Table of Contents

Book Reviews

Volume 7 Issue 2: Editorial

Sarah Attfield, University of Technology Sydney
Liz Giuffre, University of Technology Sydney

As 2022 comes to a close, we reflect on the year and events around the world that have affected working-class people. The Covid-19 pandemic continues to impact the most vulnerable, and with many nations now having abandoned all health measures and restrictions, it is inevitable that cases will continue and people will die. At the same time, the measures in place in some countries to help working-class people, such as furlough schemes, extensions of sick leave provisions to the precariously employed and the raising of unemployment benefit rates have ended, and workers are once again at the mercy of their bosses. At the beginning of the pandemic we wondered whether governments' realisations that insecure work was not good for the health of nations would have lasting effects, but outside of a few exceptions, it seems that the lessons from the pandemic have not been learnt.

However, it isn't all bad news! We have also seen an impressive increase in union activity, particularly in the United States and the UK, and it's possible that the tide is starting to turn in terms of years of hostility towards unions that has been created and encouraged by neoliberal governments. In the UK, Mick Lynch, the General Secretary of the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers has won over the public with his measured (and often very humorous) responses to anti-union questions posed by journalists and others during rail strikes. In the US, Chris Smalls, who has been instrumental in organising Amazon workers has continued to inspire workers to start and join unions in their workplaces, and in Australia (where the editors of this Journal reside), a new Labor government has been able to pass industrial relations legislation that will improve working conditions and union rights. We also note here the beginnings of a backlash against so-called 'gig economy' companies like the delivery service Deliveroo, which has now closed its operations in Germany, Taiwan, Spain, Australia and the Netherlands. As Transport Workers' Union members describe, workers are treated so poorly they 'are not even considered workers' for these companies, and although this is just one of many of these types of services, we are optimistic that these types of closures will show such models are simply not sustainable and most importantly, absolutely unfair.

This issue was intended to be a special issue exploring class issues within popular music, and we do have some fine contributions within this theme (as outlined below). But we didn't receive as many as we had hoped and we wondered why this might be the case. It could be that people are still catching up on work missed due to the pandemic, or dealing with excessive workloads. And we know that many scholars are also carers or having to take on extra jobs due to redundancies, cuts to funding for scholarly activity etc. This is the case across the board and output has been affected. We have also considered another reason though – that popular music, like the arts in general has become very middle-class dominated, with working-class people finding it increasingly difficult to start careers in the performing arts. Researchers in the English-speaking world have revealed how difficult it has become for working-class people to enter the creative arts, meaning that film, television, theatre, fine arts are excluding participation from working-class people. The result is a contraction of the depth and breadth of stories that are told – but also

perspectives that can be represented authentically. Similarly, in music, limited access to resources, skyrocketing ticket prices; and diminished returns to artists have all taken a toll. What effect does this have on music made by working-class people and that which reflects working-class experiences? Are we seeing the rise of a mainstream that is again, middle of the road and middle-class?

The problem starts early for working-class children who are not experiencing music education due to cuts to funding for music programs in schools, and for prospective students of music who are priced out of degrees, and can't afford to take on the debt burden of a degree that doesn't guarantee a job. We hope that industry bodies will start to realise and start more creative arts programs that are accessible for young working-class people (and we hope to see some research on these issues from Working-Class Studies scholars).

Having said this, we are delighted that we have four submissions relating to the theme of music and class. In 'Mamas If Your Daughters Grow Up to Be Cowboys, So What?': Women Refiguring Rurality and Class in Country Music', Lillian Nagengast gets the issue started with an article on women country music artists and the ways they use their music to articulate class experiences and to challenge male-dominated representations of working-class rurality. There are some great songs listed too that require a listen!

Michele Fazio, Aimee Zoeller, Mark F. Fernandez, Court Carney and Gustavus Stadler follow with 'Taking the Great Leap Forwards: Teaching Woody Guthrie in the College Classroom' which offers educators a series of lesson plans that use the music of Woody Guthrie (and others) to illustrate and start discussion on a range of topics in the classroom such as place, politics, famil, and love and the many intersections with class, race, gender and so on that exist within these themes. There is also a song list that should be compulsory listening.

In her personal essay, 'A Secret Fan of Despised Music', Lita Kurth takes the reader on a journey into her childhood and the significance of country music for her rural working-class family. This was music that was supposed to be uncool, but she always knew its worth. Some of the songs listed in the piece are old favourites of many rural working-class people and anyone who may also think that country music is uncool needs to listen to the songs and adjust their judgements.

The music section ends with two poems from Ian C Smith, 'The End of Lonely Street' and 'Songsters of the Troubled Heart'. These poems show the importance of music and song lyrics in the everyday lives of working-class people.

Following the music section, we have three very different pieces starting with an article by Lawrence M. Eppard, Jörg Neugschwender and Erik Nelson. In 'The American Poor and Working Class in Cross-National Comparison', the authors look at comparative data to determine the levels of poverty in the US compared to that of other sample countries and to ascertain where the US working class sit in relative terms.

Liberty Kohn's article is next – 'How COVID Vaccination Hesitancy, Social Class, and Economic Inequality Reveal a New Dimension of Public Trust' explores possible reasons for some working-

class people's hesitancy to receive covid vaccinations in the US and looks towards issues of trust in public institutions for potential answers.

A personal essay from Kenneth Atkinson follows. 'Academic Work as Factory Work: A Former Blue-Collar Worker's Observations on Class and Caste in the Academy' outlines Atkinson's previous working-class occupations and experiences and compares them with the classed and hierarchical system of the academy and points to some of the similarities in higher education institutions' approaches to the organisation of work.

This issue also contains eight books reviews (edited by Christie Launius) on a variety of topics such as Appalachian poetry, responses to the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire, Marxist theory, precarity and organising opportunities in the US higher education sector, a memoir of experiences as a working-class Chinese American, the gig economy, the effects of unemployment in the US and the rise of the health care industries in former industrial towns. Again, a great indication of the range of topics relating to class and working-class people that are being written and read (both inside and outside the academy).

Many thanks to all of our contributors, reviewers and readers. We hope that 2023 brings us more stories of hope for working-class people around the world. The level of scholarship and creativity that we see as editors of this Journal certainly makes us optimistic for the future.

‘Mamas If Your Daughters Grow Up to Be Cowboys, So What?’: Women Refiguring Rurality and Class in Country Music

Lillian Nagengast, The University of Texas at Austin

Abstract

Drawing on the burgeoning fields of rural studies and working-class studies, this essay examines contemporary country music by female artists. Namely, it considers rurality and class in the music of artists Miranda Lambert, Kacey Musgraves, and Mickey Guyton. While country music scholars have long attended to how rurality and class function in country music by men, country music scholarship has largely disregarded these concepts in the music of female country artists. Whereas male country artists typically reference rurality and the working-class as a means of identification, Lambert, Musgraves, and Guyton reference these social constructs to interrogate, destabilize, and refigure. In crafting multilayered responses to contemporary dialogues on rurality and the working-class, these women not only call attention to country music’s premises, but they also produce variations of rurality and class.

Keywords

Gender, rural, class, country music

Cowboy boots. Pickup trucks. Blue jeans. Beer. Fishing. Church. Dive bars. Dirt. Symbols of rural, working-class life such as these are synonymous with the genre of country music, particularly that of country superstar Morgan Wallen. From song titles like ‘Country A$$ Shit,’ ‘Something Country,’ and ‘Whatcha Think of Country Now,’ nearly every song on Wallen’s 30-track *Dangerous: The Double Album* (2021) invokes his rural, working-class roots. In the *New York Times*’ review of the album, Jon Pareles (2021, para.2) describes Wallen’s fixation on this lifestyle as ‘an idyllic fantasy, an escape to rural Neverland… a place of red-dirt roads and unlocked doors, a refuge from the pretensions and snobbery of cities, a home for simple pleasures like fishing, drinking, and sex.’ Indeed, Wallen’s first single after he gained national visibility as a contestant on *The Voice* in 2014 was ‘The Way I Talk’ (2016), which proclaims, ‘I ain’t ashamed, matter of fact I’m damn proud / of the way I talk, y’all.’[1] His single from *Dangerous* was ‘More Than My Hometown,’ an ode to Wallen’s hometown of Sneedville, Tennessee. Its cover shows a highway sign pointing toward Sneedville; its lyrics tell the girl he loves that he is letting her go because ‘I can’t love you more than my hometown.’[2]

While Wallen is the latest embodiment of the ‘bro-country’ sub-genre that has emerged in country music over the last decade, he is also part of a larger trend among male country artists of making

[1] Alexander, Hayslip, and McGill, 2018.
[2] Hardy, Smith, Vojtesak, Wallen, 2020.

much of their rural, (pseudo) working-class identities. Cenate Pruitt (2019) refers to these male artists who partake in this trend as 'country boy archetypes.' Pruitt explains that in their music, 'country boys' 'refer specifically to farming and small towns and at least passively dismiss city life and city dwellers as weaker than or inferior to country life and country people' and 'express joy and relief at not having to stray far from their rural roots' (p.6). Noting male country artist's fixation on the rural is not novel in country music scholarship, and plenty of research on the genre has explored how rurality and class functions in relation to masculinity.[3] However, country music scholarship has largely disregarded the role of the rural and class in the music of female country artists. While nearly all country music references rurality and class to some degree, in the music of contemporary female country artists, working-class rurality does not serve as an all-consuming identity. Scholarship must explore these artists' unique approaches to rurality and class to fully discover 'the critical possibilities of country music' (Haynes, 2018, p.317). Indeed, refusing to acknowledge the ways female country artists engage with rurality and class overlooks the complexities of country music, gender, popular culture, rurality, and class.

In this essay, I foreground the music of a group of contemporary female country artists to fill this gap in country music scholarship. Whereas male country artists typically reference rurality and the working-class as a means of identification, country artists Miranda Lambert, Kacey Musgraves, and Mickey Guyton reference these social constructs to interrogate, destabilize, and refigure. Unlike their male counterparts, these contemporary female country artists gesture to rurality and the working-class to criticize their gendered associations, address their limiting and disempowering elements, and examine their association with whiteness and racism. In producing multilayered responses to contemporary dialogues on rurality and class, these women not only call attention to country music's premises, but they also produce deviations that undercut essentialisms of the rural and the working-class.

Women Refiguring Rurality and Class in Country Music Throughout History

Exploring the music of these contemporary female country artists first requires a historical overview of other songs by female country artists that have similarly refigured rurality and class. Perhaps the most famous is Kitty Wells' 1952 'It Wasn't God Who Made Honky Tonk Angels.' Wells' song responds to Hank Thompson's 1952 'The Wild Side of Life,' which condemned so-called 'honky tonk' angels, fallen women who enjoy the nightlife and have multiple partners. Wells cites a signature marker of rural, working-class life—the honky tonk—to criticize men's social and sexual irresponsibly. She responds to Thompson saying, 'it's a shame that all the blame is on us women' and men cause 'many a good girl to go wrong.'[4] Despite country radio and the Grand Ole Opry broadcast censoring Wells because of the perceived radicalism of the song, 'Honky Tonk Angels' became Wells' first No. 1 single, and the first million-selling record by a female solo artist (Hubbs, 2014, p. 245). Pamela Fox (2009) refers to 'Honky Tonk Angels' as an 'answer song,' a musical response to a song by men in which women of the 1950s:

[3] See Hubbs, N. (2011). 'Redneck Woman' and the Gendered Politics of Class Rebellion. *Southern Cultures*, 17(4), 44-70; Neal, J. (2016). Why 'Ladies Love Country Boys': Gender, Class, and Economics in Contemporary Country Music. In D. Pecknold and K. McCusker (Eds.), *Country Boys and Redneck Women: New Essays in Gender and Country Music* (pp. 3-25). University Press of Mississippi; Pruitt, C. (2019). 'Boys 'Round Here': Masculine Life-Course Narratives in Contemporary Country Music. *Social Sciences*, 8(176), 1-18.

[4] Miller, 1952.

> not only inserted themselves into the previously predictable formula in order to sell records—they reconfigured it. Rather than simply replicating a prior hit's mood, melody, or basic lyrics, their new version of the answer song frequently had the potential to contest its very premise, functioning as a galvanizing countertext. (p.92)

I reference Fox's theorizations of Wells' song not only to better understand the track, but also to put forth the possibility that all the songs I focus on in this essay are 'answer songs' in that they all, to some degree, respond to songs by men that position working-class rurality as an identity or incessantly elevate rural, working-class life. Instead of simply inserting themselves in the 'predictable formula' embodied by the music of country artists such as Morgan Wallen, Kacey Musgraves, Miranda Lambert, and Mickey Guyton's versions of the answer song 'call attention to the ideological assumptions underlying the caricatures that they dramatize' (Fox, 2009, p. 93).

Another more contemporary example of a female country artist refiguring rurality and class is Gretchen Wilson's 2004 'Redneck Woman.'[5] Wilson's breakout single reworks the rural, white, working-class female identity 'through language, sound, and images, and in relation to middle-class / working-class, male / female, and individual /communal affiliations' (Hubbs, 2011, p. 45). Like Wells' song, 'Redneck Woman' was highly successful, skyrocketing to No. 1 faster than any country track in the previous decade and winning Wilson a slew of awards (Hubbs, 2014, p. 231). However, while some scholarship notes the transgressive nature of Wilson's track, Nadine Hubbs (2014) argues that although Wilson acknowledges her scorned status, she 'frames it with neither poignancy nor righteous protest' (p. 232). Instead, the song is 'a defiant apologia for herself and her redneck sisters and their 'trashy' position' (Hubbs, 2014, p. 232). Indeed, Hubbs argues that the song and Wilson's brand merely repositions her as 'one of the boys' in country music, 'equating her 'redneck' womanhood with the same masculine bravado required in hard country male performance' (2014, p. 205). Thus, although both 'Honky Tonk Angels' and 'Redneck Woman' invoke symbols of the rural and working-class in a way that refigure them (i.e., Wells' honky tonk and Wilson's female redneck), Wells' song presents more of a challenge to the rural, working-class status quo. Wells references the honky tonk to criticize men and how they shape wayward women, and Wilson draws on cherished symbols of rural, white, working-class life to 'make common cause with redneck men' and 'articulate [a redneck] manifesto' (Hubbs, 2014, p. 245). Thus, refiguring rurality and class in country music is not always already resistant to the rural, working-class status quo.

Queering Rural, Working-Class Life

Rural, working-class masculinity is often seen as the most authentic masculine ideal in the United States. Consider the two most celebrated images of rural, working-class masculinity in popular culture: the farmer and the cowboy.[6] Figures like the fictional farmer Tom Joad and legendary actor John Wayne embody this ideal. Contemporary rural, working-class masculinity elevates

[5] Rich and Wilson, 2004.

[6] For a more thorough exploration of images of rural masculinity see Campbell, H., M. Mayerfeld Bell, and M. Finney (2006). *Country Boys: Masculinity and Rural Life*. Pennsylvania State University Press; Malone, B. and T. Laird. 2018. The Cowboy Image and the Growth of Western Music. In *Country Music USA* (pp. 160-207). University of Texas Press.

these images and coalesces around the patriarchs that structure small-town life, such as local mayors, chairs of chambers of commerce, and pillars of local churches (Campbell et al, 2006, p. 5). While these images of rural, working-class masculinity are less celebrated than the farmer or the cowboy, they are no less central to the sense many people have of the appropriate conduct for rural, working-class men. Thus, rural, working-class life is often highly patriarchal, perhaps even more so than urban, middle- and upper-class life, although such an assessment is difficult to measure precisely (Campbell et al, 2006, p. 5).

Just as rural, working-class life is associated with patriarchy, it is similarly linked to heteronormativity. Hubbs (2014) takes up this obfuscating association in *Rednecks, Queers, and Country Music*, writing that country music and queers 'are so remote from each other in the American cultural imaginary that putting them together is perceived not as a combination but as a juxtaposition' (p. 4). Indeed, dominant cultural images of working-class gender and sexual bigotry suggest the implausibility of queer life among white working-class people in rural places. Hubbs points to the legendary murders of gay and trans people in rural places as illustrations of this implausibility, such as Matthew Shephard in Wyoming (1998); Brandon Teena in Nebraska (1993), remade in the Hollywood film, *Boys Don't Cry* (1999); and a nameless gay man in Wyoming and possibly, depending on one's interpretation, Jack Twist (Jake Gyllenhaal) in Texas in *Brokeback Mountain* (2014, p.6). However, despite these real and fictional tragedies, queer folks live in rural, working-class spaces and indeed listen to country music, as demonstrated by Kacey Musgraves and Miranda Lambert.

In 'Follow Your Arrow' (2013), Kacey Musgraves upends working-class rurality's association with heteronormativity. The song—co-written with Shane McAnally and Brandy Lynn Clark, both of whom are gay—references themes associated with rural, working-class life in its first verse, particularly the correlation between marriage and drinking. Part of the song's refiguring of rurality and class lies in what Scott Herring refers to as 'rural stylistics.' Rural stylistics are a mode of 'metro-subversion' that use 'rusticity, stylelessness, unfashionability, anti-urbanity, anti-sophistication and crudity to disarm the standardizing function of metronormative habitus' (Herring, 2010, p. 23). Musgraves uses rural stylistics both lyrically and sonically through the track's intentional simplicity, crudity, and rusticity. Through its simple mantra, the song's lyrics call out the double standards of rural, working-class life: 'You're damned if you do and you're damned if you don't / So you might as well just do whatever you want.'[7] The song also makes use of crudity, such as in Musgraves' enunciation of the first syllable in 'horrible' to make it sound like 'whore-ible.' Finally, sonically, the song invokes rusticity through its reliance on instruments such as the guitar, banjo, tambourine, as well as Musgrave's heavy southern twang. By deploying these rural stylistics, the song, perhaps counterintuitively, disrupts traditional portrayals of the rural, working-class life in country music.

Furthermore, the lyrics of 'Follow Your Arrow' turn depictions of rural, working-class sexuality on their head. In the song's chorus, Musgraves encourages listeners to kiss whomever they want regardless of gender. While country music has a handful of openly gay artists such as Ty Henderson, mainstream country music does not have many LGBTQ lyrics. Writing on sexuality, Beverly Skeggs (2012, p. 120) explains that 'heterosexuality is continually given legitimacy through its repetition and through the silencing and delegitimization of any alternatives' and thus

[7] Clark et al., 2013.

'sexuality becomes a matter of what can and cannot be said'. Country music journalist Dacey Orr (2017) explains that the power of Musgraves' song lies beyond its cheerfully queer lyrics. Instead, she maintains that the song's extraordinariness comes from its pairing of identities that are often considered contradictory: ''Follow Your Arrow' didn't just make country a welcoming space for all kinds of people; it eliminated the need to be a particular kind of personal at all. In Kacey's world, you could be a gunslinging Texan who supported gay marriage, a virgin who cracked up at crude jokes, or a country singer who revered tradition' (p.193). Framed in this way, Musgraves' song fits into what Hubbs views as a 'long-running discourse of protest and resistance in modern country music, albeit one that is not usually granted political status' (2014, p. 137). Hubbs explains that protest in country music is not presented in the language of politics or activism, but rather in the stories of ordinary individual lives and is 'sometimes funny, sometimes angry, frequently stylized and metaphorical and always focused on things other than revolution' (2014, p. 138). Musgraves frames her protest through humor—for instance, telling listeners to 'roll up a joint, or don't'—and relying on the metaphor of the song's title. Musgraves, then, by vocalizing an alternative to heteronormativity, brings queerness, rurality, and the working-class closer together in the American cultural imaginary.

Like 'Follow Your Arrow,' Miranda Lambert's 'Y'all Means All' challenges the link between heteronormativity and rural, working-class life.[8] However, it moves beyond 'Follow Your Arrow' to suggest that working-class rurality is hospitable and perhaps even conducive to queer life. Lambert wrote the spunky, joyful anthem with her brother, who is gay, and Shane McAnally for Season 6 of Netflix's *Queer Eye*. While LGBTQ people are typically depicted as city and coastal dwellers, 'Y'all Means All' asserts the presence of queer folks in rural, working-class spaces by inserting gay colloquialisms in a country song, such as 'Yes queen' and 'honey.' 'Yes queen,' perhaps more accurately written 'Yas queen,' is a gesture to the rallying cry of encouragement used among Black women and queer people of color that originated from Black vogue and drag scenes (Vikander, 2019). Lambert also references 'Chattahoochie,' asking, 'Where my Chattahoochies?' The Chatahoochie is a river, but it is also the title of Allan Jackson's 1992 hit in which he details a heterosexual coming of age in the south.[9] Song titles and place names are used in country music as 'evocative metonyms for complicated, socially located and affective dispositions' (Fox, 2004, p. 244). Lambert's citing of both the place and the song not only rhetorically locates queer folks in the south, but it also refashions and queers the prototypical southern male coming of age narrative. Furthermore, the song challenges fatalistic depictions of queer folks who live in rural, working-class America by emphasizing its predisposition to queer life: 'Out in the country honey, y'all means all / Y'all means all.'

As mentioned above, the song was written for season 6 of *Queer Eye*, and its accompanying video features the show's cast, The Fab Five. Throughout the video The Fab Five alternate between dressing 'rural' and 'working-class' i.e., in cowboy boots and hats, and wearing more 'stylish' clothing and doing activities associated with the two seemingly opposed identities. The men seamlessly alternate between their rural and urban personas, in one shot line dancing or doing yard work and voguing or twirling in the next. Together, the song and video call on the rural and working-class to challenge their association with heteronormativity and bigotry. Instead of

[8] Dick, et al., 2021.
[9] Jackson, et al., 1992.

portraying rural, working-class America as antithetical to queer life, Lambert depicts it as having a propensity to inclusivity and diversity.

