

Volume 5 Issue 2: Editorial – Special ‘Mini’ Issue for 2020 U.S. Election

Sarah Attfield, University of Technology Sydney

Liz Giuffre, University of Technology Sydney

This special mini-issue of the *Journal of Working-Class Studies* is intended to provide some ideas to consider prior and after, the 2020 U.S. Presidential election. While it might be the case that by time of publication, the American people will have already made up their minds, or cast their early votes, the pieces included here are intended to provide some opportunities to reflect on what has happened in the past, and what needs to happen in the future to improve the lives of working-class Americans. The ‘working-class Americans’ we refer to here are diverse in terms of race, gender, sexuality, ability, religion and immigration status. They are the retail and fast food workers, the factory and warehouse workers. These working-class Americans take care of the nations’ children, the elderly. They drive school buses and work in kindergartens. They work in care homes and hospitals. They are first responders and utility workers. Working-class Americans keep the streets clean and the roads and railways maintained. They are janitors, cleaning staff, cafeteria workers. They work in construction, in call centres and mines, saw mills and lumber yards. Working-class Americans harvest crops and work in food processing. Basically, working-class Americans keep the country running and overwhelmingly, working-class Americans are under-paid, exploited and face huge inequities in terms of access to healthcare, education and other essential services. African Americans, Native Americans, immigrants of colour experience racism and discrimination on a daily basis. On a systemic basis. As Eppard et al articulate in ‘Obligations to the Future’, not all Americans have access to the same basic freedoms – the freedoms to not be discriminated against, to not be poor, to not live in polluted towns and so on.

While it would be extremely naïve to think that if Trump loses this election, that such freedoms would suddenly apply to working-class Americans across the country, it seems clear to us (as outsiders albeit – we are based in Australia) that another four years of Trump will cement the harm already caused and lead to further and deeper entrenched inequality and division. While it might seem too easy for outsiders such as us to make these observations, we trust the contributors to this Journal, who, since 2016 have provided analyses and commentary on Trump, on the continued and growing inequalities faced by working-class Americans, and the ways that class intersects with race, gender, sexuality. The articles in this Journal have provided readers (and us!) with an excellent picture of the experiences of the American working class and a grounding in some of the histories of working-class America.

Eppard et al look to the future and to the obligations of those in power – and who stands to gain and lose in the aftermath of this election. With this in mind, we decided that it would be good to hear the thoughts of some young Americans on the election and the potential ramifications of the outcome, and so we reached out to colleagues in the U.S. who teach working-class college students and they sent us some commentary from current college students (the students requested anonymity):

Student ‘J’:

Recently having watched the ‘Presidential Debate’ on live, national television, astonished could hardly describe my reaction to the childish disagreements which came from both political parties. In the 15 minutes of this debate, Trump commented ‘Insulin so cheap, it’s like water,’ really reinforced my socioeconomic status in this country. It made me think about the many times my mom and I had to travel to Mexico, only 10 minutes away from home, to look for cheaper insulin alternatives. This statement, as insensitive as it was, is not nearly the worst he has said or done. From the refusal to denounce white supremacy, to the inhuman treatment of immigrant refugees at border to the complete and utter disregard for the hundred of lives lost to COVID-19, there is a very (very!) long list of reasons to vote for someone who is not Donald John Trump. It is difficult, however obvious it is, to vote for Biden who once said ‘poor kids are just as smart as white kids.’ Small ‘slips of the tongue,’ like these show the reality of the privilege these politicians have so comfortably lived in. It’s sad, really, to have to unite our votes for a politician who is a less than a good alternative. It puts me at ease, however unfortunate, that there is a good hope we can beat the man who once called my people ‘criminals and rapists.’ Although my vote will go towards Joe Biden, I hope our movements don’t cease. Our movements to defund the military and police and place money into education and health programs. Our movements against climate change. Our movements to abolish I.C.E and cease the inhumane treatment of all immigrants and refugees. And our movement for Black Lives and the systematic injustice of which they face.

