experience in the intersection of class, gender, and sexuality, crystalized in Henderson's retelling of a scene in which Allison is told about a young heterosexual man who felt that reading her work saved him from suicide. When asked what she thought of the depth of this man's sense of connection to the class trauma about which she writes so richly, Allison responds, with tongue firmly in cheek, “What I want to know...is he dating boys yet?” Allison's joke makes Henderson's point well: we cannot separate queer experience from class status, nor can we disentangle class experience from sexuality or gender.

Sue Ellen Henry, Children’s Bodies in Schools: Corporeal Performances of Social Class (Palgrave Pivot, 2014)
Review by Heidi Jones, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse

I began to read Sue Ellen Henry’s Children’s Bodies in Schools the day Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker announced his proposed astronomical budget cut to the UW System, and I finished the text during the protests against the Right to Work Bill. Connecting the text to these events is clear because of Henry’s main argument: working-class bodies are perceived negatively in a world where middle-class values and bodies are normalized and privileged, particularly in school settings, where middle class habitus is reified. Henry’s text lays the groundwork for future research in embodiment in schools by including extensive literature reviews and theoretical frameworks, and an analysis of two different types of curriculum for “poor” kids that reifies their social class position.

In my home state of Wisconsin, governmental bodies, whom are mostly white, middle-class bodies, are making decisions that do not directly affect their own corporeal performances, as Henry would call them, but instead deeply and negatively affect those humans whose corporeal performances are often ignored or devalued. Questions that come to mind in the current political climate: How are the bodies protesting at the capital perceived by these middle-class legislators? How have these bodies come to be socially classed through the hidden curriculum of public schooling in America? How do people like me, working-class academics, balance these dual corporeal performances within a system that devalues both my working-class embodiment and my identity as a professor?

While Henry’s central question for the text is: “How are children’s corporeal performances—shaped by their social class upbringing—interpreted by teachers and how might these (mis)interpretations influence the social reproductive effects of schooling?” (p. 1), she also discusses the result of these (mis)interpretations and the reification of social reproduction in
the lives of adults. Specifically, she analyzes the curriculum created by Ruby Payne for students in poverty, as well as the KIPP schools, as examples of the ways in which schools expect and promote middle-class corporeality and essentially “do violence” to working-class kids. This hidden curriculum is essentially self-control, which is seen as a “central mechanism by which different corporeal performances become advantageous or detrimental in navigating the somatic expectations of school” (p.1). Henry argues that the focus of school is typically on students’ minds, and that the body is seen as a separate, non-related entity in that once students can “control” their bodies (i.e. sit still in their desks, sit a particular way during story time, line up appropriately), their brain can begin to learn.

Henry then, smartly, connects the idea of the mind/body separation to the neoliberal idea of economic prosperity and the “importance of education in national strategies to develop a quality, skilled workforce for the global age” (p. 19). The concept of neoliberal education can be seen in Governor Walker’s “rewriting” of the Wisconsin Idea: “Walker’s proposed changes to the Wisconsin Idea would have struck passages about state outreach, improving the human condition and pursuing truth, in favor of more narrowly defining state campuses as agents of workforce development” (Wall Street Journal, February 15, 2015).

Given the current political atmosphere in Wisconsin, we are faced with the prospect that all we have built could be dismantled with one vote. Then again, Henry would say that those legislators are simply taking advantage of their corporeal performances of middle-classness and enacting their power within a society that is ostensibly built upon meritocratic principles. Henry is right: we embody our social class through reification in schools, and given that Walker wants to transform UW System schools into locations of workforce development, his attempted rewriting of the Wisconsin Idea, a 111-year-old document, privileges the working-class body but simultaneously devalues the working-class brain. Henry’s work will resonate with readers across the US who face the disbanding of unions and collective bargaining, who are actively pursuing a raise to the minimum wage, and who actively seek to have their brains and their bodies valued.
Center Reports

Texas Center for Working-Class Studies
The Texas Center for Working-Class Studies (TCWCS), to be housed at Collin College, a two-year institution in Texas, is in the process of gaining formal approval. The Center seeks to raise awareness about issues of social class and work and to provide opportunities for collaboration among faculty, students, and community members. The TCWCS urges an appreciation of the academic discipline of Working-Class Studies and the centrality of class in order to understand the history, politics, economy, and culture of the United States. Drawing inspiration from other centers around the country, the TCWCS looks forward to continuing the important work already started by others in the field of Working-Class Studies. This center will be the first of its kind in the Southwest and the first at a community college.

The TCWCS will host its first conference on April 10, 2015, at Collin College’s Spring Creek Campus. Keynote speaker Dr. Heather Thompson, of Temple University, will present a talk titled “Why Mass Incarceration Matters to the American Working Class.” There will also be scholarly presentations, panels, and roundtables from faculty, as well as graduate and undergraduate students, both from Collin and other institutions. The College will also host a photography exhibit, “Rural Texas Women at Work, 1930-1960,” during the month of April, on loan from Humanities Texas, the state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities. We welcome scholars from all disciplines and regions to join us for this exciting event. For more information, please go to http://iws.collin.edu/lkirby/ or contact Lisa Kirby at LKirby@collin.edu.