Exploring the Disempowering Elements of Rural, Working-Class Life

Unlike her male counterparts who use country music to elevate working-class rurality, Kacey Musgraves addresses the stifling and uninspiring aspects of rural, working-class life through her song 'Merry Go 'Round' (2012).[10] The song evades traditional, romanticized symbols associated with working-class rurality and instead foreground the challenges of that lifestyle, especially its dangerously cyclical nature as evidenced by the track's title. In the opening verse of 'Merry Go 'Round,' Musgraves references the cycle of norms in rural, working-class communities, such as having children at a young age and attending church weekly. These norms reflect the realities of many rural, working-class communities. Casey Quinlan (2013), writing on the particular struggles of rural, working-class women in *The Atlantic*, rightly suggests that such women face a different set of challenges than educated, upper to middle class urban and suburban women. Quinlan points to a handful of studies that show that rural, working-class women are more likely to have sex and marry earlier than urban women and women with a high school diploma are more likely to be married by twenty-five years old compared with women with bachelor's degrees. All of these issues lead to higher rates of poverty and domestic violence among rural, working-class women (Quinlan, 2013). Musgraves takes up these themes in the rest of the song. In the chorus, Musgraves frames her commentary on the interconnectedness of rural, working-class vices and poverty through clever wordplay by alternating between 'Mary' and 'merry.' The image of the 'broken merry go 'round' symbolizes the cyclical nature of rural poverty and foregrounds its inescapability. By emphasizing the cycle of rural poverty, Musgraves refuses the 'poverty pride' narrative where the working-class is portrayed as more authentic and noble than the wealthy and that poverty is preferable to being rich (Agostinone-Wilson, 2017, p. 125). Faith Agostinone-Wilson (2017) explains this enduring theme in country music, writing that common sentiments of poverty pride include a deep minimizing of economic hardship and abusive households, such as ''we were poor, but we had each other,' 'we didn't realize we were poor,' 'we were beat [spanked], but we still turned out fine,' or 'folks don't know how to be committed to each other anymore'' (p. 125). Rather than empowering the working-class, Agostinone-Wilson asserts that poverty pride in country music inadvertently reinforces the ruling class, deflects analysis away from capitalism and onto individuals and family, and erodes solidarity among the working class as a solution to ending oppression: 'It is a complex and insidious form of false consciousness, wrapped in a homey and harmless guise of nostalgia' (2017, p. 126). As Musgraves references rural, working-class people's means of escape—alcohol, drugs, infidelity—she makes candid observations about the bleakness of rural, working-class life: 'We're so bored until we're buried / And just like dust we settle in this town.' In this way, 'Merry Go 'Round' not only posits a response to the rural poverty pride narrative, but it also offers a counterimage to the rural, working-class idyll.

Examining the Rural Working-Class's Association with Whiteness and Racism

Just as whiteness is not necessarily mandatory for country music, whiteness is not mandatory for rural, working-class life. Nevertheless, both country music and working-class rurality are marked by whiteness. The whiteness of country music has been taken up by a number of country music

[10] McAnally, et al., 2013.

scholars, most notably Aaron Fox and Geoff Man. Explaining the historical whiteness of country music, Fox (2004) writes that by the end of the civil rights era, country music was 'widely understood to signify an explicit claim to whiteness… as a marked foregrounded claim of cultural identity' thanks in large part to politicians like Richard Nixon who mobilized the music in an effort to 'use the emotional issues of culture and race to achieve… a 'positive polarization' of American politics' without resorting to overt racism (p. 44). In 'Why Does Country Music Sound White: Race and the Voice of Nostalgia,' Mann focuses on the sound of the genre to explore how country music 'became white' and 'stays white' (2008, p. 73). He explains that country music sounds white 'because white people are hailed by, hear, and turn to its sounding… this 'sounding' works in both senses of 'sound': country music is a 'sound of whiteness,' and it 'sounds' whiteness, i.e., sounds its depths' (Mann, 2008, p. 92). Mann concludes that American whiteness is not reflected in country music, but is, rather, *produced* by it (2008, p. 75). Thus, although country music and rural, working-class life are both associated with whiteness, these associations are not fixed, and there exists space for interpellation. With Fox and Mann in mind, let us now turn to country artist Mickey Guyton and her refiguring of rurality and class to examine their association with whiteness and racism.

While this essay focuses on the lyrical and video components of songs by contemporary female country artists, a brief detour into the circumstances of the release of Guyton's 'Black Like Me' nuances our understanding of the track. On June 2, 2020, eight days after the murder of George Floyd by Minnesota police, Guyton took to Instagram and posted a twenty-second recording of a song about racial alienation and dwindling faith in the American Dream. In the caption, she wrote: 'I wrote this song over a year ago because I was tired of seeing so much hate and oppression. And yet here we are in the exact same place! We must change that. I hope this song can give you a small glimpse into what my brothers and sisters have endured for 400+ years.'[11] After posting the track, Spotify reached out to Guyton's label and featured her song on 'Blackout Tuesday,' a campaign aimed at protesting police violence and racism (Mamo, 2021, para.6). 'Black Like Me' went to No. 4 on Billboard's Digital Country Song Sales chart and was later nominated for Best Country Solo Performance at the 63rd Annual Grammy Awards, at which Guyton performed the song (Grein, 2020, para.1).

Unlike the other female country music artists that are the focus of this essay, Guyton does not reference rurality or class through her use of musical or lyrical twang. Musical twang refers to 'the short sustained and dynamic resonance of instruments like banjo, mandolin or dobro, the sounds of which are distinguished by an abrupt, relative sharp intonation when plucked, which is followed by quick, usually slightly ascending, muting' (Mann, 2008, p.79). 'Black Like Me' evades instrumental twang, relying on piano, cello, drums, and very subtle steel guitar.[12] Furthermore, most country music is sung with the diction and inflection of the southern U.S., regardless of whether the performer is a southerner (Mann, 2008, p.79). Although Guyton hails from Texas, she voices little southern drawl. As Mann points out, country instrumentation and voiced southern drawl 'are so consistently paired as to give the impression that twang is the direct musical expression of a white southern accent… they stand as virtually substitutable markers of 'country'

[11] Guyton, 2020.
[12] Chapman, et al., 2020.

and 'racial' identification.'[13] Thus, through sound alone, Guyton upends the genre's association with whiteness.

Although Guyton does not invoke rurality and class through sound, she does so lyrically. In the opening line of 'Black Like Me,' she sings: 'Little kid in a small town / Did my best just to fit in.' However, she quickly dispels typical notions of nostalgia by recalling painful recognitions of racial difference she experienced as a young girl. While the song has very few direct references to rurality, its lyrics appeal to rural, working-class audiences. She questions the American Dream in a way that resonances with these listeners by describing her father taking on multiple jobs to support the family. Like Musgraves' 'Merry Go 'Round,' 'Black Like Me' refuses the nostalgia for the rural working-class that dominates so much of the country music genre. Instead of longing for 'the good old days,' Guyton maintains that 'Now I'm all grown up and nothin' has changed / Yeah, it's still the same.' Furthermore, Guyton hails rural, working-class America to stand in solidarity with people of color by addressing both nonwhite and white listeners. She questions working-class rurality's association with whiteness by foregrounding the experiences of people of color, insisting and assuring the audience that 'someday we'll all be free.' Yet she also speaks to white listeners, imploring, 'If you think we live in the land of the free / You should try to be black like me.' In doing so, Guyton challenges the assumption that the rural working-class is white by default.

Whereas 'Black Like Me' interrogates working-class rurality's association with whiteness, Guyton's 'All American' produces a complex commentary on the role of the rural, white, working-class in the American cultural imaginary.[14] In 'All American,' Guyton asserts that *all Americans* are implicated in American social ills—not just those who are rural, white, and working-class. She references the rural in the song's opening line, but fuses symbols of rurality with markers of urbanity by mentioning interstates, back roads, Friday night football games, and rock concerts. In merging the rural and urban, Guyton reframes racism and issues plaguing America as issues not solely created by rural, working-class Americans. In the chorus, she implores listeners, 'Ain't we all American?' Explaining the 'badness' of country music, Hubbs writes: 'the moral suspicion attaching to country music is the moral suspicion attaching to the white working class as (purported) ground zero for America's most virulent social ills: racism, sexism, and homophobia' (2014, p. 42). Indeed, rural, working-class people are often scapegoated in standard accounts of U.S. racism. John Hartigan Jr. (2003), asserts that this scapegoating is historically distorted, socially regressive, and instrumental in perpetuating racism. Writing on 'rednecks,' 'hillbillies,' and 'white trash,' he concludes:

> This imagery [performs a] critical function in the maintenance of whiteness, for these are the figures whites use to delimit an attention to the subject of racism… News features, movies, novels, and editorials rely upon the images of poor, often rural whites to address the subject of racism… After all, poor whites are not the bank officers who deny mortgages and other loans to African Americans of all classes at rates two to three times that of their white counterparts; poor whites are not among the landlords who refuse housing to African Americans, nor are they the human resource managers who are racially influenced in their hiring and firing decisions (p. 111).

[13] Mann, 2008, p. 80.
[14] Banks, et al., 2021.

By moving attention away from rural, white working-class people and calling attention to all Americans, Guyton engages in the work of untangling rurality from these stereotypes and begins to 'deconstruct whiteness' (Hartogan, 2003, p 111).

In a 2022 article titled 'The Morgan Wallen Conundrum,' the *New York Times* calls Morgan Wallen 'more or less, the most popular performer in country music' (Caramanica, 2022, para.5). Indeed, for Wallen, taking on a rural, working-class identity has a payoff. Despite being briefly blacklisted by major award shows and country music radio after being caught on video using a racial slur, Wallen's *Dangerous* was the most commercial successful release of 2021, with 3.2 million album equivalent units sold (Caramanica, 2022, para.5). Wallen's album has placed in the Top 10 of the all-genre Billboard 200 Chart every week since its January 8, 2021, release, and he is currently on a 46-city arena tour that includes multi-night shows in Nashville, Atlanta, as well as New York and Los Angeles.

Yet the music of country artists Miranda Lambert, Kacey Musgraves, and Mickey Guyton demonstrates ways to refer to the rural, working-class life beyond simply identifying with it. Rather than serving as an identity with which one does or does not associate, these women demonstrate that working-class rurality is instead a complex set of associations that must be deconstructed, interrogated, and examined. In doing so, they provide a counterimage of working-class rurality that responds not only to the performatively rural, working-class trappings of bro-country, but also to the upper-class urbanity, or 'metronormativity,' of the entire country music establishment.[15] As Hubbs points out, 'what we 'know' of working-class and rural communities… typically issues from middle-class and urban perspectives that regard these communities as the breeding grounds of homophobia and bigotry' (Hubbs, 2014, p. 161). Indeed, the rural and the working class have long been imagined as antithetical to non-heteronormative, non-male, and non-white life, but a closer look complicates and questions these prevailing assumptions. Those who wish to better understand the communities that country music claims to represent must pay close attention to which musicians leverage rurality and class and how they do so. Attending to rurality and class in country music allows one to see beyond the dominant, urban, middle and upper-class narratives that interpret, represent, and often misrepresent them.

Author Bio

Lily Nagengast (she/her) is a doctoral student in the Department of American Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. She is from Bloomfield, Nebraska. She received her MA in English from Georgetown University and her BA in English and Gender Studies from Boston College.

Bibliography

Agostinone-Wilson, F. (2017). The Liberatory Potential and Constraint of Working-Class

[15] A term introduced by J. Halberstam, 'metronormativity' refers to a dominant 'story of migration from 'country' to 'town,'' 'a spatial narrative within which the subject moves to a place of tolerance after enduring life in a place of suspicion, persecution and secrecy' and that imagines the metropolis as an urban mecca for queer people. Halberstam, 2005, p. 190.

Rural Women's Gender Roles within the United States. *Counterpoints*, 494, 113-133. https://www.jstor.org/stable/45177657.

Alexander, J.L., B. Hayslip, C. McGill. 2018. The Way I Talk [Recorded by M. Wallen]. On *If I Know Me* [Album]. Big Loud Records.

Anti-Palindrome, A. (2018, Feb. 8). Six Things Urban Feminists Should Never Say to Rural People. *Open Democracy*. https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/transformation/six-things-urban-feminists-should-never-say-to-rural-people/.

Banks, V., M. Guyton, K. Kosowski, and Emma-lee. (2021). All American [Recorded by M. Guyton]. On *Remember Her Name* [Album]. Capitol Records.

Boulden, W. (2008). Gay Men Living in a Rural Environment. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services*, 12(3), 63-75. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315877105-7.

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge.

Campbell, H., M. Mayerfeld Bell, and M. Finney. (2006). *Country Boys: Masculinity and Rural Life*. Pennsylvania State University Press.

Caramanica, J. (2022, Jan. 20). The Morgan Wallen Conundrum. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/21/arts/music/morgan-wallen.html.

Chapman, N.P., F.J.E. Churchill, E. Davidson-Dillon, M. Guyton. (2020). Black Like Me [Recorded by M. Guyton]. On *Black Like Me* [Album]. Capitol Records.

Clark, B., S. McAnnally, and K. Musgraves. (2013). Follow Your Arrow [Recorded by K. Musgraves]. On *Same Trailer Different Park* [Album]. Mercury Records.

Dewees, A. (2021). 'Ain't My Mama's Broken Heart': The Mothers and Daughters of Hillbilly Feminism. *Journal of Feminist Scholarship*, 18(18), 43-60. https://doi.org/10.23860/jfs.2021.18.03.

Dick, L., M. Lambert, and S. McAnally. (2021). Y'all Means All - from Season 6 of Queer Eye [Recorded by M. Lambert]. On *Y'all Means All (From Season 6 of Queer Eye)* [Album]. Vanner Records.

Fadel, L. (2019, Apr. 4). New Study: LGBT People A 'Fundamental Part of the Fabric of Rural Communities.' *NPR*. https://www.npr.org/2019/04/04/709601295/lgbt-people-are-a-fundamental-part-of-the-fabric-of-rural-communities.

Fox, A. (2004). White Trash Alchemies of the Abject Sublime; Country as 'Bad' Music. In C. Washbourne & M. Demo (Eds.), *Bad Music: The Music We Love to Hate* (pp. 29-46). Routledge.

Fox, P. (2009). *Natural Acts: Gender, Race, and Rusticity in Country Music.* University of Michigan Press.

Grein, P. (2020, Dec. 8). Mickey Guyton, Charley Pride & More Black Artists to Receive Grammy Nods in Country Categories. *Billboard*. https://www.billboard.com/music/awards/black-artists-country-grammy-nominations-mickey-guyton-charley-pride-9496412/.

Guyton, M. [@mickeyguyton]. (2020, June 2). *It's Here*. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/CA60i0QnFCp/.

Halberstam, J. (2005). *In A Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. New York University Press.

Hardy, M., E.K. Smith, R. Vojtesak, and M. Wallen. (2020). More Than My Hometown [Recorded by M. Wallen]. On *Dangerous: The Double Album* [Album]. Big Loud Records.

Hartigan, J. (2003). Who Are These White People? 'Rednecks,' 'Hillbillies,' and

White Trash,' as Marked Racial Subjects. In A. Doane & E. Bonilla-Silva (Eds.), *White Out: The Continuing Significance of Racism* (pp. 95-111). Routledge.

Haynes, J. (2018). Looking for (Women's) Rights in all the Wrong Places? Country Music and Hillbilly Feminism in the 1990s. *Feminist Media Studies*, 18(2), 315-318. https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2018.1436900.

Herring, S. (2010). *Another Country: Queer Anti-Urbanisms*. New York University Press.

Hubbs, N. (2014). *Rednecks, Queers, and Country Music*. University of California Berkeley Press.

Hubbs, N. (2011). 'Redneck Woman' and the Gendered Politics of Class Rebellion. *Southern Cultures*, 17(4), 44-70. https://doi.org/10.1353/scu.2011.0061.

Jackson, A. and J. McBride (1992). Chattahoochee [Recorded by A. Jackson]. On *A Lot About Livin' (And a Little 'Bout Love)* [Album]. Arista Records.

Malone, B. & T. Laird. 2018. The Cowboy Image and the Growth of Western Music. In *Country Music USA* (pp. 160-207). University of Texas Press.

Mamo, H. (2021 March 11). 'Black Like Me' Singer Mickey Guyton Wants to 'Open Doors' for Black and Brown Girls in Country. *Billboard*. https://www.billboard.com/music/awards/mickey-guyton-black-like-me-grammy-interview-9536209/.

Mann, G. (2008). Why Does Country Music Sound White? Race and the Voice of Nostalgia. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 31(1), 73-100. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870701538893.

McAnally, S., K. Musgraves, and J. Osborne. (2013). Merry Go 'Round [Recorded by K. Musgraves]. On *Same Trailer Different Park* [Album]. Mercury Records.

Meier, K. (2019). Looking for Meaning in All the Wrong Places: Country Music and the Politics of Identity. *Social Science Quarterly*, 100(1), 89-108. https://doi.org/10.1111/ssqu.12556.

Miller, J.D. (1952). It Wasn't God Who Made Honky Tonk Angels [Recorded by K. Wells]. *On I Don't Want Your Money, I Want Your Time* [Album]. Decca Records.

Neal, J. (2016). Why 'Ladies Love Country Boys': Gender, Class, and Economics in Contemporary Country Music. In D. Pecknold and K. McCusker (Eds.), *Country Boys and Redneck Women: New Essays in Gender and Country Music* (pp. 3-25). University Press of Mississippi.

Orr, D. (2017). Kacey Musgraves. In H. Gleason (Ed.), *Woman Walk the Line: How the Women in Country Music Changed Our Lives* (pp. 191-195). University of Texas Press.

Pareles, J. (2021 Jan. 12). Morgan Wallen's Small-Town Country Songs, Aimed at a Big Audience. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/12/arts/music/morgan-wallen-dangerous-the-double-album-review.html

Pecknold, D. (2013). *Hidden in the Mix: The African American Presence in Country Music*. Duke University Press.

Pruitt, C. (2019). 'Boys 'Round Here': Masculine Life-Course Narratives in Contemporary Country Music. *Social Sciences*, 8(176), 1-18. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci8060176.

Quinlan, C. (2013, June 12). The Particular Struggles of Rural Women. *The Atlantic*. https://www.theatlantic.com/sexes/archive/2013/06/the-particular-struggles-of-rural-women/276803/#:~:text=Women%20outside%20cities%20tend%20to,higher%20rates%20of%20domestic%20violence.&text=They%20remark%20on%20the%20%22simplicity,to%20raise%20children%2C%20they%20say.

Rich, J. and G. Wilson. (2004). Redneck Woman [Recorded by G. Wilson]. On *Here for the Party* [Album]. Sony Music Entertainment Inc.

Rowlands, DW & Love, H. (2021 Sept. 28). Mapping Rural America's Diversity and Demographic Change. *Brookings*. https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2021/09/28/mapping-rural-americas-diversity-and-demographic-change/.

Simpson, A. (2020, June 12). Why Rural America Is Joining the Movement for Black Lives. *Pew*. https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline/2020/06/12/why-rural-america-is-joining-the-movement-for-black-lives.

Skeggs, B. (2012). Becoming Respectably Heterosexual. In *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable* (pp. 118-138). Sage Publications.

Vikander, T. (2019, Feb. 28). The Etiquette of Whether to Say 'YAS QUEEN.' *Toronto Star*. https://www.thestar.com/vancouver/2019/02/28/the-etiquette-of-when-to-say-yaas-queen.html.

Wallen, M. (2021). *Dangerous: The Double Album* [Album]. Big Loud Records.

Taking the Great Leap Forwards: Teaching Woody Guthrie in the College Classroom

Michele Fazio, University of North Carolina at Pembroke
Aimee Zoeller, Indiana University Purdue University Columbus
Mark F. Fernandez, Loyola University New Orleans
Court Carney, Stephen F. Austin State University
Gustavus Stadler, Haverford College

Abstract

This essay explores the work of Woody Guthrie and other folk artists who have followed in his tradition of documenting working-class people's experiences in song. In addition to outlining the creation of the Teaching Woody Guthrie Faculty Learning Collective–a group of teacher-scholars, activists, and musicians who are dedicated to collaborating across disciplines to illustrate Woody Guthrie's relevance in today's precarious world–the essay includes suggested curriculum to teach folk music and political activism in the college classroom.

Keywords

Woody Guthrie, Billy Bragg, folk music, political activism, working-class pedagogy

Workers today across the globe are organizing. After decades of corporate profits and stagnant wages, amidst the backdrop of rising inflation costs and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, workers in nearly every sector of labor from the healthcare and travel industries to educators and artists have gone on strike to protect workers' rights and decry the concerns they face on the job. Working-class protests such as the U.S.-based Starbucks Workers United and the University and College Union in the U.K. highlight the power of collective action in advocating for improved working conditions, increased wages and benefits, and corporate accountability.

Music has played an essential role in the long history of strike action and political activism. The ongoing efforts of singer and activist Billy Bragg is a case in point. Recording over 25 albums from 1983 to the present, including two collaborations with Wilco, setting Woody Guthrie's unpublished song lyrics to music in *Mermaid Avenue,* Bragg's musical career has spanned multiple genres, including punk, folk, and rock, and is infused with his progressive politics of advocating for an inclusive and just world. Songs such as 'Sexuality,' 'Between the Wars,' and 'To Have and Have Not' speak to the power of solidarity and collective action, of building bridges not walls. In giving voice to the struggles of working people, Bragg cuts through the racist, sexist, right-wing rhetoric that so often divides and, instead, invites a consideration of an alternative way of living through empathy and agency—one that balances out rising profits against the lowering of wages,

and privileges human dignity and life over corporate greed and exploitation.[1] As he has proclaimed vehemently both on and offstage, 'I sing for the radical.'

No stranger to the picket line, Bragg has supported striking workers for decades, standing with and alongside everyday people to promote working-class rights. A recent example of his activism occurred during the U.S. tour to promote his new album, *The Million Things that Never Happened*, when he joined the Starbucks Workers United rally in Buffalo, NY–the first location to organize–and performed a number of popular protest songs, including 'Which Side Are You On?,' 'Never Cross a Picket Line,' 'Solidarity Forever,' and 'There is Power in a Union.' The recent surge in union membership is helping to mobilize a new generation of young workers who are taking on multiple, intersecting issues in the struggle for social justice, including, for example, climate change and LGBTQIA+ rights. During his performance, Bragg spoke directly to the youth gathered in the crowd: 'Music has no agency. It cannot change the world. The job of changing the world is not the job of the artist. The job of changing the world is the job of the people and to organize and come together and to make that difference.' He added, 'What music does do, what music can do is make you believe that the world can change … it makes you believe there will be a great leap forward. But just remember, you have to make it happen.'[2]

Bragg is one of a long line of musicians continuing a trend rooted in the folk music tradition. In the mid-twentieth century, Oklahoma troubadour Woody Guthrie, became radicalized when he was living in California through his association with organizer Ed Robbin[3]. Robbin and others not only exposed Guthrie to the plight of the 'Okies,' 'Arkies,' and other refugees, like himself, who fled the Dustbowl after the Black Sunday dust storm on April 14, 1935. Visiting their camps, witnessing their struggles, and hearing their stories, Guthrie penned his seminal *Dustbowl Ballads* toward the end of the decade. He was not the first folksinger to speak to the conditions of working people. 'Work songs' thrived in the nineteenth century among the enslaved community. By the turn of the century, rural Appalachian writers such as Sara Ogan Gunning[4], who Guthrie met in the early 1940s, also addressed the realities workers faced in their songs; however, Guthrie, especially through his association with folklorist Alan Lomax[5], scored an influential hit with the publishing of his ballads.

In the 1940s, Guthrie teamed with fellow singers in New York, Pete Seeger, Millard Lampell, and Lee Hays to form the Almanac Singers, a group which soon became one of the major artistic voices of the 'Popular Front,' often performing at CIO rallies and even on the picket line. Although the

[1] See Bragg's *The Three Dimensions of Freedom* for an extended discussion of how restoring workers' power is central to democratic reform. 'Accountability,' he writes, 'is the key to creating a civic revolution' (100).

