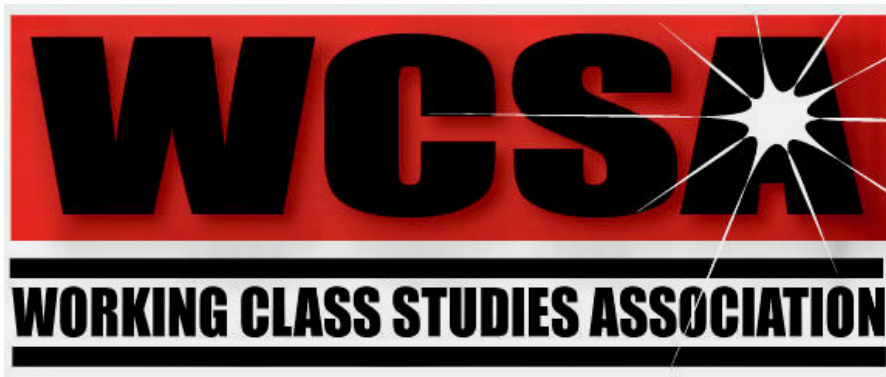




WCSA Newsletter, Summer 2023

Hello WCSA!

In this newsletter, I say a bit on our recent *conference*, share *member news*, and a *don't miss it!* announcement on a free upcoming webinar on centering working-class voices in teaching.

WCSA23

We've just wound up our annual conference, [WCSA23](#), June 15-17 in Chicago and on Zoom. Our co-host this year was the [University of Illinois, Chicago United Faculty](#) union and the UIC History department, thank you Robert Johnston and UIC UF!



In the photo above, we're celebrating on the first night at Tufano's Vernon Park Tap, a [Little Italy](#) hold out near campus. From left to right: Lisa McKenzie, Matthew Sparkes, Daniel Laurison, and Sarah Attfield. Three of the next morning's plenary speakers are seated at the table behind them.

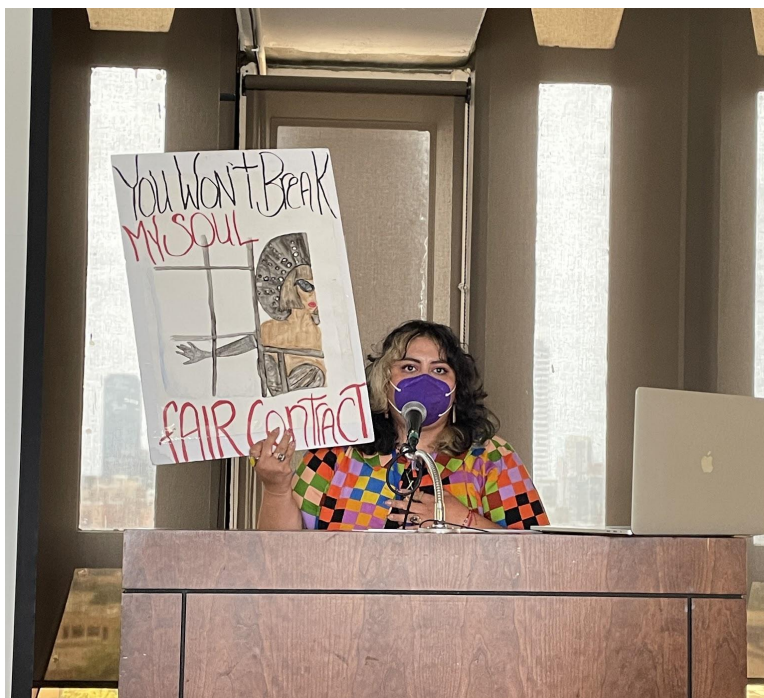
All of us are wearing name-tags hand-written in cursive by Jack's wife. Thank you, Mrs. Metzgar! There was a lot of praise for them. Because there was a vegan and many vegetarians in the house, we had rigatoni with red sauce with no meat. And the food was all great!

The [Symposium and Leadership retreat](#) happened over the next two days with many engaging presentations. One highlight was the UIC UF presentation by presenters: [Therese Quinn](#), [Teresa Moreno](#), [William Estrada](#) and [Leeann Ream](#). They storied their strike victory and how they used art and social media to advance their struggle, on-ground and online, and make emergent working-class culture.

Quinn launched their panel with a 2 ½ min. video featuring Chicago Teachers Union president and social studies teacher, [Stacy Davis Gates](#) speaking at their picket line. The videos is called, "[How We Union](#)," (click to watch) and it was made by another UIC UF member, Josh Radinsky.