Center for Study of Working Class Life - SUNY Stony Brook
Subject to budget allocation next year by the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences for a graduate student at the Center, the Center will host the How Class Works - 2016 conference at Stony Brook. Please mark your calendars: June 9-11, 2016. When we are certain we will continue to have resources to support a graduate student at the Center next year, we will send out a call for proposals. The deadline for submissions will be in December 2015. Stay tuned for details.

The Center has organized a pilot project with Playback Theater (NYC) to bring the improvisational theater troupe onto campus to help explore the experiences of working class first generation students at Stony Brook, and the experiences of faculty and staff working with those students. In February Playback went into classes to perform, and to recruit students into a day-long workshop that used techniques of poetry, mural-making, and improv to draw out layers of experience not accessible through surveys or requests for essays. Playback conducted a separate three-hour workshop with faculty and staff and finished with a powerful public performance that drew students, faculty, and staff into the mixed-media event. The event was co-sponsored with the Center by the University’s Vice-President for Student Affairs, Vice-Provost for Undergraduate Education, Dean of Students, Director of Undergraduate Colleges, and the EOP/AIM program, with some additional funding from an anonymous donor.
Students from the journalism department created a full video record of all events and will produce a five-minute video highlighting the process and findings. The video will be part of a proposal the Center and its partners will submit in April to foundations in hopes of creating a deep, year-long investigation into the needs of working class students at Stony Brook, and policies and programs the University might establish to improve these students' experiences and chances of success.

The Center is hosting the Rev. William Barber of North Carolina’s NAACP for the inaugural Distinguished Lecture in Working Class Studies, April 28, 2015. His public address is titled “The Moral Foundation of Worker Rights.” The Distinguished Lecture series is made possible in part by support from the Stony Brook University College of Arts and Sciences.

Related to the event, the Center has organized a broad coalition of labor, social justice, and religious groups to plan the event, and to create a long-term coalition to build on-going organizing on Long Island in the tradition of the Moral Monday Movement Rev. Barber has initiated in North Carolina. Among the more than twenty organizations involved in regular planning meetings are 1199SEIU UHE; Brookhaven Town NAACP; Citizens Campaign for the Environment; First Baptist Church of Riverhead; Long Island Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW); Long Island Council of Churches; Long Island Federation of Labor (fourth largest central labor council in the U.S.); Long Island Immigrant Alliance; Long Island Jobs with Justice; Make the Road New York; Stony Brook University School of Social Welfare; and the Suffolk County Human Rights Commission. In addition to his public talk, Rev. Barber will participate in a three-hour special organizing seminar with the coalition partners.

Contact Center for Study of Working Class Life director Michael Zweig at michael.zweig@stonybrook.edu or 631-632-7536. Visit the Center’s Website at www.stonybrook.edu/workingclass.

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 the MSU Labor Education Program in workers culture, labor history and working-class life. This collaboration has promoted the preservation, promotion and presentation of workers culture through a variety of activities including film showings, fiction and poetry readings, museum exhibits, and the ODW/ODL brown bag series, which entered its 19th year in September.

2015 is off to a wonderful start. We celebrated the end of Project 60/50, our yearlong campus and community-wide conversation, exploration, commemoration and celebration the two key anniversaries - the 60th anniversary of the US Supreme Court decision in Brown vs. Board of Education and the 50th anniversary of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Over 200 separate events and programs were run under the broad Project 60/50 umbrella. The campus and community group which set a common table for Project 60/50 will continue to meet and work on topics and programming of mutual interest. We will be keeping the common calendar with efforts expanding to focus, for example, specifically on human trafficking and more broadly on issues of economic and social inequality. You can check out the Project 60/50 website at http://www.msu.edu/6050/.

Our Daily Work/Our Daily Lives brown bags continued to be great across the Fall and are off to a fabulous start for the first half of 2015. Mike Honey did an outstanding job
in October speaking about labor troubadour John Handcox and singing his songs. The new head of Detroit’s Reuther Library, Eric Nordberg, started off our January with his presentation on worker housing for miners in Michigan’s copper country during the 1913-14 Michigan Copper Strike. Upcoming talks will focus on Brazilian coffee workers, the song collecting of folklorist Alan Lomax (in conjunction with a MSU Museum exhibit on Lomax’s work in Michigan), organizing fast food workers, and Peter Cole’s work comparing US and South African longshoremen among the list of presentations.