[2] To view Bragg's full speech and musical performance, visit https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_aRiahmC_hg&list=RD_aRiahmC_hg&start_radio=1&rv=_aRiahmC_hg&t=0. His song, 'Waiting for the Great Leap Forwards,' which he performed at the rally, serves as the impetus for our essay's title.

[3] See Gustavus Stadler, *Woody Guthrie: An Intimate Life*, for a discussion of Guthrie's acquaintance with Ed Robbin and his visits to refugee camps and their impact on Guthrie's *Dustbowl Ballads*, (22-25)

[4] For more on Guthrie's relationship with Sarah Ogan Gunning, see Moses Asch, ed., *American Folksong: Woody Guthrie*, (10).

[5] For a good discussion of Guthrie's relationship with folklorist Alan Lomax, see Charles Wolfe and Kip Lornell, *The Life and Legend of Leadbelly*, (Hudie "Leadbelly" Ledbetter was also the person who introduced Guthrie to Sarah Ogan Gunning), (70-73).

Almanacs never realized much in the way of commercial success, they took a step forward in popularizing the folk tradition of using music to inspire workers to organize and pressure their 'bosses' to better their conditions. One good example is the song 'Union Maid' which Guthrie wrote (perhaps with Seeger's input) to inspire women to gather the strength they needed to face down the opposition by embracing the union.

Seeger would go on to become a founding member of a popular band The Weavers in the late 1940s, a band whose commercial success helped to launch the 'folk revival' of the late 1950s and 1960s. Although Bob Dylan emerged as the most renowned member of that movement, other writers, such as Phil Ochs more directly embraced the folk tradition of activism. That tradition has lived on in the ensuing decades influencing a variety of music traditions. From the 'outlaw country' perspectives of writers like Johnny Cash's 'Man in Black' a song that explains how his famous mode of dress expresses his solidarity with the plight of Native Americans or David Alan Coe's 'Take this Job and Shove It' to the contemporary works of writers such as Grant Peeples and Chris Buhalis who celebrate Guthrie's influence on their own writings as evidenced by their many appearances at the Woody Guthrie Folk Festival (WoodyFest) that is held annually in Guthrie's hometown Okemah, Oklahoma.

Guthrie's influence on these generations of musicians marks a major contribution to American history and culture. Accordingly, his work has attracted the interest of writers and scholars such as Joe Klein, Ed Cray, and Will Kaufman. In 2020, Aimee Zoeller decided to pull together a diverse group of scholars to form the Teaching Woody Guthrie Faculty Learning Collective–a group of teacher-scholars, activists, and musicians who are dedicated to collaborating across disciplines to illustrate Woody Guthrie's relevance in today's precarious world. The purpose is to share teaching resources, exchange ideas for assessment, create interdisciplinary curriculum and contribute to the scholarship of teaching and learning. Deana McCloud, founding director of the Woody Guthrie Center in Tulsa, Oklahoma, requested the Collective create curriculum to support *Woody Guthrie: People Are the Song*, a Morgan Library and Museum exhibit curated by Woody Guthrie Publications, the Woody Guthrie Center, and Bob Santelli and anchored in Nora Guthrie and Bob Santelli's 2022 book, *Woody Guthrie: Songs and Art, Words and Wisdom.* The exhibit was on display February 18, 2022 - May 22, 2022 and is currently on display at the Woody Guthrie Center.[6]

As instructors of working-class students, each member of the Collective relies on teaching methods that provide space for storytelling and meaning-making as serious academic inquiry, a critical pedagogy rooted in education as a site of freedom. Below is the complete supplemental curriculum created for the Morgan Library & Museum. The lessons begin with a short introduction and include discussion prompts and engaging activities that can be implemented across college disciplines, including but not limited to: English, history, sociology, economics, and political science. The curriculum is organized by the five exhibit themes: sense of place, politics, family and children, love, and legacy. Each collective member took the lead on one specific theme, but many sections were written together and all sections were edited by the group at large. Many sections explicitly highlight the connection between Guthrie's work and working-class studies. For example,

[6] To view the Morgan Library exhibit, see https://www.themorgan.org/exhibitions/online/guthrie. For more information about the Woody Guthrie Center, including its current exhibit, see https://woodyguthriecenter.org/.

'Politics' chronicles Guthrie's labor songs while connecting to contemporary songwriters and social problems. The curriculum prompts students to investigate labor in their own families and communities: 'Conduct an oral history about the meaning of work in your family. How far can you trace back? Identify the kind of paid (and unpaid) labor performed by you and your family. In what ways does your family's work history connect to your identity?' The curriculum also calls attention to the relationship between our intimate lives and social institutions, including the economy: 'In advanced classes, students can take up a comparative parenting research paper. What parenting values were predominant in the 1940s? Why? How were these values influenced by race, social class, and political orientation? Guthrie was an active caregiver to his children in the 1940s; how does this compare to fathering expectations today?' Another prompt explores the role of primary archival documents: 'Direct students to Woody Guthrie's letter to Marjorie inscribed on Huddie Ledbetter's record (see page 231 in *Woody Guthrie: Songs and Art, Words and Wisdom*). How are intimate relationships shaped by social institutions such as politics, the economy, the healthcare system, the military?' The general purpose of the curriculum is to introduce students to Woody Guthrie, with a specific aim of considering current and historical social problems and phenomena from Guthrie's perspectives, philosophies, and methodologies. In addition, the curriculum encourages articulation of individual experience and agency through intentional engagement with contemporary change-makers.

Future goals of the Collective include offering symposia and conferences, creating a geospatial story map of Guthrie's life and music, developing community-based and service-learning community projects, and designing additional teaching materials for the college classroom. For more information, you can follow us at http://teachingwoodycollective.com.

Woody Guthrie: People Are the Song

Supplemental Interdisciplinary College Curriculum

To Get Started

There are many points of entry, including by theme. Instructors might also consider beginning with the music. The playlist includes Woody Guthrie songs and contemporary interpretations of his songs. Be inspired! Have your students create their own playlists based on the exhibit's themes. Which songs and artists could they add to the playlist? How will they share their playlists with one another? Or those in their communities?

Curriculum Spotify Playlist

1. 'This Land Is Your Land'
2. 'New York Town'
3. 'Why Oh Why'
4. 'Goodnight Little Cathy'
5. 'Pastures of Plenty' (Karen Dalton)
6. 'Talking Dust Bowl Blues' (Waxahatchee)
7. 'Deportee' (Dolly Parton)

8. ‘Vigilante Man’ (Parker Millsap)
9. ‘All You Fascists Bound to Lose’ (Resistance Revival Choir with Rhiannon Giddens)
10. ‘Pretty Boy Floyd’ (Rosanne Cash)
11. ‘Union Maid’ (Anne Feeney)
12. ‘Go Wagaloo’ (Sarah Lee Guthrie)
13. ‘Ease My Revolutionary Mind’ (Tom Morello)
14. ‘You Know the Night’ (Jackson Browne)
15. ‘Song for Woody’ (Bob Dylan)

(https://open.spotify.com/playlist/13TAchy0Y107HoP5ZnPcRW?si=f1e3bd2184d947e1)

Introduction

‘All You Can Write is What You See.’ Woody Guthrie, one of America’s most prolific artists and songwriters scribbled that quip on the lyric sheet that captures his most famous ballad ‘This Land is Your Land.’ And Guthrie saw a lot. Growing up in the modest town of Okemah, Oklahoma, he witnessed a world of change, a world emerging from a horrific World War. After moving to the oil boomtown, Pampa, Texas as a teenager after a series of family tragedies, he got a close-up glimpse of the underbelly of small-town life living and working in a boarding house. He also fell in love, got married, and raised a family. After the infamous ‘Black Sunday’ dust storm of 1935, he, like so many of his fellow Okies left the great Dustbowl to the more promising, greener pastures of California. In California, he started to find himself as both an artist and activist. In the ensuing decades, Guthrie traveled across the land chronicling the people and places he saw in words, music, song, and drawings.

Guthrie chronicled the essence of American life in voluminous letters (most of them housed at the Woody Guthrie Center in Tulsa, Oklahoma), over three thousand lyrics, drawings, paintings, and journalistic writings. From the refugee camps of California, to the streets of New York City, to the Columbia River of the great Northwest, and all across the lower forty-eight, he wrote about the people and places that he saw, his own political hopes and dreams of the future, and of a better world that he optimistically saw coming out of his ‘hoping machine.’ Even as his battle with Huntington’s Disease, which ravaged his body until his death in 1967, Guthrie continued to write until his body simply wouldn’t let him anymore.

His musical output has provided so many of us with a large segment of the ‘soundtrack of our lives.’ That soundtrack helped spawn the ‘Folk Revival’ of the 1950s and 1960s and has continued to inspire artists and songwriters now almost a quarter of the way through the twenty-first century. An American original, Woody Guthrie had become an American treasure by the time of his death in 1967. Influencing countless other singers and songwriters around the world, Guthrie lived by these simple words: ‘All you can write is what you see.’

THEME ONE: SENSE OF PLACE

In this lesson, we will explore what Guthrie ‘wrote’ when he ‘saw’ things in his environment. A sense of place almost always appears in Guthrie’s art. In this section, we feature several important

places in Guthrie's life: His roots in Oklahoma and Texas, where he grew up and came of age, his time out west as he matured, and the America he traveled through and chronicled. The lesson may be incorporated into the classroom in many ways. The lesson theme might be used as the basis of a single class or work the themes into various classes. This entire lesson plan, consisting of all six themes, could be used to frame an entire curriculum unit or even a semester or quarter-long seminar.

Four related historical themes emerge there that could be used in a plethora of history courses: Western History, General US History, Historical Geography, and Labor History--and of course, any and all can be used in an interdisciplinary way, so activities need not be labeled or attached to any one course. Woody's line 'Way down yonder in the Indian Nation' is a good hook that can open the lesson up to a lot of historical questions. For example, how does the creation of Oklahoma and its early history reflect nineteenth-century US history and life? This context could be used as a segue into readings and activities related to, for example, Indian Removal, the Native American presence in Oklahoma, and we can use documents like the Treaty of New Echota, excerpts from John Ehle's *The Trail of Tears*, lecture points, and discussion activities and other readings to use Woody's life and his song to introduce these concepts. Related materials to the oil boom in the Texas Panhandle and the Dustbowl can also be developed using the relevant documents and artifacts in both the book and the exhibit to round out the lesson plan in the same way. I'm thinking of one lesson plan that incorporates the three sections of the Sense of Place segment, but a lesson plan could be developed for each section.

Based on this example similar materials can be developed around the use of the word 'pony' to introduce the history of the reintroduction of horses to North America and later development of horse culture among Native American groups. The very concept of 'Oklahoma Hills' can be utilized to add a historical geography component. And of course, the word 'cowboy' opens the door to discussing one of the most misunderstood aspects of American labor history and the mythology of the 'American West' especially as it runs counter to the New Western History. There are ample sources for secondary readings on these issues available through America: History and Life and JSTOR databases. Ample primary sources are available through websites such as the American Memory section of the LOC (especially for the Dustbowl lesson).

Discussion Prompts & Activities:

1. How do the lyrics of 'In The Oklahoma Hills Where I Was Born' reveal aspects of the history of Oklahoma and Texas?

2. From the photos included in the lesson, consider the following questions (this might make a good breakout discussion)

3. Consider the dress and the background of the photo of Guthrie's sister Clara holding Woody and his brother Roy. What do you think the photo can tell us about Okemah, Oklahoma and the culture of the region in 1913.

4. What does the portrait of Woody tell us about Pampa and the Texas Panhandle in the 1920s–What do you think is going on in the background of the photo.

5. Analyze the photo of Woody and Mary in 1933. Does it give any clues to their social station in the years that they lived in Pampa? If so, what are they?

6. Compare and contrast the photos of Woody and Mary, and the portrait of Woody with the photo of the Pampa Junior Chamber of Commerce Band. Are there conflicting views of life in Pampa in these photos? If so, what do you think those conflicting views can tell us about life in the region that would become known as 'The Dust Bowl?'

7. How did the 'Black Sunday' dust storm symbolize the history of the Dust Bowl?

8. How does the painting reflect Brinkley and Depp's analysis in *House of Earth*?

9. Can you identify any changes in Guthrie's views that were influenced by his time in California?

10. What was the 'popular front' and how did it influence ideas of American radicals during the Great Depression?

11. What affect did the New Deal have on American radicalism?

12. Do you see any connections between the photos and Guthrie's lyrics in the Dustbowl Ballads? If Guthrie's is right about 'all you can write is what you see,' then what do you see in those photos?

13. Discuss the ways in which the couplets in 'Earthbound Traveler' reveal an 'American' sense of place. Include an activity that has students research an aspect of the history of each place in the years between 1935 and 1955.

Suggested Listening, Reading, and Viewing:

Guthrie W., (2013)*House of Earth*, D. Brinkley & J. Depp (eds.) New York: Harper Collins, xi-xliv.

Guthrie W., 'Pastures of Plenty,' https://www.woodyguthrie.org/Lyrics/Pastures_Of_Plenty.htm

'Do Re Mi,' https://www.woodyguthrie.org/Lyrics/Do_Re_Mi.htm

'Roll On Columbia' https://www.woodyguthrie.org/Lyrics/Roll_On_Columbia.htm

Vandy, G. (2016), *26 Songs in 30 Days: Woody Guthrie's Columbia River Songs and the Promised Land in the Pacific Northwest,* Seattle, Washington: Sasquatch Books.

Overview 'Indian Removal' *Digital History Online Textbook,* *https://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook.cfm?smtid=2&psid=3545*

Guthrie, N. and Santelli R., *Woody Guthrie: Songs and Art–Words and Wisdom*, pp. 7-99.

'The Day The Skies Turned Black' Texas Standard Radio, April 14 2020, https://www.texasstandard.org/stories/the-day-the-skies-turned-black/#:~:text=On%20April%2014%2C%201935%2C%20the,nothing%20they'd%20ever%20seen.&text=On%20April%2014%2C%201935%2C%20Texans,It%20was%20Palm%20Sunday.

'The Dust Bowl,' https://drought.unl.edu/dustbowl/Home.aspx

'In the Oklahoma Hills Where I Was Born' Included in Morgan Exhibit, https://www.woodyguthrie.org/Lyrics/Oklahoma_Hills.htm

photos: 'Clara holding Woody and Roy 1913 Okemah, 1913;' 'Woody,' Pampa, TX, ca. 1926; 'Woody and Mary,' Pampa TX 1933; 'Woody with the Pampa Junior Chamber of Commerce Band, 1936; Guthrie and Santelli, pp. 35-37.

'So Long it's Been Good to Know You Dusty Old Dust)' Included in Morgan Exhibit; https://www.woodyguthrie.org/Lyrics/So_Long_Its_Been_Good.htm

THEME TWO: POLITICS

Woody Guthrie's activism, rooted in left-wing politics, evolved significantly over the decades. The fight against Fascism and for 'one big union' during WWII came to symbolize resistance against all forms of systemic oppression as he sought to give voice to the disenfranchised and, often, invisible folks who were just trying to get by—the heartbeat of America's workforce. Whether advocating against Jim Crow laws or recounting stories of labor strikes, Guthrie's music confronted politics on a broad scale, locally, nationally, and globally. He believed, 'A folk song is what's wrong and how to fix it or it could be who's hungry and where their mouth is or who's out of work and where the job is or who's broke and where the money is or who's carrying a gun and where the peace is' (Klein, 1980, p. 176). These words, outlining problems like hunger, homelessness, unemployment, intolerance, and violence cut across aspects of identity and social belonging, forging connections between 1930s and 40s America with today's ongoing struggles for social justice.

Racial justice and white supremacy

A defender of civil rights, Guthrie's political consciousness was born out of events he witnessed in his lifetime while serving in the armed services and performing at shows—moments of racial intolerance that forced him to confront his own privilege growing up as a white man. Believing in the power of democracy to protect all, not just some, Guthrie wrote in response to what he saw, singing defiantly about the psychological and physical violence of racism. He took on the subject of lynching directly with songs like 'Slipknot,' which openly questions institutionalized racism with the lyric, 'Tell me who makes the laws?,' and 'Don't Kill My Baby and My Son,' a tale of a black mother and her two young children lynched by a mob that Guthrie first learned about in his youth. The 1949 Peekskill race riots further troubled Guthrie and became a watershed event that propelled him further to confront white supremacy. As a passenger in one of the cars leaving a

Paul Robeson concert, Guthrie experienced firsthand the violence of a white mob and he responded by writing a number of songs promoting civil rights and union solidarity such as 'My Thirty Thousand.'

Guthrie's 'Union Maid' (1940), a popular labor ballad, contains two versions. Both depict the perspective of a female labor organizer, but in the second Guthrie explicitly confronts the subject of race and racial violence against union sharecroppers by recounting the story of activist Annie Mae Merriweather's survival of a brutal attack by two anti-unionists, which also left her husband dead. This version, more graphic in calling out the fascist and cruel tactics company owners exhibited toward workers and, in particular, the violence against a black woman. In addressing the KKK and racial violence in his songs, Guthrie stood up to the conflicting ideologies of the day, inspiring others to consider more fully how race complicated labor relations and the struggle for class equality.

Working-Class Life:

A champion of working people, Guthrie put into words the fight for fair wages and union representation. As he did with many of his other songs like 'The Sinking of the Reuben James' and '1913 Massacre,' Guthrie responded to news headlines by creating a folk ballad. 'Any event which takes away the lives of human beings, I try to write a song about what caused it to happen and how we can all try to keep such a thing from happening again,' he said (Guthrie and Santelli, 2021, p.116). 'Deportee (Plane Wreck at Los Gatos)' is one such song. Written in 1948, Guthrie laments the loss of the twenty-eight deported Mexican migrants who died in a plane crash who remained nameless in news reports. 'Deportee,' as one of Guthrie's most popular songs performed by a wide range of artists such as Dolly Parton, Bruce Springsteen, Billy Bragg, Ani DiFranco, Lance Canales, and others, speaks to Guthrie's inclusive vision of a better world in which his sense of justice intersected with racial and economic equality. Moreover, the song bridges the past with the present as the history of immigration and migrant laborers in the US (and throughout the world) continues to be a politicized and polarizing reality.

Guthrie's songs exist as memorials, inviting us to recall a past that has not yet been fully reconciled. Recent events such as the Alt-right march in Charlottesville (2017), the murders of Trayvon Martin (2012), Breonna Taylor (2020), and George Floyd (2020), ongoing Black Lives Matter protests, and the insurrection against the US Capitol (2021) have revealed how deeply divided American society remains. The Jim Crow laws, white supremacy, and political conservatism Guthrie sang against in the 1940s continue to be central a part of today's protest songs. Artists such Rhiannon Giddens, Tom Morello, Billy Bragg, Bruce Springsteen, Public Enemy, Dead Prez, Kendrick Lamar, No Name and others have taken up Guthrie's mantle of using music to promote social activism and racial solidarity. In illustrating the power of working-class solidarity across racial and ethnic lines, Guthrie's music demands accountability; it asks each of us, explicitly: which side are you on? In doing so, Guthrie inspires us to think critically about our complicated past and its impact on the present to spark hope in the future of humanity. As Guthrie reminds us, 'The note of hope is the only note that can help us or save us from falling to the bottom of the heap of evolution, because, largely, about all a human being is, anyway, is just a hoping machine' (Guthrie and Santelli, 2021, p. 308).

Discussion Prompts & Activities:

1. Which contemporary artists address racial solidarity in their music? Identify a song that confronts racial intolerance, comparing it to one of Guthrie's protest songs. Analyze the song lyrics and different musical styles.

2. Identify a current news event in which racial or class injustice is present and write a song or poem like Guthrie did to tell the story. What details would you include? What ones would you leave out? From what perspective would you relate what actually happened?

3. Compare the two origin stories of 'Union Maid' and analyze the different song lyrics. How does the song change meaning with the story of Annie Mae Merriweather? What is gained (or lost) in the two versions?

4. Explore how Guthrie's music relates to contemporary conversations about the New Jim Crow. How can folk music teach racial tolerance?

5. Guthrie once said, 'If the fight gets hot, the songs get hotter. If the going gets tough, the songs get tougher.' How do his song lyrics reflect this sentiment?

6. How much power lies in the meaning of a song? Can a song do today what Guthrie memorialized in 1948 with the song, 'Deportee (Plane Wreck at Los Gatos)'?

7. Should music be political and/or promote social activism? Which artists do you think accomplish this well, and why?

8. View the short documentary, 'Harvest of Dignity' to learn about contemporary migrant work and living conditions in the U.S. What changes have occurred since 1948? Which issues remain?

9. Consider current immigration reform and the US/Mexico border wall. How does Guthrie's song, 'Deportee,' compare to the other poems and songs on the subject? Some examples may include: 'So Mexicans are Taking Jobs from Americans' by Jimmy Santiago Baca, 'Second Attempt Crossing' by Javier Zamora, and 'Across the Border' by Bruce Springsteen.

10. Read the lyrics to Woody Guthrie's song, 'Deportee (Plane Wreck at Los Gatos)' and explore his use of language and imagery to document this historical event. Then, listen to a recent recording of 'Deportee' by Lance Canales. How has the performance changed your perception of the song? What similarities and differences do you notice?

11. Research current news reports about work-related accidents. How do we remember those who lost their life while on the job? What does this reveal about commemoration and, more generally, working-class life today?

12. Look through Guthrie's artwork. Which image would you pair with one of his songs, and why? Identify two to three themes that connect the visual and written texts.

13. Conduct an oral history about the meaning of work in your family. How far can you trace back? Identify the kind of paid (and unpaid) labor performed by you and your family. In what ways does your family's work history connect to your identity?

Suggested Listening, Reading, and Viewing:

Alexander, M. (2012). The New Jim Crow: *Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. The New Press.

'The Ghost of Emmett Till,' Thea Hopkins, feat. Ruth Hazelton: https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=826223934679957&mc_cid=f227ffeab6&mc_eid=a7a22df591

'Harvest of Dignity,' Student Action with Farmworkers, the Farmworker Advocacy Network, and Minnow Media https://saf-unite.org/documentary_/harvest-of-dignity/

Hernandez, Tim Z. *All They Will Call You*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2017.

Kaufman, Will. *Woody Guthrie: American Radical*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011.

https://newjimcrow.com/study-guides accessed 12/2/22

'Plane Wreck at Los Gatos-Deportee,' Lance Canales & The Flood https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CeCstLTB0EI

Thompson Jr., Charles D. and Melinda F. Wiggins, eds. *The Human Cost of Food: Farmworkers' Lives, Labor, and Advocacy*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002.