Reflecting on our past and future, we at WCSA should ask ourselves *how we wicksa* (shorthand for WCSA), and get excited about how we'll keep at it to make our ideals real!

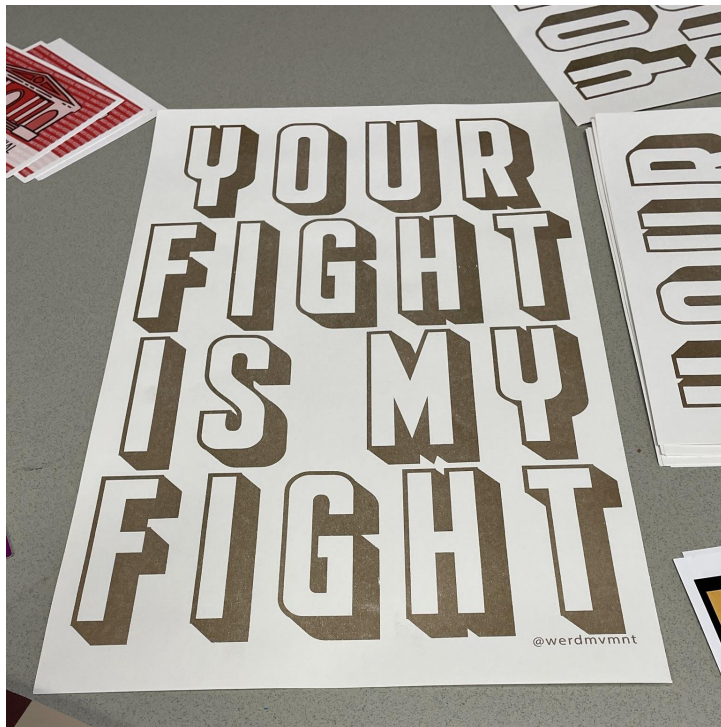
Teresa Moreno talked about taking up space on the picket line with style and pizzazz and posters that draw on popular culture to talk back to the top. In the photo below, Moreno shows the audience one of the posters she made during her presentation. This one references Beyonce's [You Won't Break my Soul](#) to demand a fair contract and puts fresh music and meaning to the struggle.



Continuing her creative intervention in public space, our WCSA website features this [photo of Moreno](#) on the picket line, taken by Quinn when they were out together. In the photo, Moreno is wearing one of the artistic, performative outfits she put together for the picket line. It continues to do cultural work on WCSA's website, challenging boring and bleak versions of life on the line that discourage people to step up and out. Like *picket lines*, the phrase *working-class* has to be constantly wrestled back and remade by and for us, too. The photo on our association's website renews it as a lime green, pink boa'd emerging story. So thank you, Teresa Moreno!

Leeann Ream's meme magic and Therese Quinn's social media might can be witnessed on the [UIC UF Instagram](#). See [this post](#) of Moreno with her watercolor art and stand out style and this, "Picket line inspiration: What will this UICUF member wear today? Up your own fashion game today!"

Panelist William Estrada made prints to gift us at the event. Here is an image of one on a conference table, "Your fight is my fight."



Yes! That's right. Here's to an open and expansive and inclusive WCSA. As a digitally bound organization connecting across time and space, leaning into each other we've got so much to gain.

Class Cultures Plenary

Four scholars who have written and published influential works on our conference theme, *class cultures*, [Jack Metzgar](#), [Allison L. Hurst](#), [Barbara Jensen](#), and [Betsey Leondar-Wright](#) gave a powerful presentation. They discussed the many differences between working-class and professional-middle-class cultures, and the political, moral, and social consequences of overlooking and underestimating working-class ways of life.

Here they are the night before at Tufano's:



Top left: Alison Hurst, with Christie Launius, top right: Jack Metzgar, bottom left: Barbara Jensen, and bottom right: Betsey Leondar-Wright.

Jack Metzgar's [recent book](#) was a provocation for the conference theme. Metzgar is a Chicago local and a WCSA founder. The last time WCSA's conference happened in Chicago was 2011 and Metzgar chaired the conference organizing committee. It was planned as a bigger event that year than this year. You can read Nick Cole's reflection on that conference: "[We're Onto Something: Reflections on the WCSA Conference.](#)" in *Working-Class Perspectives*. It's still relevant.

Dorian Warren

Another Chicago-based WCSA founder, [Dorian Warren](#), gave an invited talk at the end of the symposium. Currently, Warren leads a non-profit organization called [Community Change](#), that works to build power among low-income people, especially people of color, and make societal level change. Warren has also been and continues to be a commentator and invited speaker on televised news outlets and podcasts.