Planning is underway for a major Fall 2015 work-themed writer series co-sponsored with MSU’s Poetry Center and a MSU Museum exhibit on maritime trade and work life to be held in conjunction with the 40th anniversary of the Lake Superior sinking of the ore carrier Edmund Fitzgerald. (One of the writers in the Poetry Center series is Cindy Hunter Morgan, who is finishing a manuscript of poems based on Great Lakes shipwrecks; she will be doing a reading in conjunction with the exhibit). The MSU Museum exhibit on Latino workers in the auto industry, which we co-sponsored, is ready to be loaned out as a MSU Museum traveling exhibit (perhaps traveling soon to the Reuther Library in Detroit).

2015/2016 will be the 20th year in the brown bag series and we are looking forward to our 200th brown bag sometime this Fall. We are blessed to have a great working relationship with folks at the MSU Vincent Voice Library, who have been audio recording our brown bags for a number of years and making them available to anyone worldwide through the University’s on-line catalog. You can listen to any of the nearly 70 talks which have been recorded by going to http://magic.lib.msu.edu/search/X?SEAR CH=%28our%20daily%20work%20our%20daily %20lives%29&searchscope=27&SORT=D, choosing a title and hitting on the “Listen to Sound Recording - All Users” button in the middle of the entry.

The list of brown bag speakers for the 2015/2016 series is already under construction; anybody who wants to come to Michigan State to do a presentation should contact me at beckj@msu.edu to propose a topic and a possible month for their talk.

Chicago Working-Class Studies
Chicago Working-Class Studies hosted the city’s first mayoral candidates’ forum, Election 2015: Chicago’s Working People and the Mayor’s Race at the University of Illinois-Chicago in November. All mayoral candidates were invited to attend to discuss their positions on important issues for Chicago’s working class in a non-debate format. Questions for the candidates were prepared by faculty and activists from several universities and local workers’ campaigns. Current Mayor Rahm Emmanuel declined our invitation, but the spirited discussion among other candidates drew more than 100 citizens, who also had an opportunity to ask the candidates questions. The February preliminary mayoral election was indecisive as Mayor Emmanuel failed to achieve a majority of the vote and now faces a run-off election in April against the second-place vote-getter, Cook County Commissioner Jesus “Chuy” Garcia. CWCS also sponsored two book talks last Fall - one on The Walmart Republic, a book of poetry by Quraysh Ali Lansana and Christopher Stewart, co-sponsored with the Guild Complex, and one on Jeffrey Helgeson’s new book, Crucibles of Black
Empowerment: Chicago’s Neighborhood Politics from the New Deal to Harold Washington, co-sponsored with the St. Clair Drake Center for African and African-American Studies at Roosevelt University. Coming up in April is a lecture by Venise Wagner, associate professor of journalism at San Francisco State University, also co-sponsored by Roosevelt’s St. Clair Drake Center. Partly based on her own family history, Professor Wagner will speak on “Black Steel, White City: The 1959 Strike’s Impact on Black Steelworkers.”

Class Action
Class Action’s third annual First-Generation College Student Summit was March 7 at Wellesley College, with programs and student groups from more than 25 colleges participating.

Class Action’s new anthology of 40 first-person class stories, Class Lives: Stories from Across Our Economic Divide (see http://www.classism.org/class-lives/), came out from Cornell University Press in November. Class Action is organizing book events in all the cities where two or more contributors live. The kick-off event in Boston included an open mic where audience members could share their own class stories. The next events will be in Seattle, Western Massachusetts, and Philadelphia. To learn about upcoming events in your area, go to our events page at http://www.classism.org/class-lives-events/. One event will take place in late May at Busboys and Poets in DC during the Working-Class Studies Conference, where there will also be an Editor Meets Readers session with co-editor Maynard Seider.

Discussion guides for college faculty assigning Class Lives are being developed by Working-Class Studies members: Cheri Rankin and contributor Michelle Tokarczyk are working on one for English and composition courses, and contributor Betsy Leondar-Wright and co-editor Maynard Seider are working on one for social science courses. These guides will be available free online for interested faculty.

Philanthropy has always been one of Class Action’s key constituencies, since raising class awareness among large donors and foundations has a powerful impact on what gets funded and on cross-class collaborations. 2014 and 2015 seem to be break-out years for much deeper work with philanthropists. Besides doing six single workshops for foundations and membership groups of wealthy people in recent months, Class Action has begun a year-long contract with the national Women Donors Network, including nine workshops with chapters around the US. The goal is to enable the wealthy members to be more effective allies and more tuned-in donors as they reach across race and class lines.

Class Action continues to spread the take-away lessons on activist class cultures from Betsy Leondar-Wright’s 2014 book Missing Class. Besides offering workshops for social justice activists, we have begun to develop online audio-visual and interactive materials to bring the ideas to far more people than will read a book or go to a workshop. A team of artists has begun illustrating stories from the book and programming quizzes and other interactive features.

Class Action’s high school curriculum on class and classism, Created Equal at www.classism.org/store, is being evaluated for impact on youth empowerment in several Boston high schools where teachers are using it.