THEME THREE: FAMILY AND CHILDREN

'There was great respect for the child.' – Marjorie on Woody, *Wardy Forty*

Children as Co-Creators

The items gathered in the exhibit give voice to Guthrie's joy in his family relations, particularly his children. As Henry David Thoreau identified, tender relations are the cause and consequences of just relationships and are essential to a joyful, good, and creative life. Guthrie embodied this philosophy through his relationship to and with children. He engaged in imaginative work with his young children and saw them as co-creators, the primary architects of his many children's songs and powerful sources of artistic and spiritual insight. He wrote more than 400 children's songs that 'recognize and celebrate the children's agency and autonomy' (Maloy, 2020, p.37). And like other

dynamic writers of his era, such as Margaret Wise Brown, he wrote words as they would be heard, as evident in his detailed notebooks. All of Guthrie's children, including Cathy Ann, were a source of endless inspiration. Guthrie meticulously noted her daily habits, interests, and sayings. Children's curiosity reigns in 'Why, Oh Why':

Why does a horn make music?
Why, oh why, oh why?
Because the horn-blower blows it.
Goodbye goodbye goodbye
Why does a cow drink water?
Tell me why n why?
Because the cow gets thirsty just like you or me or anybody else.
Goodbye goodbye goodbye.

Guthrie's belief in the power of children as co-conspirators lives on. Nandi Bushell's recent song on global warming, 'Children Will Rise Up,' (2021) demonstrates a dynamic collaboration between children as social justice music-makers and the adults who nurture their hopes for a better world and their talents.

Family and Work

Families create together and they work together, too:

'All Work Together'
My mommy told me an' the teacher told me, too,
There's all kinds of work that I can do:
Dry my dishes, sweep my floor,
But if we all work together it won't take very long.

We all work together with a wiggle and a giggle,
We all work together with a giggle and a grin.
We all work together with a wiggle and a giggle,
We all work together with a giggle and a grin.

My sister told me,
Brother told me, too,
Lots an' lotsa work
That I can do.
I can bring her candy.
Bring him gum.
But if we all work together
Hadn't oughtta take long. So

My daddy said,
And my grandpaw, too,
There's work, worka, work
For me to do.
I can paint my fence.
Mow my lawn.

But if we all work together,
Well, it shouldn't take long…

Guthrie valued integrating children into all processes, dissolving the strategy of parent-work vs. children's work. Nora Guthrie remembers, 'When it came to daily life, I learned from the masters: The best way parents can keep control of the kids is by not letting them know you're in control. If you want them to clean up, write a song and have them act it out. Thus songs like 'Pick it Up' and 'Cleano' were born, as we were guided to *act out* the lyrics' (Guthrie and Santelli, 2021, p.271).

Parenting to Combat Fascism, Build Unions

Guthrie's philosophy on family–a group that cooperates, offers 'honest strength,' values everyone's ability and contributions–reflects his orientation to the world. Loving parenting was central to Guthrie's resistance to fascism: 'He wrote about his desire to foster the child's autonomy and build their confidence in order to challenge authority and critique social norms' (Maloy, 2020, p.43). His experience of family, as a son, brother, husband, lover, and father, illuminates the complexities of family structures, values, norms, and rituals. In his writing and drawings, Guthrie articulated the connection between individual family experiences and larger sociohistorical forces such as war, the economy, and working conditions. And Guthrie believed children could serve as inspiration for adults to organize and fight the war; children had the ability, power, and energy to yell and make demands known – another small, yet insightful way Guthrie saw how social institutions overlapped and should affect ideas and interactions.

Many contemporary artists, poets, and musicians have captured the nuances of social conditions on the experience of childhood and family. For example, Joy Harjo, former United States Poet Laureate, depicts the impact of racism and domestic and political violence during her childhood in Oklahoma in her memoir *Crazy Brave* (2012); Ani DiFranco and Crys Matthews, contemporary music-makers, describe expansive ideas and ideals of family. Inspiration and creative works are social and do not spring from the self alone but are formed in our given and generated families.

Discussion Prompts & Activities:

1. Observing family life: Guthrie made everyday observations of his family's activities. This practice is an important aspect of qualitative methodology. Ask your students to journal their family's activities, feelings, reactions. Like Guthrie, allow students to choose visual (students take photographs) or written observations. What do these observations reveal about family roles, values, and beliefs?

2. Compare Guthrie's Arlo birth announcement to contemporary birth announcements – how do they differ? What do today's birth announcements reveal about gender expectations? Or parental expectations and experiences? Students can analyze contemporary birth announcements and/or create a birth announcement. And like Guthrie, they can practice writing the announcement from a variety of perspective (ex: the baby's perspective, the expecting parent's perspective, etc.)

3. Using the Story Corp App, ask students to interview a family member. Students can collectively create the interview questions, including but not limited to, the role of music in their family member's life. Students should be familiar with the role of music in Guthrie's mother's life.

Example questions:

- Ask the family member to describe early memories of music.
- What music were they exposed to?
- What did the music tell them about their social world?
- Do they see this music as influential today?

4. Personal narrative assignment: Family names, nicknames, all were important to Guthrie. Ask students to reflect on their name. What does their name reveal about themselves or their family history?

5. Found art activity: Have students research the found art movement. Next, ask students to find ordinary objects in their homes that can be modified, manipulated, or altered to reflect their experience of family life. Students can reflect on the changed meaning of the object. Students can bring in the object to class, write a narrative essay, take a photo of the object, etc. Alternatively, the instructor can bring in an object and ask small groups to work collectively on changing the object to represent a variety of family experiences and values.

6. Direct students to Woody Guthrie's letter to Marjorie inscribed on Huddie Ledbetter's record in *Woody Guthrie: Songs and Art, Words and Wisdom*. How are intimate relationships shaped by social institutions such as politics, the economy, the healthcare system, the military?

7. Many of our contemporary music-makers and poets have expansive definitions of families. Direct students to the music of Ani DiFranco and Crys Matthews; after listening, ask students to write a short reflection on how the artists make families, recover from families of orientation, and work to change families on the micro and macro levels.

8. Families come in all types. Arlo Guthrie 'My mom and dad had an obvious love for each other that extended before their marriage – through it – and beyond it. A love and appreciation for each other as artists and human beings and as parents … Even though she was married to other people at the time, and even though my dad had been remarried at one point briefly' (Buehler, 2013, p. 136). Ask students to describe how their family form has evolved; which socio-historical forces can be identified to explain these changes?

9. Parenting Research Paper: In advanced classes, students can take up a comparative parenting research paper. What parenting values were predominant in the 1940s? Why? How were these values influenced by race, social class, and political orientation? Guthrie was an active caregiver to his children in the 1940s; how does this compare to fathering expectations today?

10. Considering everyday uses of space: In advanced classes, assign essays 'The Apartment Building' and 'Things We Ought to Do Systematically, from Time to Time' from Georges

Perec *Species of Space and Other Pieces.* After reading Perec's essay and considering his methodology, students can undertake an inventory of their homes or neighborhoods.

Suggested Reading and Viewing:

Partridge, E. (2002). *This Land Was Made for You and Me*. Chapters 1, 3, & 10. New York. Viking.

Maloy, L. (2020). *Spinning the Child*, Chapter 3 'Woody Guthrie's 400 Songs for Children.' London, United Kingdom. Routledge.

Stadler, G. (2020). *Woody Guthrie: An Intimate Life.* Boston, Massachusetts. Beacon Press.

Karen Dalton: In My Own Time (documentary; 2021)

THEME FOUR: LOVE

For Woody Guthrie, a meaningful and purposeful life meant being open, even vulnerable, to other people. To love someone was a radical act that countered the strict individualism common in capitalist culture, which pitted people against each other as competitors for resources, wealth, and happiness. Love countered the desperation and loneliness that led people to embrace the shallow vehemence with which fascism divided the world into 'us' and 'them.' In other words, love wasn't simply a personal matter; it was a political practice.

Guthrie developed many of these ideas over the course of his relationship with Marjorie Mazia, whom he met while both were working on a dance performance soon after he moved to New York in 1942. Where he was impulsive and impetuous, she was disciplined and organized; the strength of their bond exemplified the power of difference, diversity and boundary-crossing that he referred to in his song 'She Came Along to Me.' They were from vastly unalike backgrounds, he from small-town Oklahoma and she from the Jewish immigrant community of Philadelphia, but all the differences between the two energized them, and that energy was what love and marriage were for. In one note from his papers, he bemoaned the fact that a female musician friend had, upon marrying, hung up her guitar to concentrate on domestic matters. Marriage and family life ought to be fun, he wrote, and the bonds therein ought to stoke creativity: 'No matter how much you might try to fool yourself and others, as long as your talents hand there to dry and rot, you can't tell me you've even commenced to find the real happiness there is in being married. People marry, or ought to, at least, to learn more and more music, art, literature, dancing or prancing …' (Guthrie and Santelli, 2022, p.255).

Moreover, Guthrie was drawn to his wife Marjorie's form of artistic expertise, dance, because a group performance required careful cooperation and coordination; without a deep, near-instinctual understanding of what others were doing, serious injury might result. Over the years, he made many sketches and paintings of dancing figures, images which display reverence for the simple fact of bodily movement. The profusion of these images may stem from another loving bond, with his mother, whose body he had seen ravaged by Huntington' Disease while he was growing up. In

the late 1940s, when he began to manifest signs of Huntington's himself–symptoms which include involuntary movements that gradually grow more drastic–his fascination with powerful, graceful bodies of dancers took on all the more poignance. But in his kids' songs, he also celebrated the random, silly, not-yet-disciplined movements of children, their freedom to simply 'dance around and around and around.'

Guthrie's admiration for the collective aspect of dance was reflected in the profuse and multipurpose term *union* one finds in his writings. For someone deeply invested in the labor movement's efforts to gain rights and respect for the lowest paid Americans, the term obviously referred to the collective groups of workers that many of his best-known songs celebrated. But it was no accident that he also used it as a quasi-sacred term to describe bonds between people--lovers, family, friends, as well as fellow workers--that allowed them to overcome isolation, live fulfilling lives, and fight together in the interest of those exploited and dispossessed by the pursuit of profit. Union also spoke to Guthrie's deep belief in the redemptive power of sex and sexuality, the place where people literally surrendered their protective walls and merged. It resonated for him precisely because it spanned the realms of relationships, intimacy, and labor.

Suggested Reading & Viewing:

Garman, B. (2000). *A Race of Singers.* Chapel Hill, North Carolina. University of North Carolina Press.

Kaufman, W. (2017). *Woody Guthrie's Modern World Blues*. Norman, Oklahoma. University of Oklahoma Press.

Tom Morello, 'Revolutionary Mind' from Woody at 100! https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5fkdWa4raZ0

Stadler, G. (2020). *Woody Guthrie: An Intimate Life.* Boston, Massachusetts. Beacon Press.

Discussion Prompts & Activities:

1. The phrase 'the personal is political' is associated with 1960s identity politics movements and second-wave feminism. Where do you see signs of this perspective in Guthrie's decades-earlier work? Where do you see similarities and differences between writings of that time, or the current moment, and the way he discusses politics and identity?

2. Compare Guthrie's thinking/writing about the body to passages from poets such as Walt Whitman, Allen Ginsberg, Audre Lorde, and others.

3. Compare and contrast Guthrie's perspective on love with writings on 'radical love' by Martin Luther King, Jr., bell hooks, and others.

4. Discuss Guthrie's perspective on the body in relation to today's writing and activism by people with disabilities.

5. What does Guthrie's work tell us about the ways different art forms and media (writing, dancing, singing) are useful for expressing different aspects of freedom?

6. For Guthrie, his romantic and intimate relationships were bound up with his political worldview (listen to 'Ease My Revolutionary Mind' and read Inscription of Leadbelly album, page 231 in *Woody Guthrie: Songs and Art, Words and Wisdom*); discuss how this is evident or absent in celebrity relationships or students' experience.

7. Students can interview family members on altered bodies; how and why do bodies change? How do altered bodies interact with institutions? Or with others?

THEME FIVE: I AIN'T QUITE DEAD YET

Woody Guthrie refused stasis. Not only did Woody travel persistently throughout his career, but he also revisited and re-addressed his lyrics and songs. He shifted words, recontextualized meanings, changed directions, and adopted new viewpoints. In concert, Guthrie added and subtracted verses giving his songs an elasticity. The folk tradition plays a role here with its oral transmission and fluid boundaries of song ownership. Still, Woody pushed his music into a space where he could respond to an event or an emotion in real time and then revisit and reframe these moments again and again. His famous sign-off from his hospital bed, 'ain't dead yet,' thus works along multiple lines as it represents a plea of acknowledgement and bodily strength as well as a signal to the longevity of his music and songs and words.

In the days and weeks after Woody's death in October 1967, work started on a tribute to his life and music. Held at Carnegie Hall in January of 1968, the tribute concert worked as an acknowledgment of the depth of Woody's musical influence with Joan Baez, Judy Collins, Bob Dylan, Jack Elliott, Richie Havens, Odetta, Tom Paxton, and Pete Seeger providing aural testimony to the range and importance of his music. This concert was the first fundraiser for the Committee to Combat Huntington's Disease (later renamed the Huntington's Disease Society of America).

Song to Woody

The show's star attraction for much of the audience was Bob Dylan, Woody's most famous acolyte. Missing from the national spotlight since a motorcycle crash in 1966, Dylan elicited rumors about his attendance, his music, and his health. Dylan had been connected to Woody since 1961, when Bob, not quite twenty years old, found his way to the Guthrie apartment in Queens and then the Greystone Park Psychiatric Hospital in New Jersey. Dylan had just arrived from Minnesota, and Woody—through *Bound for Glory*—had provided the young singer with the path and promise of songwriting, storytelling, and rambling. Guthrie was also the subject for Dylan's first significant composition: 'Song to Woody.' Based on Guthrie's melody for '1913 Massacre,' Dylan's 'Song to Woody' opened a new door for Dylan as a songwriter pairing Woody's tune with personal lyrics of searching, traveling, and making sense of the world.

Dylan's visits to Woody began to taper off as he slowly pushed away from the Guthrie orbit. The self-described 'Woody Guthrie jukebox' embarked on different musical pursuits. The folk music world faded away as Dylan built a new sound around the rock and roll of his youth and his newfound love of symbolist poetry. Still, once off the international stage following his wreck, Dylan sought a different life. Guthrie's death in 1967 seemed to catalyze Dylan as he returned to the music and memory of his former mentor. Just weeks after Guthrie's death, Dylan wrote 'I Dreamed I Saw St. Augustine,' again borrowing a Woody-related folk melody ('I Dreamed I Saw Joe Hill') and bringing in an enigmatic lyric about martyrdom. The following January, Dylan emerged from his self-imposed exile and performed three Guthrie numbers with members of The Band for the Carnegie Hall tribute: 'I Ain't Got No Home,' 'Dear Mrs. Roosevelt,' and 'Grand Coulee Dam.' Electric and volatile, these songs connected Dylan to his past while pushing Woody's legacy forward into new contexts.

Since his death, a number of singer-songwriters have picked up the mantle of folk troubadour from Woody. The late 1960s and early 1970s held space for a new type of singer-songwriter: at once infused with the music of the past and the self-help mindset of the present. Woody's son, Arlo, released several albums during this period that reflected and refracted his father's music and legacy to new audiences. Arlo glanced off his father's music with songs about hobos and protest songs that used humor to wedge political concerns into radio playlists. His name gave him claim to a lineage, but Arlo also took an expansive view of his father's legacy. In 1969, Arlo released *Running Down the Road*, an album featuring a country-rock band of session musicians that provided a new musical setting for his music, including a cover of Woody's 'Oklahoma Hills.'

The Ghost(s) of Tom Joad

In many ways, Bruce Springsteen flipped the Dylan narrative. Starting out as a hotshot guitar player with a well-fingered rhyming dictionary and a tight New Jersey bar band, Springsteen grasped for (and later rejected) the 'New Dylan' tag. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, Springsteen eschewed the bombast of songs like 'Born to Run' in favor of quieter material driven by character sketches and a more pronounced folk music approach. In late 1980, Springsteen added 'This Land is Your Land' to his setlist on *The River* tour. He soon added a brief monologue to the song where he namechecked Joe Klein and urged his audience to read *Woody Guthrie: A Life*. Springsteen's interest in Woody led to a desperate, quiet clutch of songs limning a bleak landscape of a shattered economy defined by defiance and desperation. The 'New Dylan' had effectively metamorphosed into the 'New Woody.' In 1995, Springsteen again aligned himself with the image of Woody Guthrie through his record, *The Ghost of Tom Joad*. Another quiet record filled with deeply contoured character sketches, Springsteen recast Guthrie's protagonists through the lens of modern political concerns. In 2021, Springsteen accepted the annual Woody Guthrie Prize. Guthrie's, Springsteen noted, 'was the first music where I found a reflection of America that I believed to be true, where I believed that the veils had been pulled off' (Trotter, 2021).

As Springsteen mined Woody's life story for glimpses of an America too often ignored or forgotten—with its complicated vectors of class and labor and working people—other singers and songwriters turned to Guthrie as an extension of their politics, especially as viewed through the lenses of gender and race. Throughout their careers, Ani DiFranco, Mavis Staples, and Chuck D

(all recipients of the Woody Guthrie Prize) came to Guthrie through his activism, art, writing, and capaciousness. These singers have each underscored the different ways in which Woody's music impacted artists across genres. DiFranco's music, steeped in the politics of community and expression, illustrates Woody's view of collective action. Staples's commitment to social change through songs of freedom speaks to the power of music, community, and protest. Chuck D—hip-hop artist, writer, and leader of Public Enemy—exemplified Woody's spirit of confronting injustice and corrupt power structures through music. Like Dylan in the early 1960s, people like Ani DiFranco, Mavis Staples, and Chuck D grasped the vastness of Woody's worldview.

Mermaid Avenue

Woody's words came crashing back into focus in the mid-1990s (just as Springsteen explored the world of Tom Joad) as Nora Guthrie approached the English songwriter and activist Billy Bragg to write music to a wide array of finished lyrics that Woody had not put to music. Bragg then asked American band Wilco to work on this material. Wilco, led by songwriter Jeff Tweedy, accepted the challenge and helped draft almost fifty songs featuring Woody's lyrics. Released in 1998, the first volume of material helped reorient the public image of Woody as the songs reflected the breadth of his material and career. Songs about fascists sat next to children's songs, love songs, funny songs, surreal songs, and songs that bucked any sense of genre or definition.

Woody Guthrie's legacy crossed multiple genres and lines of communication. From obvious connectors such as Bob Dylan and Bruce Springsteen to musicians rooted in the spirit, if not the music of the past such as Mavis Staples and Chuck D, Woody's shadow falls across a broad panorama of American music, life, and culture. 'I ain't dead yet,' Woody wrote ninety years ago, and his music and legacy remain as vital and as necessary as ever. (Smith, 2011)

*Suggested Reading***:**

Carney C. (2018) ''With Electric Breath': Bob Dylan and the Reimagining of Woody Guthrie (January 1968)', *Woody Guthrie Annual*, Vol. 4: 22-39

Garmin, B. (2000) *Race of Singers: Whitman's Working-Class Hero from Guthrie to Springsteen*. Chapel Hill: UNC.

Wolff, D. (2017) *Grown-Up Anger: The Connected Mysteries of Bob Dylan, Woody Guthrie, and the Calumet Massacre of 1913*. New York City: Harper.

Discussion Prompts & Activities:

1. Ask students to listen to Bob Dylan's 'Song to Woody.' How does Dylan's song/tribute relate to Guthrie's life and work? Consider, too, the song as homage.

2. What does John Lennon mean by writing 'Woody lives, and I'm glad' eight years after Guthrie's death? What parts of Woody's life and music continued to have an impact in the 1970s? How did creative people use Woody to further their own music and writing?

3. Ask students to listen to selections from *Mermaid Avenue*—Billy Bragg and Wilco's collaboration, which fused Woody Guthrie lyrics to new musical compositions. How did these 'new' songs speak to Woody's legacy? Consider the popularity of this record in the 1990s. Why would audiences in the 1990s feel so drawn to these songs?

4. Although Dylan was the most prominent Woody acolyte in the 1960s, Woody's legacy was and is being built by musicians of color, female songwriters, and LGBTQ+ performers. How have these musicians impacted the meaning, context, and significance of Woody's words?

5. Ask students to build a playlist with contemporary musicians following in the footsteps of Woody Guthrie.

6. Have students identify current songs that encourage agency, activity, and critical thought.

Conclusion

Those Woody Guthrie influenced, like Billy Bragg, are keeping his spirit alive today. Guthrie understood the world around him and how it failed working people. His life and music reflected this empathetic energy. As worker-led movements continue their efforts to organize strikes, protest music, in its most boundaryless definition, can serve as both a reference point for what *is* as well as a direction toward what *could be*. Guthrie's legacy lies within this space between description and prescription. Bringing Guthrie into the classroom allows for myriad conversations that transcend the academic—to push students to engage with his work and to realize their power and voice within contemporary society.

Author Bios

Court Carney is a Professor of History at Stephen F. Austin State University, where he teaches courses on Black History and American Cultural History. He is the author of *Cuttin' Up: How Early Jazz Got America's Ear* (Univ. Press of Kansas).

Michele Fazio is Professor of English and Co-coordinator of the Gender Studies Minor at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke where she teaches courses on contemporary U.S. ethnic literature, service-learning, and working-class studies. She co-edited the *Routledge International Handbook of Working-Class Studies* and has served as past-president of the Working-Class Studies Association.

Mark F. Fernandez is the Patricia Carlin O'Keefe Distinguished Professor of History at Loyola. In 2012, he was named the Seventh Annual Woody Guthrie Fellow by the Woody Guthrie Foundation and BMI Music Publishers.

Gustavus Stadler is William R. Kenan Professor of English at Haverford College where he teaches courses on 19th- and 20th-century US literature and popular culture. He is the author of *Woody Guthrie: An Intimate Life* (Beacon Press, 2020).

Aimee Zoeller is the director of sociology and coordinator of women, gender, and sexuality studies at Indiana University Purdue University Columbus. She is a three-time recipient of the Indiana University Trustees' Teaching Award.

Bibliography

Asch, M. (1961), ed., *American Folksong: Woody Guthrie*, New York and London: Oak Publications, 1947, reprinted from the original, 1961.

Balthrop-Lewis, A. (2021). *Thoreau's Religion*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press.

Bragg, B. (1983). 'To Have and Have Not,' *Life's a Riot with Spy vs Spy*. Go! Discs

---. (1984). 'Between the Wars,' *Brewing Up with Billy Bragg*. Go! Discs

---. (1986). 'There is Power in a Union,' Talking with the Taxman About Poetry. Elektra Records.

---. (1988). 'Waiting for the Great Leap Forwards,' *Workers Playtime*. Elektra Records.

---. (1990). 'Never Cross a Picket Line,' *The Internationale*. Utility Records.

---. (1991). 'Sexuality,' *Don't Try This at Home*. Elektra Records.

---. (2019). *The Three Dimensions of Freedom*. London: Faber & Faber Ltd.

---. (2021). *The Million Things that Never Happened.* Cooking Vinyl.

---. (2022). Ralph Chaplin. 'Solidarity Forever.'