At Community Change, the organization has a Communications Fellows program that includes stories fellows author on an area of their website called, *Change Wire*. One person who went through their program is [Stephanie Land](#), the author of *Maid* and an upcoming memoir called *Class*. You can read some of her posts on the Community change website such as this stand-out: "[What happens when you can't afford self-care?](#)"

Isn't it interesting to observe the many ways people take their experience in the interdisciplinary field of working-class studies and apply it in their life and work? I appreciate how people tell their working-class stories through an intersectional lens in ways that shift and change but don't end. In our association, people do their identities in many ways and there's room for all of us as a cross-class organization.

In Warren's talk at our WCSA23 symposium, he highlighted sites of struggle for working-class economic, political, and narrative power and how working-class institutions should be integrated into outreach and organizing designs. Working-class institutions take shape in various ways across communities and can range from temporary and semi-permanent to permanent. Consider where these spaces may be in your lives and communities. Applying it to myself as a community college professor, I think I work in one: But it only becomes real when we recognize it and talk about it in ephemeral classroom spaces.

In line with the narrative project that Warren referenced, WCSA's [about](#) page describes our organization as "...an international group dedicated to developing working-class studies as a field within higher education and public discourse." WCSA members participate in narrative work in these two spheres in various roles, shifting disciplines, opening doors for working-class learners, and challenging working-class frames that aren't by us and for us in public discourse.

Thanks to the Organizers

Finally, I want to recognize the whole conference organizing committee for WCSA23. It included: Jackie Gabriel, Christie Launius, Michael Zweig, Sarah Attfield, Robert Johnston, Jack Metzgar, Jamie Daniel, Lisa Kirby, Kim McAloney, Tim Sheard, Michele Fazio, and Michelle Tockarczyk. Some members were essential in the beginning when we were looking for a conference venue, drafting the call, building the programs, others came on to guide logistics. I too was an active member as chair but it would have been completely impossible without the committee. Thank you so much to everybody!

Stay tuned for news on the Leadership Retreat and if you'd like to participate in documenting more of WCSA23 in writing or with images, video, or art, please do! I've clearly only touched a sliver of it.

Contributions & Feedback

Here is a form where you can attach documentary content you may have from the event and also offer feedback: [WCSA23 Reflection Google Form](#).

Feedback Snapshot (added July 16, 2023)

We received emails and submissions through the above "WCSA23 Reflection Google Form," that offered lots of praise and some constructive criticism. We will share it with the WCSA24 Conference Organizing Committee and the WCSA Executive Council after August 1st, when new members are added to the team. Thanks to everyone who contributed. Here's some feedback from a WCSA23 Zoom program registrant, Kenneth Atkinson. In reflecting on the conference he said:

"The Class Cultures Plenary was the highlight for me as it was wonderful to listen to the conversation between these four experts. Their observations were all quite insightful. The various zoom sessions were all quite meaningful as they allowed me to interact with speakers from numerous countries. Listening and sharing stories with speakers from working-class backgrounds in several countries was very meaningful as, despite our diversity, we all have overcome many of the same difficulties and share many of the same concerns. This was my fourth conference this summer (two were international events) and, although technically not related to my current academic job as an ancient historian, was the highlight of the year. It is the only venue where those from working-class backgrounds and those concerned to better the working-class can meet together."

Atkinson didn't present this time but you can read one of his recent articles in the *Journal of Working-Class Studies*, "[Academic Work as Factory Work: A Former Blue-Collar Worker's Observations](#)"

[on Class and Caste in the Academy.](#)”

Member News

*The statements below are responses to a prompt sent to WCSA members last month that asked: **"How have you been doing working-class studies, broadly defined, from your corner of the world?"** If you missed responding this time, another call for member news will go out in early August.*

Lisa Kirby & The Texas Center for Working-Class Studies

The [Texas Center for Working-Class Studies](#) at Collin College hosted its 9th annual conference in February 2023. This year's keynote address, titled "Working-Class Studies in Action: Making a Difference in the Community," focused on the intersections of Working-Class Studies and service learning. Professors Pamela Gaiter of Collin College and Jillian Williamson of West Texas A&M University both shared their experiences with service learning and the connections to social class.

The conference featured both faculty and student presentations and awarded prizes to the top three student papers through the Center's annual writing contest. The Center also recognized Dr. Rebecca Sharpless of Texas Christian University as the recipient of the 2023 Ruth A. Allen Pioneer in Texas Working-Class History Award. Plans are already underway for the 2024 conference, which will celebrate the Center's 10th anniversary. For more information, please contact Dr. Lisa A. Kirby, Founding Director of The Texas Center for Working-Class Studies at Collin College (LKirby@collin.edu).