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Student ‘P’:

The thought of having another four years of a Trump presidency absolutely makes my skin crawl. I have lost sleep over his presidency in the last four years. I’ve cried more tears that I can count. I’ve seen not only myself, but people I love be affected in negative ways because of this revolting man. He’s a disgrace to this nation. His values, ethics, leadership, and orator skills are laughable. It’s so blatantly obvious this man does not care about being a public servant that it’s scary. He does not care about you or me. You need to realize that. This man, our president, does not give a single fuck about your wellbeing. He does things to push his own political agenda and disregards precedent and morals. The very fact that he’s pushing for a new supreme court justice after the republicans themselves made the precedent with Obama that you can not instill a justice 8 months before your term ends just makes me want to scream. It’s so hypocritical and disgusting. I’m a practicing Christian, and seeing fellow Christians supporting Trump is baffling to me. He does not support our morals. Christianity is about love. This man is the embodiment of all that is vile in the world, and people are following him blindly for a political statement. A good, godly person would not put children in cages. They would not sexually abuse people around them. They would not limit support to our fellow humans. I’m a queer, biracial woman. Trump hates me. Trump hates you unless you are rich and powerful. This is not a man that we should worship. If you value not only your own, but those around you’s, security and right to live life happily and freely, do not vote for Donald Trump. The world is watching. Do not be on the wrong side of history.

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Student ‘K’:

I am currently a 5th term, FLoW (first-generation, low-income, working-class) student, and person of color. This upcoming election affects me for a variety of reasons but it affects me specifically as a FLoW student because if Trump is re-elected that means that there will certainly be even more time my family and I (who are high-risk) will need to work during a pandemic. Although it is not guaranteed that if Biden wins anything will get any better, there is always a chance that nothing will change and my family and I will still have to bear the consequences. I will still have to endure the constant negative messages of people who feel as if I don't deserve to be where I am and will still have to keep going above and beyond just to make myself feel like I deserve what I have. The upcoming election could make my life a lot harder Trump is re-elected, I will have to live with anti-LGBT policies that he will no doubt implicate, or racist policies that are just as harmful, or even just the strict policies he already has in place for immigrants in this country. Another issue at hand that would be wilfully and continuously unrestrained, even unmonitored it seems like, is the ICE department that handles undocumented immigrants and their questionable and inhumane actions to the detainees they have in custody. It is upsetting to see that there are people who would vote for someone who clearly does not care about the American people and would purposefully put lives in danger to benefit himself and the rich. Someone who puts money before people's lives and health does not deserve to be in office, I would much rather settle for Biden than Trump since it seems that anyone is better than Trump right now.

There is an urgency in the students' words that must be taken seriously.

This issue also includes a tribute to the feminist pioneer Florence Howe. Janet Zandy's moving tribute outlines Howe's contributions to feminism and her working-class credentials. The tribute illustrates that working-class women have been at the forefront of feminist activism. This is significant at a time when women's rights are increasingly under attack in the U.S.

And the issue also contains a commentary-essay by Gloria McMillan that lists some films about industrial workers that might serve as a counter to the lack of representation of industrial workers and industrial towns – the kinds of towns that Trump pretends to care about.

This is an unusual edition of the *Journal of Working-Class Studies*, but unusual seems to be the order of the day. 'Unprecedented' has certainly become the 2020 Word of the Year. We are facing challenges across the world of all different types – environmental extremes pushing us closer to climate crisis tipping point, to health extremes of COVID-19, and the political extremes facing much of the world as right-wing extremists across the globe seem to be rising into the mainstream.

Academics, activists, artists and commentators are also facing unprecedented times. We are under threat in a way that also seems relentless and multidimensional. Precarious work conditions, health conditions and cultural conditions means we have been thrown out of the halls of power.

While we work out how to rise again (and we will!), the period of change leaves many of us without the anchors we would prefer. This includes producing work that is finished in different

ways to the past – without technological support (see ‘zoom as the new norm’ on broadcast television and radio), but also with less time for contemplation and private revisions. The need to publish NOW and keep the public updated of changes overtakes the previous luxury of getting it right before getting it written – as the sands move beneath our feet our job is provide swift advice about where the next safe step might be rather than to take a laboured reflection on what happened. Reflections can happen when we’ve back on higher, safer ground.

The contents of this unusual issue have been put together as part of these unprecedented conditions. Our peers and community of experts are currently facing much greater workloads than ever before as they attend to online teaching as well as face to face and other mixed modes; many also doing so while providing supporting distance learning for their own families and facing other consequences of contracting economies around them as well as worries about the health of themselves and their families. We thank them for facilitating this swift and widely accessible publication.

The work we do in the Working-Class Studies Association to advocate on behalf of working-class people around the world will continue into the end of 2020 and beyond, and we hope that after 2020, future issues of this Journal will not need editorials containing references to ‘strange times’ or (particularly) to the dreaded zoom!

This issue is dedicated to our American friends, we send our hopes for an equitable society and an end to division and discrimination. Solidarity.