---. (2006). Florence Reese. 'Which Side Are You On?,' *Brewing Up with Billy Bragg*. Yep Roc Records. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_aRiahmC_hg&list=RD_aRiahmC_hg&start_radio=1&rv=_aRiahmC_hg&t=0. Accessed 10/20/22.

Bragg, B. and Wilco. (1998). *Mermaid Avenue.* Elektra Records.

Bragg, B. and Wilco. (2000). *Mermaid Avenue Vol. II.* Elektra Records.

Buehler, P. (2013). *Woody Guthrie's Wardy Forty: Greystone Park State Hospital Revisited*. New York. Woody Guthrie Publications.

Cray, E. (2004). *Ramblin' Man: The Life and Times of Woody Guthrie*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Dylan, B. (2004) *Chronicles: Volume One*. New York City: Simon and Schuster.

Guthrie, N., Santelli, B. (2021). *Woody Guthrie: Songs and Art, Words and Wisdom*. San Francisco, CA. Chronicle Books.

Holmes, A. (2022). The Radical Woman Behind *Goodnight Moon*. *The New Yorker*, 31 January Available at https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2022/02/07/the-radical-woman-behind-goodnight-moon

Kaufman, W. (2011). *Woody Guthrie: American Radical*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Klein, J. (1980) *Woody Guthrie: A Life*. New York City: Random House.

Kot, G. (2004) *Wilco: Learning How to Die*. New York City: Random House.

Maloy, L. (2020). *Spinning the Child*, Chapter 3 'Woody Guthrie's 400 Songs for Children.' London, United Kingdom. Routledge.
Harold Leventhal Collection, Woody Guthrie Center Archives.
Reineke, H. (2010) *Ramblin' Jack Elliott: The Never-Ending Highway*. Lanham: The Scarecrow Press.
Santelli, R. and Davidson, E. (1999) *Hard Travelin': The Life and Legacy of Woody Guthrie*. Hanover: Wesleyan University Press.
Scaduto, A. (1971) *Bob Dylan: A Biography*. New York City: New American Library.
Smith, C. (2011) Bob Dylan Visits Woody Guthrie. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/music/2011/jun/16/bob-dylan-woody-guthrie.
Stadler, G. (2018) *Woody Guthrie: An Intimate Life*. Boston, Beacon Press.
Trotter, M. (2021) Springsteen Accepts Woody Guthrie Prize, Explains Folk Singer's Longstanding Influence On His Music. Available at: https://www.publicradiotulsa.org/local-regional/2021-05-14/springsteen-accepts-woody-guthrie-prize-explains-folk-singers-longstanding-influence-on-his-music.
Vandy, G. and Person, D. (2016) *26 Songs in 30 Days: Woody Guthrie's Columbia River Songs and the Planned Promised Land in the Pacific Northwest*. Seattle: Sasquatch Books.
Wilentz, S. (2017) So Long to Woody Guthrie. *The Tribute Concerts: Book 1, The Concerts*. Bear Family Records.
Wolfe, C. and Lornell, K. (1992) *The Life and Legend of Leadbelly*. New York: Da Capo Press

A Secret Fan of Despised Music

Lita Kurth

I was well aware, growing up, that country music was uncool, but at home, a country station continually sent out its fiddles and banjos, its Southern-sounding voices and slide guitar. We had even tuned in to the Grand Ole Oprey on clear nights. That was hick music supreme, music for people with cow-shit on their barn-shoes.

Out of sight and in private, I loved George Jones' sharp, forceful voice and clever, funny-sad lyrics: 'The Race is on and here comes Pride up the backstretch. Heartaches are going to the inside. My Tears are holding back. They're trying not to fall.' Country music accepted the lives and dreams of farmers, truck drivers, people who pushed brooms, chopped cotton, raised kids.

Summer mornings, I swept the crumbs from the old wooden floors listening to the simple beauty of: 'I Was Born a Country Girl.' Wherever we drove, my parents kept the radio tuned to a country station.

At school, though, I probably made gagging sounds if anyone said 'country western' as it was known then. Sixty percent of my high school lived in the country, yet town kids hurled the epithet, 'Farmer!' with scorn. If asked, I always hastened to say that, though I lived out in the country, 'we don't farm.' I never added that, far from being semi-suburbanites with a few blue spruces and an acre of lawn to mow, we were too poor to farm and merely rented a rundown farmhouse for forty dollars a month and kept a few chickens, geese, and goats in the shed-like barn. Just like farmers, we shoveled shit, but unlike them, we didn't make a living. I was not one who proudly wore a blue corduroy Future Farmers of America jacket with the state insignia of Wisconsin embroidered in gold on the back. I posed as one who had bought land in the country and lived in a ranch style house.

Country music was an embarrassing secret in public, but at home I was immersed in it. For five early years of my life, my father was our entertainment when we had no TV, no telephone, no indoor bathroom, no kitchen sink, only a woodstove, a galvanized tub, a wringer washer, an outdoor pump, and a radio. Four of us shared a bed in the living room by the stove. Every night, my father shook the sawdust out of his boots, ate supper, then sat in the rocker and sang to us: 'tear jerkers' such as 'Put My Little Shoes Away,' in which a dying girl instructs her parents to give her little brother all her toys, but 'put my little shoes away.' Hearing it, I would pull the covers over my head to hide my crying, and my dad would tease me for it. Other songs were 'Little Green Valley,' 'The Little Brown Church in the Dale,' and 'Listen to the Mockingbird,' another song about early death. These were story-songs of home, loss, dearness, and simple orthodox faith in heaven.

A further immersion in country music took place when I spent nights at my mother's cousin's in town. Dolores and her husband, Arnie, had no kids while my parents had kids to spare, so one or two of us stayed over at their tidy and comfortable one-bedroom apartment from time to time, a

treat and a getaway. One of us slept on the couch, the other on the floor or maybe both on the floor. It was carpeted, a special treat, and we didn't mind at all.

Our mission was to keep Dolores company and help out while she suffered through breast cancer treatments. 'Helping out' mainly consisted of our enjoying the food she made such as 'apple pie' from the recipe on the Ritz cracker box, or Kool Ade. Most importantly, we got to play their records which took up a double shelf all along one wall. There on the album cover was Skeeter Davis in a wide skirt and bouffant hair, Porter Wagner in blonde pompadour and glitter, Johnny Cash in a cowboy hat. My favorite album was The Browns: Jim Ed and his sisters who looked like a minister flanked by two housewives. Very Southern. Very uncool. I would have disowned them with lightning speed at school. But at Arnie and Dolores's, I asked to play that record again and again, especially one song, the hushed, reverent, infinitely sentimental 'Scarlet Ribbons.'

In this song, a father overhears his daughter praying one evening, 'Send, dear God, some scarlet ribbons' (for her hair).

At first, I thought the dad in the story was extremely poor like us, too poor even to afford ribbons. But no. As the song went on, he apparently had enough money and even went out searching for ribbons that very night, only to find that 'in our town, no scarlet ribbons.' At the time, I didn't think to ask, 'How small *was* this town? Didn't they have a Sears or a JoAnn Fabrics?' Defeated by his hopeless search, the father sings, 'through the night my heart was aching.' But 'just before the dawn was breaking,' he checked in on his daughter's bedroom again, and, by the sappiest of miracles, there, on her bed, were scarlet ribbons 'in gay profusion lying there.' The joyful father-narrator can only shake his head and claim a mystery: 'If I live to be one hundred, I will never know from where came those lovely scarlet ribbons.' (Wink, wink. We all knew it was God.)

What we didn't know and never questioned was how God pulled off this delivery of trivial merchandise. But practical difficulties could not interfere with the allure of that song. I found the arrangement heartfelt, the harmonized voices beautiful.

Apparently, they didn't bother other fans either. My research revealed the startling fact that Roy Orbison, The Kingston Trio, and even left-wing Harry Belafonte covered 'Scarlet Ribbons.' Apparently, we all gave in to some irresistible draw. Was it the melody, as sweet and sweeping as *The Dance of the SugarPlum Fairy?* Was it the charm of an almost- fairy tale? Was it the comfort of the unquestioned Christian culture I lived and breathed, in which God answered prayer, and Jesus was coming back any day?

I think now that the real attraction of the song was its calling forth of a powerful archetype, the image of a loving father, like mine, who cared for, attended to, and doted on his daughter; a father who, overhearing her wish, would go out at night and try to fulfill it, would toss and turn, anguished by his failure, and rejoice when God stepped in to grant it. Not scarlet ribbons, but a father's love, which all daughters yearn for and only some receive, was the miracle, the draw, the real story.

Did my father sing 'Scarlet Ribbons' to us? He might have. Certainly, the songs he sang brought back to him the best parts of his own rough childhood and the memory of his own beloved 'Pa'

renowned in the family as a singer. Those old songs became part of my life, tied me to my sometimes harsh but greatly beloved dad.

At a certain point, I stopped apologizing for my enjoyment of country music, never all of it, but much of it.

Last year, my father, a man of fantastic physical strength, went on hospice. During my last visit, he lay in bed, and I sat next to him holding his hand. I found Youtubes of the Carter Family on my phone and played their songs for him. He rested and sighed, connected again to the long ago. And I sang from memory the songs he once sang to me, 'Will the Circle be Unbroken?' and 'I'll Fly Away.'

Author Bio

Lita Kurth, MFA - Rainier Writers Workshop, has published widely in three genres, fiction, creative nonfiction, and poetry. 'Are We Not Ladies,' was nominated by Watershed Review for Best of the Net, 2017 and 'Fish Genesis' was nominated by Rabid Oak for Best of the Net, 2019. 'This is the Way We Wash the Clothes,' (CNF) won the Diana Woods Memorial Award (Lunchticket). Her creative nonfiction 'Pivot,' and short story, 'Gardener's Delight' (Dragonfly Press DNA) were nominated for Pushcart Prizes. She is co-founder of San Jose's literary reading series, Flash Fiction Forum and teaches at De Anza College. A sampling of publications: *The Millions, Atticus Review, Brain,Child, Main Street Rag, Microfiction Monday, Concis, Rappahannock Review*.

Song List

Woody Guthrie 'Put my Little Shoes Away'
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DmU5XF2XtUQ

'Little Brown Church in the Dale' https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o69eYmqReDg

George Jones 'The Race is on' https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dj7ahuCHGbM

The Browns 'Scarlet Ribbons' https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EigBDVbe3yM

'Little Green Valley' https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ph7DmYaV2wI

'Listen to the Mockingbird'
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vqYYkWwfYhs&list=RDvqYYkWwfYhs&start_radio=1

Johnny Cash 'Will the Circle be Unbroken?' https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7bRJLkNqNXI

The Browns 'I'll Fly Away' https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qUmzxm9lCac

The Carter Family https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DcvWrxrNk4k

Two Poems: ‘The End of Lonely Street’ and ‘Songsters of the Troubled Heart’

Ian C Smith

The End of Lonely Street

Lyrics memorized, he strains, *since my baby left me*,
wailing Presley covers, a quid a song, *train, train*,
band blitzing him, for he can’t sing, can’t play.
Week’s work done, the Frankston pub crowd vibrates.
He loves the cool strut, needs money, and more.

Pay piss-poor in a chicken processing plant,
classroom quit at fourteen for a colourful life,
he avoids the line’s sickly stench, toils in the freezer
trekking icy Arctic wastes in a blizzard of songs,
in out, in out, massive doors always slammed shut.

That kid, who has two of his own, works his way up,
squalid jobs, each paying ten bob more than the last
in stained brick districts, smell of cement after rain,
caravans, bungalows, a dwelling behind a shop,
thirsting for learning, sorrow waiting in ambush.

His origins cowled, he embraces language, ideas,
lectures, libraries, posters of Leos: Kottke, Sayer,
his new zeitgeist the death of old music, old marriage.
Permed women click by, skirts aswirl, caressing leather.
His papers earn credits, arrows pointing to success.

On holiday deep in forgetful years, sea view superb,
he talks with a young friend who learns the guitar,
impressed by the intricacies of this endeavour.
His old strummed prop, his past, arrives, unravels him,
a long black train coming round the bend.

Songsters of the Troubled Heart

Driving in rain, radio soft, Karen Dalton's throaty voice, a wind finding cracks, a drug's effect, a siren, invokes me. To what? Bygone chances missed in that ossuary of broken dreams, past wrongs? I have flexed my scornful wit on music's cryptic lyrics, but then, what about Wulf & Eadwacer? Now this song illuminating the shadows, that creaking fiddle evoking crossing old iron bridges slowly, sultry light flickering, starting with the plaintive drawn-out opening: *Yesterday*, cherished youth vanished. Begirded by heartache I want to rush back, save Karen from dead-set trouble, keep her off the streets, above ground, fend off danger as she pours out her wounded life.

Now the sweet redolent intro of Moby's *Mistake*, then grief as the pensive beat explores my heart's lacunae, leaves me depleted. Another song about regret. I could have died a dozen deaths, but survived. Wrenched apart by songs? C'mon. I heard the mournful cries of trams at night's edge, remember smouldering words igniting. This beat hammers my superannuated memory, a song not from my time yet relevant, playing wintry scenes I can smell again in my mind. The sky god batters me, wipers losing it. I would drive beyond this bleary gloom, re-enter remnants of the ghostly tattered past, a voice repeating my name, stanch this wretched helplessness. *Don't let me make the same mistake again*.

A troubadour's lute
heard beyond the castle wall
pricks hearts rich and small.

Author Bio

Ian C Smith writes in the Gippsland Lakes region of Victoria, and on Flinders Island. His work has appeared in *Antipodes*, *cordite*, *Eureka Street*, *Griffith Review*, *Journal of Working Class Studies*, *Meniscus*, *Shaping the Fractured Self* (UWAP), &, So Fi Zine. His seventh book is *wonder sadness madness joy*, Ginninderra Press.

The American Poor and Working Class in Cross-National Comparison

Lawrence M. Eppard, Shippensburg University, USA
Jörg Neugschwender, LIS Cross-National Data Center, Luxembourg
Erik Nelson, Brigham Young University, USA

Abstract

In this paper the authors compare the American poor and working class with their counterparts around the world. They find that the earnings of the American working-class fare well in their analysis, while American poverty is closer to the middle of the pack.

Keywords

Absolute poverty, child poverty, concentrated disadvantage, cross-national, disadvantage, Gini coefficient, government assistance, health care, homicide, IGE, inequality, LIS, Mexico, OECD, poverty, relative poverty, single parent poverty, social mobility, social welfare, United States, violence, working class

Introduction

There are numerous data sources, measures, and methodologies available to scholars which allow them to assess the well-being of a given society. One useful tool is cross-national data, which allows comparisons between societies. If people are doing much better (or much worse) in one country compared with another, the conditions and policies in each country can be examined to determine if they are contributing to those differences. If so, such conditions and/or policies might be emulated (or avoided).

In this paper we assess the well-being of the American poor and working class compared with their counterparts in selected countries around the world. We begin our discussion with the working class.

American Working Class in Comparison

Let us first settle on a definition of the 'working class' for the purposes of this paper, since this group has been classified in a variety of ways in the U.S. (Draught 2018).

Some definitions attempt to account for the degree of power and control one has. Economist Michael Zweig, the former director of the Center for Study of Working Class Life at Stony Brook University, for instance, defines the working class as:

> '[P]eople who, when they go to work or when they act as citizens, have comparatively little power or authority. They are the people who do their jobs under more or less close supervision, who have little control over the pace or the content of their work, who aren't the boss of anyone' (2004, p. 4).

Other scholars use definitions based upon occupation, income, and/or education (Draught 2018).

For the purposes of our discussion, we will consider the American working class to be the proportion of the U.S. population without a college degree—this includes those who did not finish high school, high school graduates, Americans with some college experience but no finished degree, and those with no more than an associate's degree (Draught 2018).

The median annual wage earned by the American working class was around $35,000 in 2018[1] (Draught 2018; BLS 2022b). Using an education-based definition of the working class leads to the inclusion of a wide range of occupations and wages. Heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers, for instance, earned an average annual wage of around $47,000. At the lower end of the scale, you have people like cashiers (around $25,000 average annual wage), childcare workers (around $26,000), and maids/housekeepers (around $28,000) (BLS 2022a & 2022b).[2] Workers at this lower end of the working-class pay scale would have been somewhere between the third and fourth income deciles in the U.S. in 2018.

So how do the incomes of working-class Americans fare compared to their counterparts in other countries?

The U.S. is not the world leader. . .

When it comes to income, the American working class is not the world leader. Of the 52 countries with appropriate data in the Luxembourg Income Study (LIS) database, seven have a higher median income at the third decile, and three at the fourth decile (see Tables 1 and 2) (LIS 2022a). In Luxembourg, for instance, workers earn more than Americans at the third (123% of U.S. income) and fourth (114%) deciles.

. . . but the American working class performs very well

While there are some countries ahead of the U.S., the American working class earns a higher income than the vast majority of countries in our analysis. This can even be said for several OECD member countries. Citizens in Greece, for instance, earn significantly less at the third (43%) and fourth (41%) deciles. This is true for a number of other OECD countries as well (see Tables 1 and 2).

[1] Salaries expressed in 2018 dollars for the sake of this analysis so we can compare to Luxembourg Income Study (LIS) deciles for the U.S. and Mexico—and the most recent year for comparison in LIS is 2018.

[2] Salaries based upon Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) (2022a) data from May 2021 converted into May 2018 dollars using the CPI Inflation Calculator from the BLS (2022b).

TABLE 1. Median Earnings Relative to United States, 2nd and 3rd Income Deciles.

Country	2nd decile ratio (%)	3rd decile ratio (%)	Country	2nd decile ratio (%)	3rd decile ratio (%)
LUX (2019)	132.6	123.4	HUN (2015)	47.2	43.9
NOR (2019)	125.3	117.1	LTU (2018)	47.0	45.4
CHE (2018)	122.8	115.8	GRC (2016)	43.6	43.3
DNK (2016)	113.4	102.1	URY (2019)	32.1	30.4
ISL (2010)	112.1	100.2	CHL (2017)	26.9	26.8
AUT (2019)	107.6	101.6	PAN (2016)	26.0	29.7
CAN (2018)	106.5	100.8	SRB (2016)	24.9	24.9
NLD (2018)	105.9	95.3	VNM (2013)	24.8	24.4
FIN (2016)	103.0	93.7	PSE (2017)	20.2	21.4
BEL (2017)	100.0	94.6	PRY (2019)	18.7	19.5
USA (see note)	100.0	100.0	ROU (1997)	18.6	17.4
AUS (2018)	99.0	94.6	CHN (2013)	17.6	18.8
IRL (2018)	98.6	88.4	MEX (2018)	17.5	17.4
DEU (2019)	94.1	89.8	BRA (2016)	15.9	17.2
SWE (2005)	90.6	80.3	GMT (2014)	14.1	13.7
FRA (2018)	88.6	82.1	GEO (2019)	13.4	13.4
GBR (2018)	85.7	78.7	PER (2016)	12.0	15.1
JPN (2013)	84.8	81.3	COL (2019)	11.7	13.1
SVN (2015)	74.4	72.5	EGY (2012)	10.9	11.9
CZE (2016)	72.4	64.8	DOM (2007)	10.8	11.6
KOR (2016)	70.7	73.1	ZAF (2017)	10.0	11.5
ESP (2016)	65.2	65.5	MLI (2019)	7.8	7.7
ISR (2018)	60.8	62.5	IND (2011)	7.1	7.5
POL (2019)	57.3	53.1	CIV (2015)	3.8	4.8
ITA (2016)	56.8	57.1			
SVK (2018)	51.9	46.8			
EST (2016)	51.8	51.9			
RUS (2019)	49.7	46.5			

Note: All data most recent years available in LIS database. Ratios are the median income of an income decile in a particular country divided by the median income of that same decile in the U.S. in the same year. All income converted into U.S. dollars. Income is post-tax/transfer. For context, the median income of the 2nd income decile in the U.S. in 2019 (latest year available in LIS database) was $18,892, while the median income for the 3rd decile was $24,707. Three letter country codes used due to limited space in table.
Source: Authors' calculations based upon LIS (2022a) data.

TABLE 2. Median Earnings Relative to United States, 4th Income Decile.

Country	4th decile ratio (%)	Country	4th decile ratio (%)
Luxembourg (2019)	113.8	Hungary (2015)	40.1
Switzerland (2018)	107.3	Panama (2016)	30.8
Norway (2019)	107.3	Uruguay (2019)	29.0
U.S. (see note)	100.0	Chile (2017)	26.5
Canada (2018)	96.3	Vietnam (2013)	24.2
Denmark (2016)	94.3	Serbia (2016)	23.9
Austria (2019)	93.3	Palestine (2017)	22.3
Iceland (2010)	91.6	Paraguay (2019)	20.1
Australia (2018)	90.9	China (2013)	19.6
Belgium (2017)	90.8	Brazil (2016)	18.4
Netherlands (2018)	87.9	Mexico (2018)	17.2
Finland (2016)	86.4	Peru (2016)	16.5
Ireland (2018)	83.6	Romania (1997)	16.1
Germany (2019)	83.5	Colombia (2019)	13.6
Japan (2013)	78.9	Guatemala (2014)	13.5
France (2018)	76.9	Georgia (2019)	12.9
Sweden (2005)	74.1	Egypt (2012)	12.2
U.K. (2018)	74.0	South Africa (2017)	12.0
South Korea (2016)	70.4	Dominican Republic (2007)	11.9
Slovenia (2015)	67.3	India (2011)	7.7
Spain (2016)	64.4	Mali (2019)	7.4
Israel (2018)	62.5	Ivory Coast (2015)	5.3
Czech Republic (2016)	58.8		
Italy (2016)	54.4		
Estonia (2016)	50.3		
Poland (2019)	48.9		
Lithuania (2018)	44.2		
Russia (2019)	43.5		
Slovakia (2018)	43.5		
Greece (2016)	41.1		

Note: All data most recent years available in LIS database. Ratios are the median income of fourth income decile in a particular country divided by the median income of that same decile in the U.S. in the same year. All income converted into U.S. dollars. Income is post-tax/transfer. For context, the median income of the fourth income decile in the U.S. in 2019 (latest year available in LIS database) was $30,940.
Source: Authors' calculations based upon LIS (2022a) data.

We should also note that a disproportionate number of countries in our analysis are wealthy. If most countries in the world were included (such as middle- and low-income countries), one can assume that the U.S. would fare better than the vast majority.

One interesting comparison is between the U.S. and the country that it shares a border with to the south: Mexico. As you can see in Figure 1, Americans in the third income decile earn about the same median income ($23,486) as those in the richest decile in Mexico ($23,212), while Americans in the fourth decile ($29,197) earn more than the richest Mexican decile.

Money Is Not Everything

We should be careful to note that income is not the only way to measure the plight of a society's citizens. There are a variety of non-income dimensions of disadvantage that are important to consider, of which we will discuss an illustrative few.