Curtis Chin

On October 17, Little, Brown will be publishing my memoir, "Everything I Learned, I Learned in a Chinese Restaurant." The book is about growing up Asian in Detroit and coming out to my working class immigrant family, all set against the 80's and my family's popular restaurant. Publishers Weekly just named it one of the Top 10 memoirs for the fall. Also, the article I wrote for Bon Appetit Magazine, "[Detroit's Chinatown and Gayborhood Felt Like Two Separate Worlds. Then They Collided](#)," just got selected for Best American Food Writing 2023.

EVERYTHING I LEARNED, I LEARNED IN A CHINESE RESTAURANT

From filmmaker and co-founder of the Asian American Writers' Workshop, Curtis Chin's memoir about coming of age and coming out traces the author's journey through 1980's Detroit as he navigated rising xenophobia, the AIDS epidemic, and the Reagan Revolution to find his voice as a writer and

activist — all set against the backdrop of his family's popular Chinese restaurant. The book, which features plenty of Chinese food and Motown vibes, will be published by Little, Brown in the fall of 2023.

CURTIS CHIN

A co-founder of the [Asian American Writers' Workshop](#) in New York City, Curtis Chin served as the non-profits' first Executive Director. He went on to write for network and cable television before transitioning to social justice documentaries. Chin has screened his films at over 600 venues in sixteen countries. He has written for CNN, Bon Appetit and the Emancipator/Boston Globe. A graduate of the University of Michigan, Chin has received awards from ABC/Disney Television, New York Foundation for the Arts, National Endowment for the Arts, and more. His memoir, "Everything I Learned, I Learned in a Chinese Restaurant" will be published by Little, Brown in Fall 2023. He's currently writing projects for PBS and Warner Bros. and his essay in Bon Appetit was just selected for Best Food Writing in America 2023.

Jim Daniels

Jim Daniels has recently published two new collections, [The Human Engine at Dawn](#), poetry, Wolfson Press, and [The Luck of the Fall](#), fiction, Michigan State University Press. Both collections contain a great deal of material connected to work and class.

Tom Kastle

Tom Kastle performing at [Fermats Last Theatre Co.](#) in Madison, Wisconsin. He is singing a song by labor folk singer, Joe Hill called, "Alive as You and Me."



Tom Kastle, singer/storyteller, in Joe Hill – Alive as You and Me,
Madison WI April 2022
A production of Fermat's Last Theater – fermatstheater.org

Here is a [video version](#) of it sung by Joan Baez in 1969 to give context to anyone who might be new to the song.

Kevin Van Meter

In 1947 an autoworker and Chinese-American luminary [Grace Lee Boggs](#), under the party name Ria Stone, wrote a pamphlet titled *The American Worker* about "life in the factory" of those working in a General Motors automotive plant in Linden, New Jersey. "This little pamphlet," begins the opening remark, "concerns itself with the life of the working class in the process of production. Its purpose is to understand what the workers are thinking and doing while actually at work on the bench or on the line."

What are workers thinking and doing at work? It was a novel inquiry for 1947 and unfortunately still so in 2023. With a French translation two years later and an Italian version appearing in 1954, the pamphlet has had considerable impact on workers' movements during the 75 years after initially appearing.

The American Worker pamphlet speaks the politics of authorship and representation, complexities of identity and power. What is more, it is still speaking to what workers are thinking and doing, then as well as now.

Join the search for the American worker: for the identity of author-autoworker, the pamphlets influence internationally, and its use for workers' movements today. You can read my new article "Searching for the American Worker" in the Summer issue of *New Politics* and [online](#).

[Kevin Van Meter](#) is currently a union organizer in healthcare in the Pacific Northwest and affiliated faculty with the University of Oregon.

Don't Miss It!

Colby King

One thing I've been working on that is relevant to WCSA and might be celebrated by the group is working as a guest co-editor with four other colleagues on a special issue of [Teaching Sociology](#): "Special Issue—A Class of Our Own: Teaching Sociology by, for, and about First-Generation and Working-Class People."

The full issue will publish in July, but several of the individual pieces are published online early.

The journal, and several of us involved in the project, will be **hosting a webinar** about the special issue on **Wednesday, July 19 at 4pm Eastern time**. Here is the [rsvp link for the webinar](#).

Thanks for reading this newsletter! It will be saved as on our website with [earlier versions of our newsletter](#).

Love & Solidarity,

Jen Vernon, interim Digital Lead and President-Elect