

# Volume 5 Issue 1: Editorial

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We are writing this editorial during tumultuous times. 2020 has been the year of the Covid19 pandemic which has left many people around the world dead and unprecedented numbers of workers without jobs. In the preceding years, working-class people have experienced growing precarity, legal challenges to collective action, and heightened disrespect and stigmatisation as the ‘causes’ of inequality are increasingly viewed through a tainted lens of moral and individual failure. Yet, the pandemic has highlighted what working-class people have always known – that insecure work is not sustainable, and that working-class people make up the majority of ‘essential workers’. The impact of precarity and the associated lack of access to health care, sickness benefit and safe working conditions has been felt by working-class people – the people who have kept societies functioning during this crisis. We expect that future issues of this Journal will spotlight some of the stories of working-class experience during the pandemic, and further reveal the significant contribution working-class people have made to mitigate the pandemic’s worst effects.

2020 has also seen the Black Lives Matter uprising in the United States, with supporting protests taking place in France, the UK, Spain, Australia, South Africa, Japan, Germany, Brazil and the Netherlands. These protests are deeply significant because they indicate global recognition for the systematic and systemic oppression of black and minority ethnic communities, and offer hope for real change to racialised structures and institutions. We stand in solidarity with people fighting for racial justice and support the Black Lives Matter movement. This movement has inspired activism across the world and shown the power of collective action. The Working-Class Studies Association’s statement in support of Black Lives Matter can be read [here](#).

Although the articles and reviews included in this issue were mostly submitted before the Covid19 pandemic and before the Black Lives Matter uprising, they are each concerned with the intersections of class with race, ethnicity and gender; the contributing authors therefore animate our understanding of oppression and injustice, and demonstrate the importance of working-class studies in our current era.

The first article, ‘On Government, Agency, and the Violence of Inaction’ by Lawrence M. Eppard and Noam Chomsky outlines the role of government in addressing structural inequalities in American society. They point to the problems within the American political system that prevent the government from acting in the best interests of the people, but they end on a hopeful note, acknowledging the activism of young Americans.

Following is an account of the campaign to raise the minimum wage in the state of California. In ‘Raise the Wage LA: Campaigning for Living Wages in Los Angeles and an Emergent Working-Class Repertoire’, Paul Doughty discusses the challenges and the successes of the campaign and presents the experiences of the union and community organisers and the workers who were involved in this significant campaign.

Andrew Dawson and Bryonny Goodwin-Hawkins offer some insights into the pro-Brexit vote in some deindustrialised towns in the UK. 'Post-Industrial Industrial *Gemeinschaft*: Northern Brexit and the Future Possible' points to the way that the Brexit campaign offered promises of work to some communities, particularly the industrial work that had previously supported their towns.

The next article takes us back to the US – in 'Differential Opportunity for Men from Low-Income Backgrounds across Pennsylvania' Lawrence M. Eppard, Troy S. Okum and Lucas Everidge examine equality of opportunity among low-income men in Pennsylvania counties and point to the place-based issues that can impact on opportunities.

George Towers, Joan R. Poulsen, Darrin L. Carr and Aimee N. Zoeller discuss the challenges faced by working-class faculty in finding suitable career mentors in 'Mentoring for Faculty from Working-Class Backgrounds' and consider the successes and lessons learnt during a pilot mentoring program at their institution.

The issue then moves in another direction and the next two articles are literature focused. Leah Richards examines themes of class anxieties present in the story popularly known as Sweeney Todd in 'Class, Crime, and Cannibalism in The String of Pearls; or, The Demon Barber as Bourgeois Bogeyman' and argues that the story of the murderous barber operates as an 'eat the rich' revenge fantasy that disturbed the middle classes.

Erika Meyers' 'Nationalizing Realism in Dermot Bolger's *The Journey Home*' considers how Irish author Dermot Bolger uses graphic accounts of poverty and abuse in his realist novel to illustrate the ways that capitalist structures oppress working-class people.

There is a turn to television in 'Are we All "BBC Dad" Now? What Covid19 Restrictions Reveal about Comedy, Class, Paid Work, Parenting and Gender', where Liz Giuffre looks at the inequities of working from home and the implications relating to the class and gender of the at-home worker. She suggests that not all working from home is equal, and she uses examples of comedians broadcasting shows from home to illustrate these inequalities.

The popular culture theme is maintained in Gloria McMillan's two review essays, 'Anti-Union Clichés float *On the Waterfront*: Rhetorical Analysis of the Film' and '*Citizen Kane* and *How Green was My Valley*: Have We Sold Ourselves Short?'. In these essays she uses the case studies to demonstrate the anti-union sentiment in some classic Hollywood film and compares this to more sympathetic portrayals of working-class life.

And the article section ends with Sara Appel's curated selection of working-class undergraduate student essays on a diverse range of topics. The essays cover working-class environmentalism, the problematic aspects of documentary photography that uses poor people as subjects, the importance of understanding sex work as work and the role of public transport in both crossing and reinforcing the class divide. The student writers in this collection show insight, research and great enthusiasm for their chosen topics.

A number of book reviews complete the issue (seven altogether). The book reviews editor, Christie Launius brings a diverse range of books to the attention of readers. Books reviewed cover topics such as working-class writing and working-class writers, the experiences of working-class adults in the anthracite coal region of rural Pennsylvania, poverty and class

inequality in contemporary America, the impact of capitalism on workers' health, a history of dockworkers in South Africa and the San Francisco Bay Area, pedagogical approaches to teaching about class and inequality and the experiences of working-class students at small liberal arts college in the US. We hope that readers will be inspired to seek out these books!

The Journal continues to develop apace, and the editors are delighted to see the growing interest from authors wishing to submit and from readers all around the world. We thank the authors and the reviewers for all of their work (particularly during such challenging times). We hope readers enjoy this issue and find much within the articles to challenge, provoke, inspire and activate.