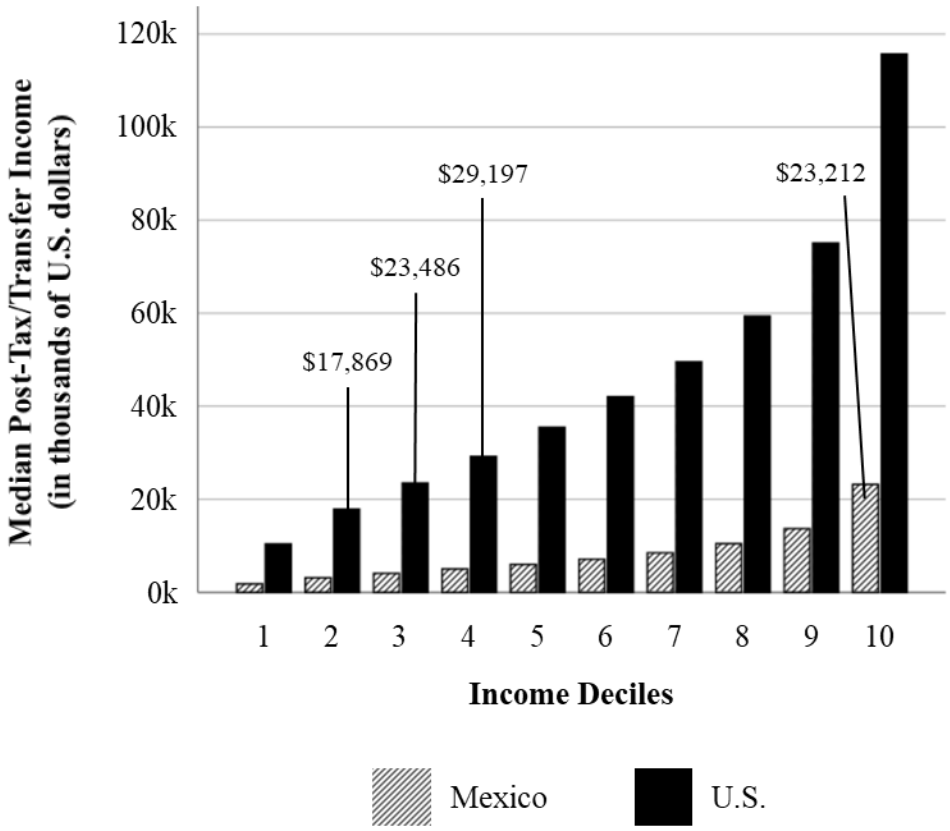
Access to health care, for instance, is an important non-income dimension of societal well-being. In some countries, citizens are assured health insurance coverage regardless of their economic or social status. Of the 37 non-U.S. OECD member countries, 26 have universal health insurance coverage and 36 see a larger share of their population insured than the U.S. (OECD 2022b)—and health care in a number of these countries, such as in Germany and the U.K., is on par with the U.S. in terms of quality (see Appendix A).

In the U.S., the risk of being uninsured is much higher for lower-status Americans. In 2020, for instance, 11.5% of those between 26-64 years old were uninsured in the U.S. That number was almost a third (31.9%) for those without a high school degree and 16.1% for those with a high school degree but no college experience. For those with a bachelor's degree, it was 5.9% (U.S. Census Bureau 2021).

Another non-income dimension of disadvantage is intergenerational social mobility, or how difficult it is to move up the income ladder from the group you were born into. If you were poor or working class, would you settle for a lower income now if it meant a brighter future? Some would not, but no doubt many would. In some countries, the poor and working class may bring home less income than they would in the U.S., but they also may have a better chance of eventually moving up.

One way that economists assess intergenerational mobility is a measure called an intergenerational earnings elasticity or IGE. This measure typically has values ranging from 0 to 1. The higher the value, the harder it is for somebody born in a lower income group to move up into a higher one in adulthood. The lower the IGE, the easier such a move is.

FIGURE 1. Income of U.S. Working Class Compared with Mexico.



Note: The most recent LIS year available for both countries (2018) was used for this analysis.
Source: Authors' calculations using most recent LIS (2022a) data.

As CUNY economist Miles Corak explains:

> 'The IGE helps us understand to what extent a child's adult economic outcomes are foreshadowed by their parents' income. The IGE is a way of measuring that and helps tell us how close that relationship is. More technically, it refers to the percentage change in a child's income if their parents' income were to increase or decrease. So if the IGE was say 0.50, that is the same thing as saying that if my parents' income were to double, my income would be 50 percent higher. This intergenerational stickiness in income is one signal of the impact of family origins on children's outcomes' (Mazumder et. al. 2021).

Most economists argue that the IGE in the U.S. is around 0.50 (although some estimates put it closer to 0.60), which is higher than average when compared with most wealthy countries (Mazumder et. al. 2021). As you can see in Figure 2, several countries have a lower IGE than the U.S., suggesting better intergenerational social movement in those countries.

One more non-income dimension of disadvantage to consider is violence. Living in lower-income areas means facing a greater risk of exposure to violence in the U.S. (Eppard et. al. 2020). As Robert Sampson explains, '[C]oncentrated disadvantage remains a strong predictor of violent crime' (2019, p. 13). And as Chase Sackett writes, 'Concentrated disadvantage, crime, and imprisonment appear to interact in a continually destabilizing feedback loop' (2016).

Detailing how this plays out in the city of Chicago, Princeton University sociologist Patrick Sharkey explains:

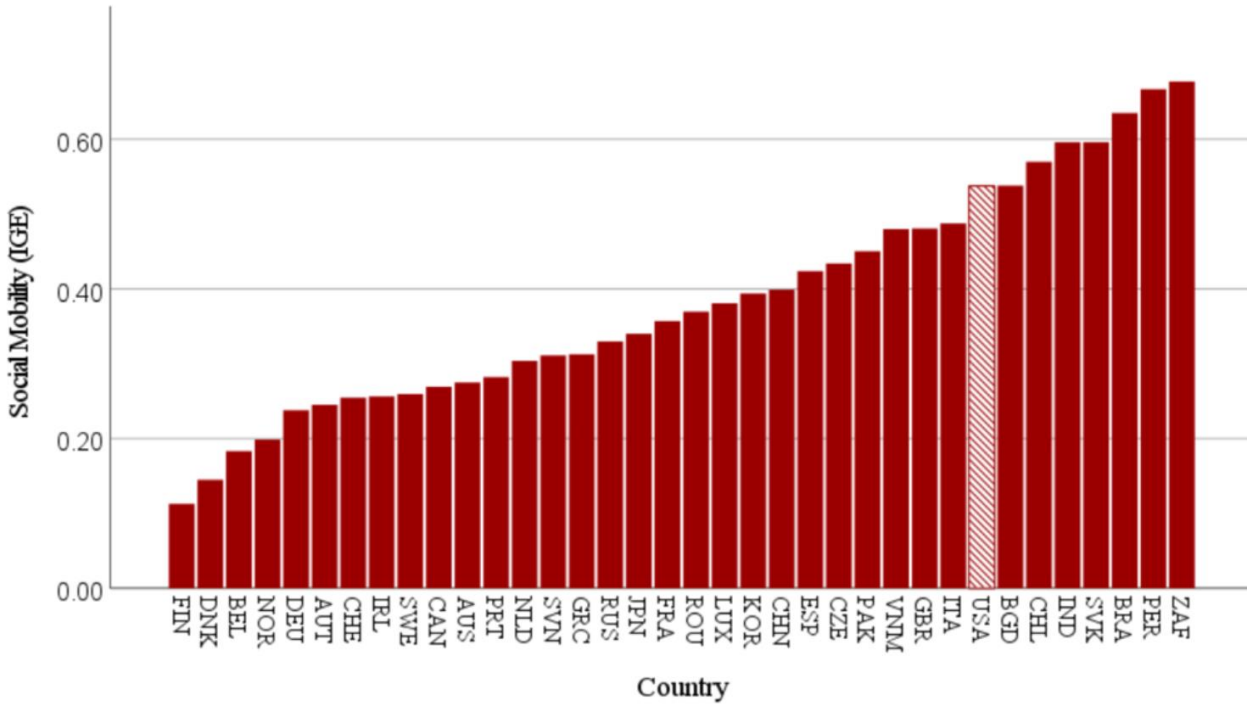
> '[T]he concentration of violence goes hand in hand with the concentration of poverty. There is a remarkable spatial clustering of homicides in and around neighborhoods with high levels of poverty. . . there are entire sections of this violent city where the most extreme form of violence, a local homicide, is an unknown occurrence. There are other neighborhoods where homicides are a common feature of life. . . these maps provide perhaps the most vivid portrait of what living in areas of concentrated poverty can mean in America's cities' (2013, p. 30).

In our own previous analyses of a variety of American cities, we have also demonstrated the remarkable clustering of gun homicides amidst concentrated disadvantage. In Figure 3 you can see two examples from our previous analyses of New York City and St. Louis/East St. Louis.

While this pattern holds in several other countries as well (for an example, see Trust for London 2022), the risk is significantly higher for Americans living in lower-income areas compared with their counterparts in a number of other countries.

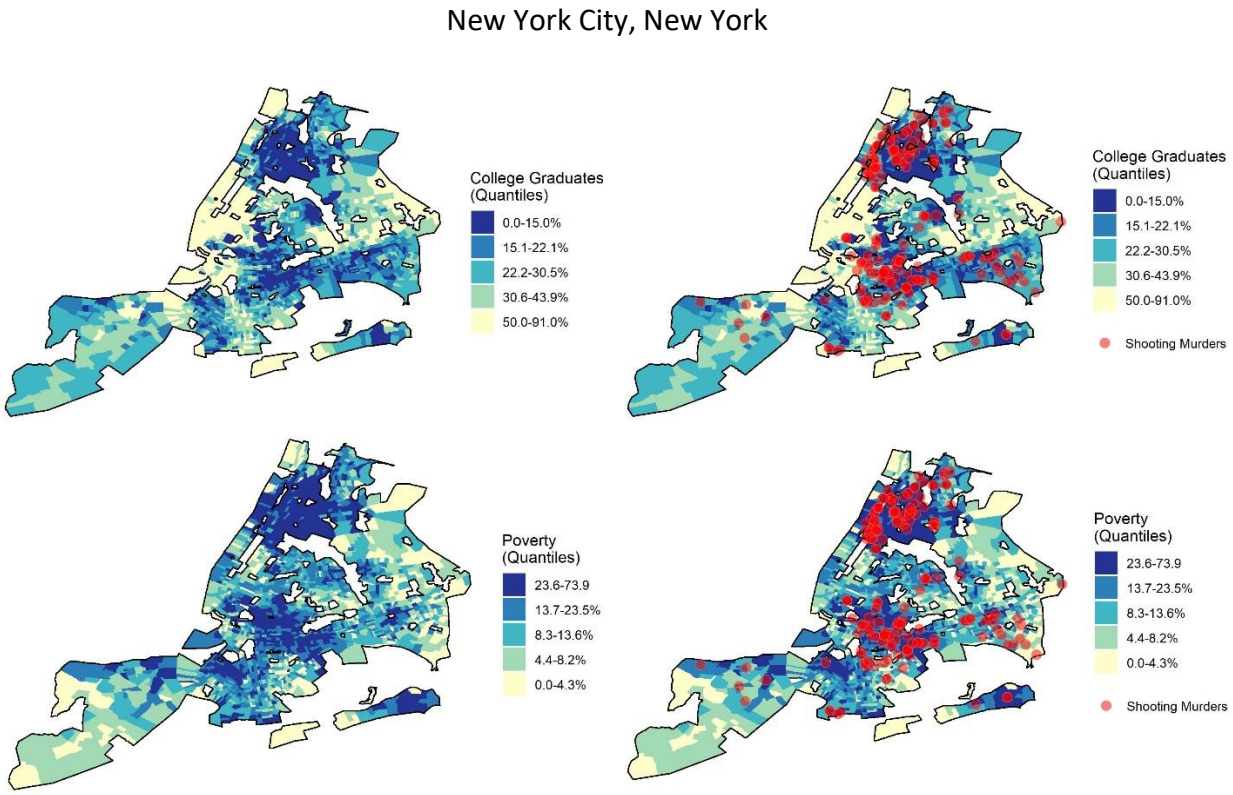
So while income is an important dimension of disadvantage, it is not the only one. There are several others in addition to health care, social mobility, and violence that we could examine. With this in mind, we will move on to discuss how the American poor compare with their counterparts around the world.

FIGURE 2. Social Mobility Cross-Nationally.



Source: World Bank 2022.

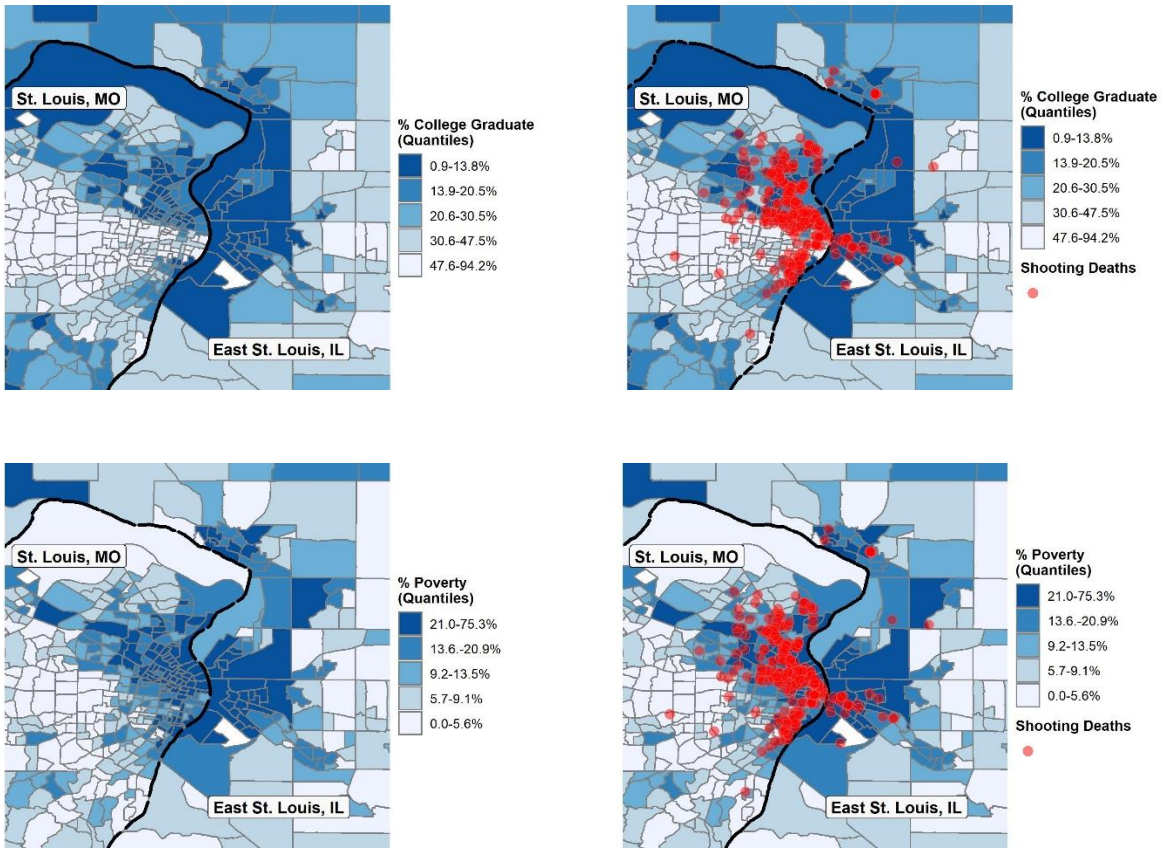
FIGURE 3. Mapping Disadvantage and Gun Homicides.



Source: For New York City, see Eppard et. al. 2020. For St. Louis/East St. Louis, see Eppard & Nelson 2022.

FIGURE 3 (continued). Mapping Disadvantage and Gun Homicides.

St. Louis, Missouri/East St. Louis, Illinois



Source: For New York City, see Eppard et. al. 2020. For St. Louis/East St. Louis, see Eppard & Nelson 2022.

American Poverty in Comparison

When researchers compare poverty rates cross-nationally, they can use either an absolute poverty rate or a relative rate. An absolute measure typically tells you the percentage of people in that society earning less than a particular income threshold, with the assumption being that earnings below that threshold are not enough to cover a family's basic needs. The poverty threshold used by the U.S. Census Bureau, which is considered the 'official' poverty measure and is cited by most publications, was conceived of as an absolute measure. According to this poverty line, a married couple with two children would be considered poor if they earned less than $27,479 in 2021 (U.S. Census Bureau 2022a).

A relative measure is very different. Relative measures tell you the percentage of the population that earn an income that is low when compared with the country's median income. When researchers compare poverty rates across OECD countries, they often use a relative measure. In these analyses, people are typically defined as poor if their household income falls below 50% of the median household income of the total population in that country.

U.S. has room for improvement

When using a standard relative poverty measure, the U.S. has a high poverty rate after taxes and transfers[3] compared with most OECD countries. Among the 37 OECD countries reporting data,[4] the U.S. has the second highest rate (18.0%), only topped by Costa Rica (20.3%). The average among OECD countries (excluding the U.S.) is 11.4%. The low is Iceland at 4.9% (OECD 2022a).

Absolute measures tell a different story. Using LIS data (2022b), we applied the official U.S. Census Bureau (2022a) poverty thresholds to all countries with appropriate data.[5] After doing this, the U.S. still has a somewhat high poverty rate (9.8%) for an OECD country but is much closer to the middle of the pack (non-U.S. median of 6.5%) than the high end (34.9%). The lowest poverty rate was in Luxembourg (1.3%) and the highest was in Lithuania (34.9%) (see Table 3).

Some of the countries had similar absolute and relative poverty rates, including the U.K. (0.3 percentage point difference), Finland (0.5), and Denmark (0.9). Other countries had very dissimilar rates, including Lithuania (19.4), Estonia (12.7), and Italy (10.7). In the case of the Czech Republic, it goes from the lowest poverty rate among OECD countries[6] when using a relative measure (5.6%) to a higher-than-average poverty rate among the countries in the absolute poverty analysis (15.3%). Luxembourg had the lowest absolute poverty rate (1.3%) but was around average among OECD countries when it comes to relative poverty (10.5%) (see Table 4).

[3] 'After taxes and transfers' means after taxes are subtracted from people's incomes and after households have received any government assistance for which they qualify.

[4] There were no data available in the database for Colombia.

[5] See Appendix B for methodology.

[6] Of the OECD countries in our analysis, as not every OECD country is included. Iceland has a lower relative poverty rate than the Czech Republic, for instance, but was not included in our analysis because it did not have comparable LIS data.

TABLE 3. Absolute Poverty Rates Based on U.S. Poverty Line.

Country	Pre-tax/transfer absolute poverty rate (%)	Post-tax/transfer absolute poverty rate (%)	Poverty reduction post-tax/transfer (%)
Luxembourg	21.4	1.3	93.9
Switzerland	10.5	3.4	67.6
Norway	25.6	3.9	84.8
Netherlands	17.4	4.9	71.8
Denmark	22.9	4.9	78.6
Belgium	31.3	5.2	83.4
Austria	28.6	5.3	81.5
Germany	26.6	5.8	78.2
Ireland	31.8	6.3	80.2
Finland	32.4	6.3	80.6
Canada	19.4	6.6	66.0
Australia	21.5	6.7	68.8
United States	19.5	9.8	49.7
France	34.1	10.8	68.3
United Kingdom	27.8	11.4	59.0
Czech Republic	34.3	15.3	55.4
South Korea	20.1	16.1	19.9
Israel	26.8	21.7	19.0
Italy	42.8	24.4	43.0
Estonia	40.6	28.5	29.8
Russia	46.0	34.6	24.8
Lithuania	46.0	34.9	24.1

Note: Poverty threshold is the official U.S. Census Bureau (2022a) poverty line for that year.
Source: Authors' calculations using most recent LIS (2022b) data.

TABLE 4. Comparing Absolute and Relative Poverty Rates Cross-Nationally.

Country	Absolute poverty rate (%)	Relative poverty rate (%)	Percentage point difference
Luxembourg	1.3	10.5	9.2
Switzerland	3.4	10.5	7.1
Norway	3.9	8.4	4.5
Netherlands	4.9	7.8	2.9
Denmark	4.9	5.8	0.9
Belgium	5.2	8.2	3.0
Austria	5.3	10.0	4.7
Germany	5.8	9.8	4.0
Ireland	6.3	7.4	1.1
Finland	6.3	5.8	-0.5
Canada	6.6	11.8	5.2
Australia	6.7	12.4	5.7
United States	9.8	18.0	8.2
France	10.8	8.5	-2.3
United Kingdom	11.4	11.7	0.3
Czech Republic	15.3	5.6	-9.7
South Korea	16.1	17.6	1.5
Israel	21.7	16.9	-4.8
Italy	24.4	13.7	-10.7
Estonia	28.5	15.8	-12.7
Lithuania	34.9	15.5	-19.4

Note: Absolute poverty measured using U.S. Census Bureau (2022a) poverty thresholds. Relative poverty measure is a household income less than 50% of the national median income.
Source: Authors' calculations using most recent matching LIS (2022b) and OECD (2022a) data.

Using a relative measure, one might assume that Lithuania (15.5%) has less poverty than the U.S. (18.0%). Yet Lithuania's absolute poverty rate (34.9%) is about 3.5 times higher than the rate in the U.S. (9.8%).

We calculated poverty rates not just for the overall population, but for children and single-parent families as well. On child poverty, the U.S. is somewhat high among the OECD countries in our analysis at 12.0%, but again much closer to the middle of the pack (non-U.S. median of 7.0%) than the high end (36.4%). The lowest child poverty rate was 1.4% in Luxembourg and the highest was 47.7% in Russia (see Table 5). On single parent family poverty, the U.S. is also somewhat high among the OECD countries in our analysis at 24.0%. Yet again this is much closer to the middle of the pack (non-U.S. median of 17.8%) than the high end (63.1%). The lowest single parent family poverty rate was 0.7% in Luxembourg and the highest was 63.1% in Lithuania (see Table 6).

Both absolute and relative measures are valuable

While we found a strong correlation ($r = 0.60$, $p < .01$) between absolute poverty rates and relative poverty rates in our analysis, we found that relative poverty rates were even more strongly correlated with Gini coefficients ($r = 0.83$, $p < .001$). The correlation between absolute poverty rates and Gini coefficients was not statistically significant ($p > .05$).

When absolute poverty rates and Gini coefficients were included together in a multiple regression model (r square = 0.77, $p < .001$) with relative poverty as the dependent variable, both independent variables were statistically significant, but the standardized coefficient for Gini coefficients (0.707) was larger than that of absolute poverty (0.296).

Which one should you use to measure poverty? It depends on your research question. Absolute poverty measures give you a good picture of whether somebody's basic needs are being met, while relative poverty measures tell you how far removed somebody is from the mainstream standard of living in a society. Both are valuable indicators for scholars.

An additional measure

An additional measure that provides insight into the plight of different income groups is the median earnings of various income deciles. When conducting our absolute poverty analysis discussed earlier, there were only 22 countries with appropriate recent data available in the LIS database. But using that same database we were able to obtain decile median income data for 52 countries.

Using this method, the U.S. is average among OECD countries. Of the 33 OECD countries in this analysis, 16 have higher earnings than the U.S. at the first decile and 16 have lower earnings. Among all 52 countries in the analysis, the U.S. performs above average—16 countries have higher earnings and 35 have lower earnings (this latter groups includes every non-OECD country in the analysis) (see Table 7).

TABLE 5. Child Absolute Poverty Rates Based on U.S. Poverty Line.

Country	Pre-tax/transfer child absolute poverty rate (%)	Post-tax/transfer child absolute poverty rate (%)	Poverty reduction post-tax/transfer (%)
Luxembourg	10.6	1.4	86.8
Norway	11.8	2.5	78.8
Denmark	12.8	3.0	76.6
Switzerland	7.2	4.5	37.5
Netherlands	10.1	5.0	50.5
Finland	15.7	5.5	65.0
Canada	19.1	5.7	70.2
Germany	15.3	6.0	60.8
Austria	16.3	6.9	57.7
Belgium	17.9	6.9	61.5
Australia	18.6	7.0	62.4
Ireland	27.6	7.8	71.7
South Korea	8.9	9.2	-3.4
United States	17.5	12.0	31.4
United Kingdom	30.9	14.2	54.0
France	23.6	15.5	34.3
Czech Republic	22.3	19.1	14.3
Estonia	33.6	24.1	28.3
Israel	31.8	29.4	7.5
Italy	34.4	36.1	-4.9
Lithuania	42.5	36.4	14.4
Russia	51.9	47.7	8.1

Note: All data most recent available in LIS database. Poverty threshold is the official U.S. Census Bureau (2022a) poverty line.
Source: Authors' calculations using LIS (2022b) data.

TABLE 6. Single-Parent Family Absolute Poverty Rates Based on U.S. Poverty Line.

Country	Pre-tax/transfer single-parent family absolute poverty rate (%)	Post-tax/transfer single-parent family absolute poverty rate (%)	Poverty reduction post-tax/transfer (%)
Luxembourg	21.6	0.7	96.8
Switzerland	16.9	4.7	72.2
Norway	29.4	5.0	83.0
Denmark	32.0	5.5	82.8
Belgium	41.0	7.4	82.0
Netherlands	37.7	9.6	74.5
Austria	36.9	12.4	66.4
Germany	39.0	12.9	66.9
Canada	47.8	14.3	70.1
Finland	43.0	17.2	60.0
Australia	54.5	18.4	66.2
South Korea	19.2	18.6	3.1
Ireland	59.5	23.6	60.3
United States	35.4	24.0	32.2
United Kingdom	66.8	30.1	54.9
France	44.2	31.9	27.8
Estonia	51.4	44.1	14.2
Italy	50.2	51.0	-1.6
Czech Republic	53.3	51.6	3.2
Israel	60.1	53.8	10.5
Russia	65.2	60.1	7.8
Lithuania	65.1	63.1	3.1

Note: Poverty threshold is the official U.S. Census Bureau (2022a) poverty line for that year.
Source: Authors' calculations using most recent LIS (2022b) data.

TABLE 7. Median Earnings Relative to United States, 1st Income Decile.

Country	1st decile ratio (%)	Country	1st decile ratio (%)
Luxembourg (2019)	165.8	Italy (2016)	46.4
Denmark (2016)	148.5	Uruguay (2019)	38.5
Norway (2019)	145.4	Chile (2017)	30.3
Iceland (2010)	141.5	Vietnam (2013)	28.9
Switzerland (2018)	139.2	Panama (2016)	23.6
Finland (2016)	137.8	Serbia (2016)	22.2
Netherlands (2018)	132.5	Romania (1997)	21.8
Belgium (2017)	129.8	Palestine (2017)	17.6
Ireland (2018)	128.2	Mexico (2018)	17.5
Austria (2019)	124.0	Paraguay (2019)	17.2
Sweden (2005)	121.4	China (2013)	17.2
Canada (2018)	119.8	Guatemala (2014)	16.4
Australia (2018)	117.8	Georgia (2019)	12.6
Germany (2019)	109.2	Colombia (2019)	9.1
France (2018)	107.2	Brazil (2016)	9.1
U.K. (2018)	104.8	Peru (2016)	8.9
U.S. (see note)	100.0	Dominican Republic (2007)	8.7
Japan (2013)	93.0	South Africa (2017)	8.1
Czech Republic (2016)	92.1	Egypt (2012)	7.8
Slovenia (2015)	91.1	Mali (2019)	7.4
Israel (2018)	65.9	India (2011)	6.4
Estonia (2016)	64.7	Ivory Coast (2015)	0.7
South Korea (2016)	63.1		
Poland (2019)	62.8		
Hungary (2015)	60.2		
Russia (2019)	59.4		
Slovakia (2018)	58.4		
Spain (2016)	57.8		
Lithuania (2018)	51.4		
Greece (2016)	46.6		

Note: All data most recent years available in LIS database. Ratios are the median income of first income decile in a particular country divided by the median income of that same decile in the U.S. in the same year. All income converted into U.S. dollars. Income is post-tax/transfer. For context, the median income of the first income decile in the U.S. in 2019 (latest year available in LIS database) was $11,095.
Source: Authors' calculations based upon LIS (2022a) data.

In some OECD countries, income at the bottom is much higher. In Luxembourg, for instance, the median income at the lowest decile is 165.8% of their American counterparts. In other peer countries, low earners appear to be much worse off. In Greece (46.6%) and Italy (46.4%), for instance, the lowest earners take home less than half of what their American counterparts earn.

While this method shows us that income for low earners is average in the U.S. compared with other OECD countries, it also shows us how much more insecure the poor are elsewhere in the world compared with the U.S. and its peer OECD countries. The median incomes of the countries at the bottom are startlingly low, just a fraction of U.S. earnings (7.8% in Egypt, 7.4% in Mali, 6.4% in India, and just 0.7% in the Ivory Coast) (see Table 7).

Like we did in our discussion of the working class, it is interesting to compare the lowest earners in the U.S. and Mexico, given these countries' proximity and history. As you can see in Figure 4, Americans in the lowest income decile earn a median income of $10,386. In Mexico, that number is not exceeded until you get to the eighth income decile where median earnings are $10,465. This analysis suggests that the meaning of poverty in these two countries is clearly different.

Now let us look at how the U.S. government compares with other countries in addressing economic insecurity.

Government Effectiveness

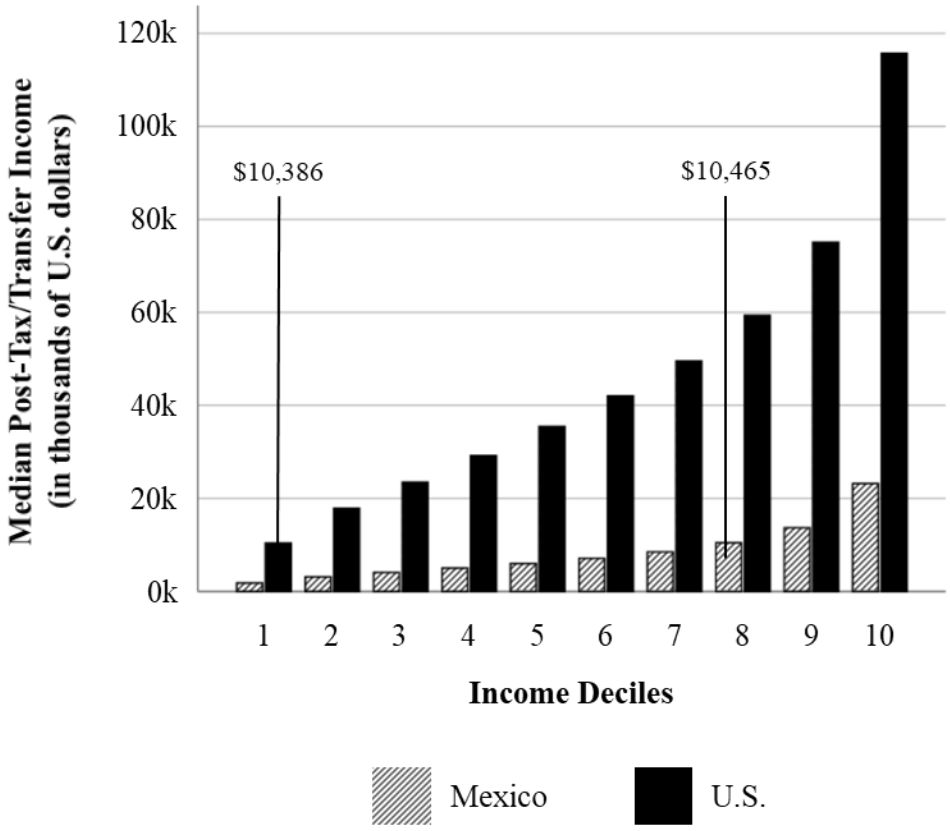
In any given year, the U.S. poverty rate would be much higher than it ends up being if not for a variety of government programs,[7] including Unemployment Insurance (UI), Social Security, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, commonly referred to as food stamps), the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), and public housing, among others.

In 2021, for instance, traditional non-pandemic related government programs are projected to have reduced the poverty rate from 23.1% to 12.6% (Wheaton et. al. 2021, p. 19). This projected reduction (45%) is typical in the U.S. after the distribution of our standard slate of government programs (CPSP 2022). These numbers are based upon estimates from the Urban Institute (using the Supplemental Poverty Measure or SPM) as the official U.S. Census Bureau data will not be released until later this year (after this article was written).

What was unique about 2021 was the presence of additional government programs created to help American families weather the COVID-19 pandemic—including stimulus checks and child tax credits. With these additional programs, the poverty rate is projected to have been further reduced from 12.6% to 7.7% (Wheaton et. al. 2021, p. 19). The combination of traditional government assistance and pandemic-related programs is projected to have reduced poverty by a total of 67%

[7] From the U.S. Census Bureau (2022b): 'Public assistance refers to assistance programs that provide either cash assistance or in-kind benefits to individuals and families from any governmental entity. There are two major types of public assistance programs: social welfare programs and social insurance programs. Benefits received from social welfare programs are usually based on a low income means-tested eligibility criteria. . . Benefits received from social insurance programs are usually based on eligibility criteria such as age, employment status, or being a veteran.' For more, visit their website (see references for address).

FIGURE 4. Income of U.S. Poor Compared with Mexico.



Note: The most recent year available for both countries (2018) was used for this analysis.
Source: Authors' calculations using LIS (2022a) data.

(from 23.1% o 7.7%), potentially keeping nearly 50 million Americans out of poverty (see Figure 5). The projected rate for children was even lower at 5.6%, down from 30.1% before standard assistance and pandemic programs (81% reduction) (Wheaton et. al. 2021, p. 19). These projected poverty rates—both overall and for children—would be the lowest on record in the U.S. (CPSP 2022).

To get an idea of a typical U.S. poverty rate (using the SPM), the average overall rate for the decade preceding the pandemic was 14.5% (average reduction of 45%) while the average child poverty rate was 16.0% (39% average reduction) (CPSP 2022).

Projected overall poverty rates differed from state to state, ranging from a low of 4.9% in Minnesota to a high of 10.9% in Florida. Projected child poverty rates ranged from a low of 1.9% in Maine to a high of 8.8% in Delaware and Florida (Wheaton et. al. 2021, pp. 7-10).

While poverty reduction is nothing new for the U.S. government, the historic projected reduction in 2021 shows us that we can reduce poverty much more than we have in the past if we so choose.

Other countries have shown us that such reduction can be regularly achieved through well-designed social policies. Referring back to Tables 3, 5, and 6, for instance, you see how much poverty exists in different countries before taxes and transfers, and how much lower poverty is afterward.[8] The degree to which poverty is reduced in each country is a good indication of the effectiveness of their anti-poverty efforts.

While a 7.7% poverty rate and 67% reduction is impressive for the U.S., it would not stand out among wealthy countries. Of the 21 non-U.S. countries in our analysis, 12 have lower poverty rates than the historic low of 7.7% for the U.S., with Luxembourg coming in at an astoundingly low 1.3%. In addition, several in our analysis reduce poverty by 70% or more, including Luxembourg (93.9%), Belgium (83.4%), Austria (81.5%), Ireland (80.2%), Denmark (78.6%), Germany (78.2%), and the Netherlands (71.8%).

If Americans need proof that low poverty rates are possible, they need only look at either (a) their own country in 2021, or (b) other wealthy countries around the world.

Permanently implementing the measures that led to the historic poverty reduction in 2021 sounds great, but there are drawbacks to consider.

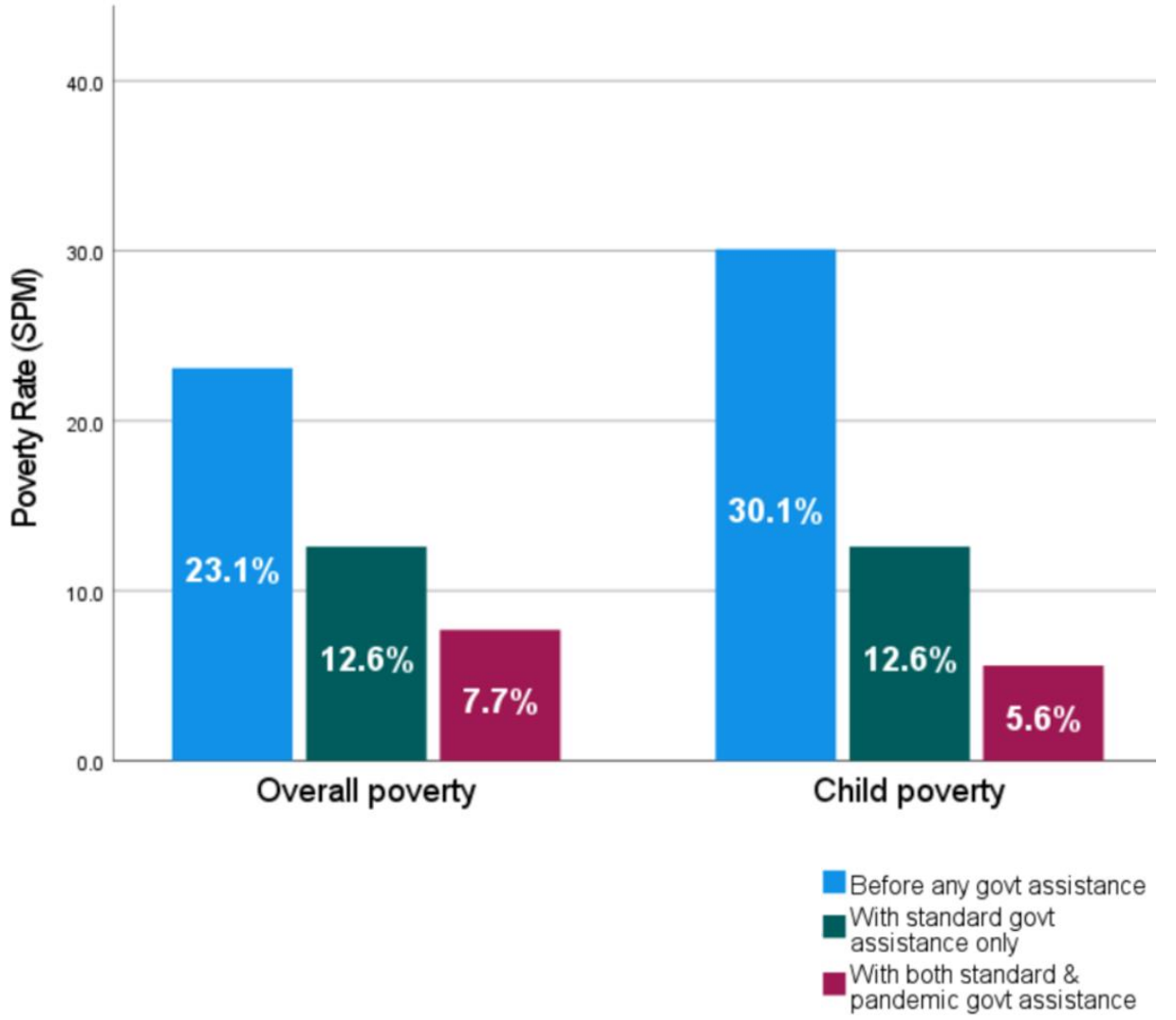
For starters, somebody must pay for them. There are no objectively ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answers to how much assistance should be offered or who should foot the bill—these are determinations only voters and their elected representatives can make based upon their subjective values and priorities.

Something else to consider about permanent implementation is a possible negative macroeconomic implication that many Americans became familiar with in 2022: inflation. We reached out to David Wessel, a senior fellow in economic studies at the Brookings Institution

\

[8] Also refer to Table 9 in Appendix C for how effective different countries are at reducing income inequality.

FIGURE 5. Projected U.S. Poverty Reduction in 2021.



Note: These are projections by scholars at the Urban Institute as the U.S. Census Bureau has not yet released poverty data for 2021 at the time of this article's writing.
Source: Wheaton et. al. 2021, p. 19.

and director of their Hutchins Center on Fiscal and Monetary Policy, to help us understand this concern.

He explained that today's inflation is likely due to a combination of factors, including particularly strong demand for goods during the pandemic, the unanticipated reluctance of millions of workers to return to the job market, China's 'zero COVID' policies, and supply chain issues.

An additional factor Wessel cited was the fiscal stimulus of late 2020 and early 2021. He said he does not believe that the stimulus was a bad idea, especially for low-income families, but that it could have been better designed to prevent inflationary effects:

> 'I think the size of the March 2021 American Rescue Plan (ARP) was too big, especially on top of the December 2020 legislation. The Fed could have responded to the larger-than-anticipated ARP, but it didn't. I do think the Child Tax Credit may have been too generous toward upper-middle-class families, but full refundability for those who do not owe taxes is a very good social and economic policy. We shouldn't be reluctant to help people at the bottom of the income scale because we are worried about the inflationary effect—we can offset that in other ways.'

Laura Wheaton and her coauthors on the Urban Institute study cited previously conclude their research report by saying:

> 'Our projections demonstrate that government benefits can reduce poverty well below traditional levels when substantial resources are devoted to that task. Policymakers who want to make some aspects of the higher level of support permanent will need to consider the appropriate levels and types of increased supports, the best ways to fund such efforts, and the potential macroeconomic implications of various choices' (2021, p. 27).

Wheaton's study, our cross-national analyses, and several studies by other scholars reveal that government programs can work very well in reducing poverty. They provide us useful evidence to continue the conversation of the best ways to address poverty and inequality in the U.S. However, we should not understate that additional government programs do come with extra costs, and they must be properly designed to account for all possible negative social and economic impacts.

In Conclusion

The take-home messages from our analyses might be summed up as follows. First, the U.S. working class fared well compared with peer countries and very well compared with middle- and low-income countries. Second, American poverty was about average in our analysis when using an absolute measure, and high when using a relative one. Third, our comparisons between the U.S. and Mexico underlined just how different the experiences of the poor and working class are in different countries. Fourth, evidence from other wealthy countries, as well as the U.S. in 2021, shows that government can be quite effective in improving the lives of those with low earnings.

APPENDIX A: HEALTH CARE RANKINGS

TABLE 8. U.S. Health Care Compared with 10 Peer Countries.

Country	Safety rank	Timeliness rank	Efficiency rank	Choice rank	Cost rank
Australia	9	6	2	-	3 ($4,919)
Canada	4	11	7	-	5 ($5,370)
France	6	4	5	-	4 ($5,274)
Germany	9	2	9	-	8 ($6,518)
Netherlands	5	1	8	-	7 ($5,739)
New Zealand	1	8	4	-	1 ($4,212)
Norway	11	6	1	-	9 ($6,745)
Sweden	8	10	3	-	6 ($5,552)
Switzerland	7	3	10	-	10 ($7,138)
United Kingdom	2	9	6	-	2 ($4,500)
United States	2	5	11	-	11 ($10,948)

Source: Eppard 2022.

APPENDIX B: ABSOLUTE POVERTY METHODOLOGY

This section introduces a technique to measure absolute poverty in a cross-national perspective, taking the absolute thresholds defined by the U.S. Census Bureau as the baseline for other countries.

For this exercise, we used data from the Luxembourg Income Study (LIS) database, selecting advanced countries which reached GDP per capita of above $10,000 in the latest year, where data were available (no later than 2019 to keep analyses unaffected by COVID measures).

The U.S. Census Bureau poverty thresholds vary by size of family and number of children, and are adjusted every year for price changes, hence various adjustments to the micro data are needed to apply the respective poverty thresholds to calculate poverty headcount ratios.

In a first step, to accommodate for differences in PPPs, the values of national currencies were divided by the PPP conversion factors for the respective years, using the PPP rates provided by the World Bank Development Indicators available and quarterly updated on the LIS website.

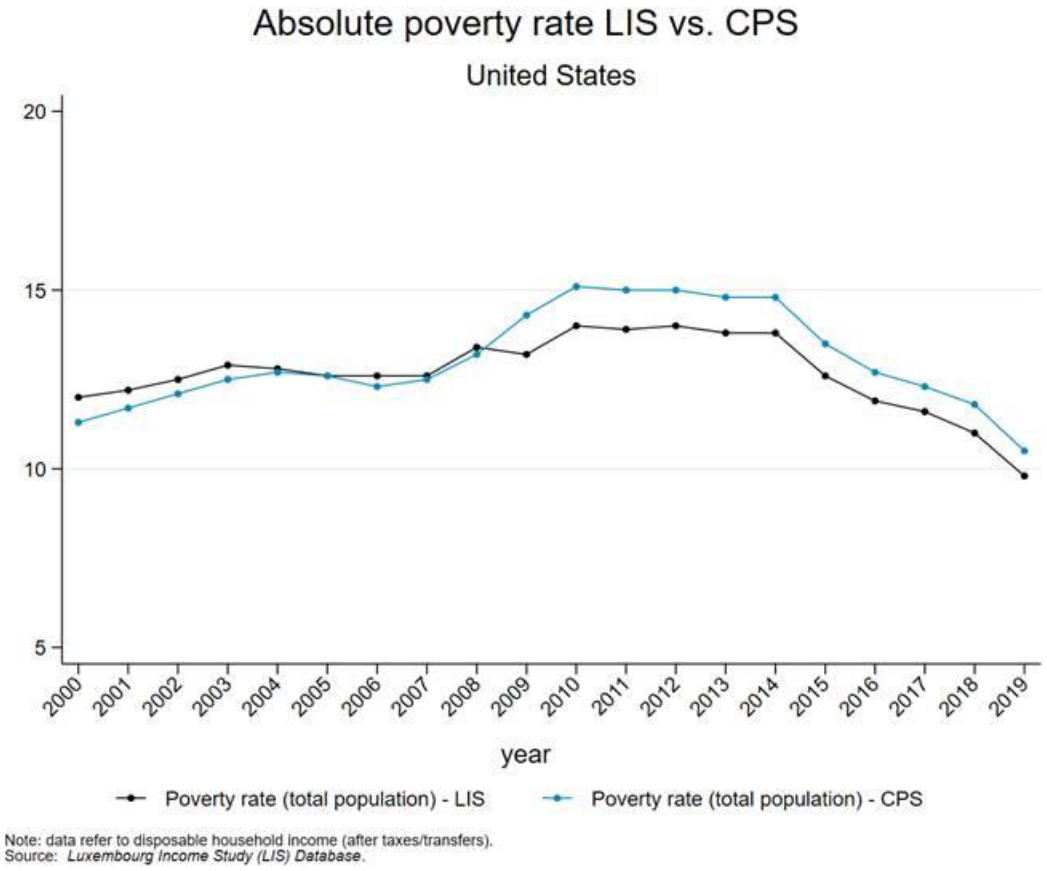
Children of the head (and/or spouse) were treated as dependent children, as long as these children are aged below 18, or are not yet mainly working in the age of 18-24. However, when the latter already have a spouse and/or own children living with them, they do form their own family and are no longer counted in the head's family.

In the LIS survey data, benefits are frequently directed to the household rather than the tax or family unit. Thus, rather than recreating individual family income, and reallocating household amounts to the families, household's total income was proportionally split according to the size of each family in the household. This seems justifiable, since these families form households. It is not obvious which incomes belong to which members, but more generically, budget sharing is assumed. Following the U.S. definition, which closely follows the idea of monetary flows, the value of near-cash and in-kind transfers (such as housing subsidies and food stamps) are excluded from the income definition.

This method does not replicate the U.S. concept to the letter, but it allows an approximation of a harmonized cross-nationally comparable definition of poverty instead, going systematically back to family units. Thus, the numbers for the United States were recalculated using the proposed approximation for family identification for the LIS U.S. datasets. In terms of absolute numbers, this approximation leads for dataset us19 (based on CPS-ASEC 2020) to a poverty rate of 9.8%, whereas the official number is reported at 10.5%. The figure below shows how the harmonized concept compares to the official CPS poverty rates over time for the period 2000-2019.

In this analysis, contributory pensions by the state are kept alongside the redistributive component of the state. For the case of Finland, the outcome of the tripartite pension agreements between state, employer associations, and trade unions are reclassified for this comparison as part of public redistribution. We acknowledge that alternative treatment for pensions as deferred wages could be argued. However, due to the complex national settings and cross-financing of pension payments and redistributive elements embedded in public pensions, no ideal fully cross-national definition

can be reached, and future analyses might separate out specifically the effect of different components of pensions in a cross-national perspective. Selected in this overview are only datasets for which taxes and contributions were available in the LIS Database.



APPENDIX C: INTERNATIONAL INEQUALITY REDUCTION

TABLE 9. Cross-National Comparison of Income Inequality Reduction.

Country	Pre-tax/transfer Gini	Post-tax/transfer Gini	% Gini reduction
Slovak Republic	0.387	0.236	39.0
Slovenia	0.444	0.246	44.6
Czech Republic	0.432	0.248	42.6
Iceland	0.369	0.250	32.2
Norway	0.427	0.261	38.9
Belgium	0.489	0.262	46.4
Denmark	0.443	0.263	40.6
Finland	0.509	0.269	47.2
Austria	0.486	0.274	43.6
Sweden	0.430	0.280	34.9
Poland	0.452	0.281	37.8
Hungary	0.463	0.286	38.2
Germany	0.494	0.289	41.5
France	0.519	0.292	43.7
Ireland	0.520	0.292	43.8
Netherlands	0.445	0.295	33.7
Canada	0.421	0.301	28.5
Estonia	0.465	0.305	34.4
Luxembourg	0.490	0.305	37.8
Greece	0.525	0.308	41.3
Portugal	0.511	0.310	39.3
Switzerland	0.402	0.316	21.4
Russia	0.434	0.317	27.0
Spain	0.491	0.320	34.8
Australia	0.454	0.325	28.4
New Zealand	0.453	0.326	28.0
Italy	0.511	0.330	35.4
Japan	0.501	0.334	33.3
South Korea	0.404	0.339	16.1
Romania	0.512	0.339	33.8
Israel	0.449	0.342	23.8
Latvia	0.479	0.345	28.0
Lithuania	0.495	0.357	27.9
United Kingdom	0.508	0.366	28.0
United States	0.505	0.395	21.8
Turkey	0.492	0.397	19.3
Bulgaria	0.523	0.402	23.1
Chile	0.495	0.460	7.1
Costa Rica	0.532	0.478	10.2
Brazil	0.582	0.481	17.4
India	0.508	0.495	2.6
South Africa	0.709	0.618	12.8

Source: Authors' calculations based on OECD data (2022a).

Author Bios

Lawrence M. Eppard is a sociology faculty member at Shippensburg University and host of the Utterly Moderate Podcast (ConnorsForum.org).

Jörg Neugschwender is a data team manager at the LIS Cross-National Data Center in Luxembourg.

Erik Nelson is a public health faculty member at Brigham Young University.

Bibliography

Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). (2022a). 'Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics.' https://www.bls.gov/oes/home.htm.

Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2022b). 'CPI Inflation Calculator.' https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm.

Center on Poverty & Social Policy at Columbia University (CPSP). (2022). 'Historical Supplemental Poverty Measure Data.' https://www.povertycenter.columbia.edu/historical-spm-data.

Draught, T. (2018). 'Understanding the Working Class.' Demos. https://www.demos.org/research/understanding-working-class.

Eppard, L.M. (2022). 'U.S. Health Care Compared with Other Wealthy Countries.' Connors Forum. https://connorsforum.substack.com/p/us-health-care-compared-with-other?s=w.

Eppard, L.M., E. Nelson, C. Cox, and E. Bonilla-Silva. (2020). 'Obligations to the Future.' *Journal of Working-Class Studies*, 5(2), 6-69. https://workingclassstudiesjournal.files.wordpress.com/2020/10/jwcs-vol-5-issue-2-october-2020-eppard-nelson-cox-bonilla-silva.pdf.

Eppard, L.M., and E. Nelson. (2022). 'Race and Place: How Community Disparities Affect Inequality.' *The Bulwark*. June 9, 2022. https://www.thebulwark.com/race-and-place-community-disparities-and-inequality/.

LIS Cross-National Data Center in Luxembourg (LIS). (2022a). 'Data Access Research Tool (DART).' https://dart.lisdatacenter.org/.

Luxembourg Income Study (LIS). (2022b). https://www.lisdatacenter.org/.

Mazumder, B., M. Corak, and L.M. Eppard. (2021). 'Social Mobility in the United States.' *Sociation*, 20(1). https://sociation.ncsociologyassoc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/socialmobility_transcript.pdf.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2022a). 'Income Distribution Database by Measure.' https://stats.oecd.org/.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2022b). 'Population Coverage for Health Care.' https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/ae3016b9-en/1/3/5/1/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/ae3016b9-en&_csp_=ca413da5d44587bc56446341952c275e&itemIGO=oecd&itemContentType=book.

Sackett, C. (2016). 'Neighborhoods and Violent Crime.' United States Department of Housing

and Urban Development. https://www.huduser.gov/portal/periodicals/em/summer16/highlight2.html.

Sampson, R.J. (2019). 'Neighbourhood Effects and Beyond: Explaining the Paradoxes of Inequality in the Changing American Metropolis.' *Urban Studies*, 56(1), 3-32. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0042098018795363.

Sharkey, P. (2013). *Stuck in Place: Urban Neighborhoods and the End of Progress Toward Racial Equality*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press. https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/S/bo14365260.html.

Trust for London. (2022). 'Crime and Income Deprivation.' https://www.trustforlondon.org.uk/data/crime-and-income-deprivation/.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2021). 'Health Insurance in the United States: 2020.' https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2021/demo/health-insurance/p60-274.html.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2022a). 'Poverty Thresholds.' https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/historical-poverty-thresholds.html .

U.S. Census Bureau. (2022b). 'About Public Assistance.' https://www.census.gov/topics/income-poverty/public-assistance/about.html#:~:text=Supplemental%20Security%20Income%20(SSI),including%20Pass%20through%20Child%20Support.

Wheaton, L., L. Giannarelli, and I. Dehry. (2021). '2021 Poverty Projections: Assessing the Impact of Benefits and Stimulus Measures.' Urban Institute. https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/104603/2021-poverty-projections_0_0.pdf.

World Bank. (2022). 'Global Database on Intergenerational Mobility.' https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/brief/what-is-the-global-database-on-intergenerational-mobility-gdim.

Zweig, M. (ed.). (2004). *What's Class Got to Do with It? American Society in the Twenty-First Century*. New York: ILR Books. https://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/whats-class-got-to-do-with-it-michael-zweig/1135340737.

How COVID Vaccination Hesitancy, Social Class, and Economic Inequality Reveal a New Dimension of Public Trust

Liberty Kohn, Winona State University

Abstract

COVID vaccination data on United States' citizens reveals that working-class citizens across multicultural domains and political identities are vaccinating at lower rates because working-class citizens do not feel that public institutions have met obligations to improve their life. This belief in unmet obligations illustrates a new facet of institutional trust: a general indifference to institutional requests. This *indifference* to institutional request, with indifference as a new dimension of trust, differs from past working-class scholarship on institutional trust, which often finds anger, submission, or scapegoating other groups as common responses to institutional request or rhetoric. This article also recapitulates the strong relationship between the U.S.'s high economic inequality and working-class lack of trust and indifference toward public institutions.

Keywords

Institutional trust, working class, public rhetoric, economic inequality, COVID 19

Since the theorization of ethos dating to ancient Greece, the field of rhetoric, my own field, as well as other modern fields, has a long interest in the study of trust. This interest in trust, often grounded in public and political settings, extends in the modern day to *institutional trust*, trust in the institutions that govern citizens' lives and that shape and deliver ideas of the public good. Importantly, recent annual surveys and metrics show that trust in institutions has declined over the last several decades—this is true in the U.S. of both private and public institutions (Botsman, 2018, p. 41). Concerning public institutions, Gallop Polls of the 1970s show that 70% of Americans trusted their government to do the right thing, but by 2017 the number has decreased to 35% (Botsman, 2018, p. 41). Since 1972, trust in government institutions' handling of domestic issues has declined from 70% to 54% and from 75% to 52% on international issues, while in this period trust in Congress has declined from 42% to a meagre 9% (Botsman, 2018, p. 41).

While the reasons for this decline in trust can be many, recent common political analyses in our post-fact age typically offer up two avenues of thought for a distrust in public institutions. One view involves the political, symbolized by the high-profile anti-institutional rhetoric of Donald Trump, including his and other elites' use of anti-government conspiracy theory, such as a Deep State controlling governmental decisions (Muirhead and Rosenblum, 2019, p. 7); in this view, governmental institutions are corrupt and controlled by either elite or secretive forces beyond the reach of ordinary voters. Thus, Trump's rhetoric and success as a politician stands as testimony to a working-class belief that institutions do not serve the working class, but only other groups. This

anti-institutional sentiment in Trump's rhetoric is one reason for his popularity with America's white working class (Gest, 2016; Kohn, 2018). Alternatively, a less conspiratorial, yet anti-governmental conservative small government movement dating to the Reagan years (Aune, 2001, p. 129) also explains the decline in trust because, in Reagan's words, 'government is the problem.' Other potential reasons for decreases in institutional trust are based not in anti-institutional conservative political rhetoric, but in unequal justice, where public opinion polls demonstrate that a consistent lack of punishment over the first decades of the twenty-first century in high-profile abuses by the political or financial elite has made ordinary citizens feel that institutions do not hold elites accountable for violations of institutional norms and laws for which ordinary citizens are held accountable (Botsman, 2018, p. 42).

While these current political trends and ethical reasons for decreases in institutional trust are certainly true, I will argue that an under-identified informant of institutional trust is a citizen's class-based experiences with and beliefs toward public institutions—particularly, institutions' fulfillment of obligations based not in the present, but in the individual's beliefs about institutions' previously positive or negative impact on their life. That is, I'm not analyzing for the degree to which working-class citizens *understand* the impact of institutions; nor am I focusing on the degree to which institutions *understand* working class needs and identity. My interest is not gauging or measuring *understanding*, but analyzing for working-class *beliefs* and *attitudes* about institutions' impact on their life.

In support, I'll be using published interview data and trends from public health researchers Sreedhar and Gopal (2021) on U.S. working-class and low SES (socioeconomic standing) citizens' reasons for not complying with the American government's (from the CDC to state-level public health to President Biden's) highly public request to receive vaccination for the protection of oneself and the public good. In short, I argue that one feature of institutional trust relies on individuals' and demographics' belief, or lack of belief, that public institutions have been helpful and impacted their lives—a positive impact begets reciprocity from citizens toward the institution. Herein, COVID data on what is often termed vaccine hesitancy, which I'll term *lack of reciprocity*, demonstrates a clear social class divide. In short, the COVID vaccine non-compliance data opens a window onto a new facet of institutional trust: many working-class members engage in vaccine 'hesitancy' (i.e., non-compliance) due to *lack of reciprocity*, a belief that public (and potentially, private) institutions of varied sorts (from education, health, pharmaceuticals, labor and wages, etc.) haven't helped the working class much in the past. Thus, they, working-class citizens, do not owe institutions enough to reciprocate in the present: that is, the failings of any area of institutional expertise or authority is enough to feel that institutions and authority in general don't serve the working class. In the case of COVID, this means that a public vaccination request from local, state, or national government may go unfulfilled because of a feeling that institutions haven't helped in the past, so one owes them little now, in the present.

Naturally, not complying with vaccination is not based in only one factor or reason, whether for individuals or across demographics. Multiple factors matter in decisions to get vaccinated or not. Thus, a lack of reciprocity toward institutions, the theory I forward here, will be contextualized alongside other possible reasons in the closing Discussion section of this article. Other potential reasons to not vaccinate include other identities, political affiliation, conspiracy theory or misinformation, a media environment that politicizes all issues, including COVID, and the

challenge and expense of a largely privatized healthcare institution in the U.S., with this final issue connected to distrust of institutions (public and private) in general. However, I'll reserve further discussion of these factors for the close of the article and begin with an exploration of trust, social class, and public institutions.

What is Trust?

Trust is often grounded in safety and security, where trust can be defined as 'a confident relationship with the unknown' (Botsman, 2018, p. vii), or 'an attitude of positive social expectations—expectations that are not well-defined, but of a more 'open-ended' character' (Hoff-Clausen, 2013, p. 427). Trust may operate from the assumption that others will not harm us or take one's interests into account (Govier qtd in Hoff-Clausen, 2013, p. 427). Yet trust, even as security or safety, implies opposites. Thus, trust likely requires distrust (Allen, 2004, p. 143), or at the least a dialectical relationship with distrust, particularly when moving beyond physical or material domains of safety and security to domains of debate, democracy, policy, and ideological preferences toward public problem solving.

Concerning the parameters of trust and distrust, Christopher Gilbert argues that distrust is not for 'securing truth' (2012, p.21) and falsity, but for 'testing the fitness of social life through rhetorical performance and promoting durable, human civic actions' (p.21). That is, distrust allows citizens to examine, to test, the usefulness and limits of ideas—and, I would add, because of institutions' role in public life, this 'fitness test' includes public institutions charged with solving public problems. Gilbert argues that, in trust as a fitness test, one then sees in *distrust*, 'rejection as a means for developing doubt into a critical lifestyle' (p.21), with doubt benefitting the common good due a dialectical process that tests ideas' validity.

Certainly Gilbert's theory of distrust offers benefit, yet one must also recognize that distrust and rejection are clearly not always a pathway to trust, truth, or durable civic action. Rather, distrust can also foment resentment; therein, distrust lives at the core of political partisan *resentment* that divides a populace, making neighbor distrustful of neighbor (Engels, 2015, p. 72). Engels claims such is true in the U.S. of our current Trump/post-Trump era. Public sphere scholar Patricia Roberts-Miller (2017) similarly suggests that our age of demagoguery builds such resentment, as media and political discourse in the public sphere is often based around an 'Us versus Them' rhetorical strategy from left-leaning and right-leaning politicians and media who forego discussion of issues (p.32) and reduce competing views to personal actors that are 'evil' or 'bad' (p.34). And in our current era of resentment by ideological tribalism, resentment and distrust toward public institutions grows, particularly in the Trump era, as evidenced by physical or verbal attacks by Trump and supporters on institutions ranging from the CDC (protests against masks, the villainization of CDC Director Anthony Fauci) to threats against local politicians and school board members, to threats toward democratic election officials and elections (i.e., election denial/Stop the Steal, support for January 6, etc.). Thus, in our era of resentment, forms of distrust may not work in dialectical process to produce trust. Instead, distrust remains lodged, operating only to foment resentment, as opposed to distrust functioning more like 'doubt' as part of a civic-minded dialectic.

Concerning institutional trust, with institutions defined as 'social structures [with] a history of practices, values, and laws that are accepted and used by many people' (Botsman, 2018, p. 40), and with institutional trust, particularly governmental public institutions, being the focus on this article, it is worth pointing out that a socially 'fit' idea can still produce backlash and resentment, building into institutional distrust from some demographics, but not others. For example, Danielle Allen's exploration of trust since the 1960s civil rights era, *Talking to Strangers*, argues that interracial distrust is one identifiable factor at the root of political problems (Allen, 2004, p. xiv), with studies since the 1960s civil rights-era showing declines in trust in 'government and other institutions of authority' (Allen, 2004, p. xv) as race relations and social status were reformulated across American society. Allen, for her part, largely traces the effect of race and the civil rights gains of the 1960s on social trust and institutional distrust, finding that movement toward equality damaged institutional trust among white demographics whose status was threatened. Thus, Allen's historical work proves that public ideas and political movements, even those seen as the natural progress in a democratic society, such as racial equality, are not accepted to all citizens or demographics, and a single idea spurs or spurns trust, depending on the demographic. Allen's work on race ultimately argues that while distrust is a necessary component of conceptual democracy, social and institutional trust are necessary for social stability, yet social status differences and insecurities easily upset social stability and trust in institutions. Such is true in the Trump/Post-Trump era as well, I would suggest.

Trust theorist Hoff-Clausen, not in the context of Allen's reconfigured racial social statuses, but in the context of trusting institutions after the 2008 market crash, analyzed campaigns to rebuild trust in banks. Hoff-Clausen's study found trust is based in the institution's ability to make the public feel entrusted themselves to 'partake in the organizational development of the banks' character and conduct' (2013, p.442). Hoff-Clausen sees the ability to participate or help construct the institution, and be trusted by the institution to partake, as major factors in citizens' institutional trust. Taken together, Allen and Hoff-Clausen demonstrate that core identity differences in demographics (Allen) as well as beliefs in ability to participate in or construct institutions (Hoff-Clausen) inform citizens' levels of institutional trust. In short, identity and ability to participate are two key elements in institutional trust.

Ideas of Institutional Engagement: Met Obligations vs. Participation and Construction

I argue that COVID vaccination interview data by public health specialists and researchers Sreedhar and Gopal suggests that a related, yet novel, feature of institutional trust can be identified. This new feature of institutional trust is based in varying social class demographics' feelings and beliefs that the institutions have fulfilled their obligations (or not) to the citizen. That is, as Allen suggests, identity matters in institutional trust. However, unlike Allen, I focus on social class, not race, as an important factor in institutional trust. And while I agree with Hoff-Clausen that feeling trusted to participate is important in institutional trust, unlike Hoff-Clausen, I argue that COVID vaccination data suggests working-class citizens, or at least elements of the working-class identity, do not feel served by public institutions. Therein, many working-class members may *withhold not only participation, but simple institutional requests such as vaccination because of a belief that institutions have not positively impacted their life.* In short, many U.S. working-class citizens not only feel alienated and unable to participate in institutions, which is a denial of the two-way participatory, constructive relationship between citizen and institution often imagined of public

citizenship, but the working-class demographic's perception may be that institutions in general have not met institutional obligations and have failed to positively impact their lives: therefore, these citizens not only forego two-way participation, but forego one-way requests for action, such as COVID vaccination. Although many factors are operative, as I'll outline in my Discussion section, I argue that the feeling of being underserved by institutions may be one operative factor when deciding to fulfill a public institutional request, such as COVID vaccination.

Therein, I argue that COVID vaccination data I'll present shortly has larger theoretical implications: certain demographics may not wish to reciprocate or comply with institutional requests for the public good, and this lack of compliance with institutional requests is a discernable new feature linked to an increase in anti-institutional actions based in institutional distrust. However, unlike resentment or anti-government movements, COVID vaccination data shows that the sentiment behind inaction is not aggressively anti-institutional. Rather, the sentiment is one of indifference toward institutional requests for public good. And unlike dialectical assertions of the necessity of distrust to produce trust, institutional distrust in the form of lack of reciprocity to institutional request does not inform a dialectic leading to trust in public institutions. The distrust remains distrust and indifference—distrust does not become a tool to test democratic ideas. Distrust and indifference remain lodged in the identity and demographic (not in the democratic process), proving identity-based willingness to reciprocate, or not to reciprocate, a new facet of institutional trust.

COVID Vaccination Data: How Social Class and Economic Inequality Predict Institutional Trust

This article will analyze and theorize from a variety of data, including data and interviews performed over five years on vaccination attitudes in the working class, including a final two years that were the COVID-19 era, by U.S. medical doctor and public health specialist Dr. Anita Sreedhar and Arizona State Professor of Sociology Dr. Anand Gopal. The pair of public health researchers investigated vaccine non-compliance just before and during the COVID era. The researchers' preliminary 2021 public presentation of their findings in the *New York Times* reported that their interviews reveal two trends: that attitudes toward non-vaccination are influenced by 1) how much people believe institutions help them and 2) a greater or lesser sense of a collective democratic endeavor (para. 6) .

I am interested mainly in their former finding, that, to quote the authors insight into why so many working-class people didn't get vaccinated, 'people are unlikely to trust institutions that do little for them' (para. 6). Sreedhar and Gopal's interview excerpts and analysis identify what I will term the *(un)willingness to reciprocate to institutional request*, which I define as a feature of institutional trust; this article will gather Sreedhar and Gopal's interview data and examples as well as other statistical research and scholarship to support my claim that the working class doesn't see institutions as serving them well, and therefore may be less willing to reciprocate to institutional requests. However, this willingness to reciprocate is, from a theoretical standpoint, not beholden to only public institutional requests for COVID vaccination. Rather, I will argue that the degree of belief that institutions positively impact one's life can potentially shape trust and ethos in public institutions in general.

The Why and What of Working-Class COVID Vaccination Resistance

Sreedhar and Gopal's trends from five years of interview and focus group-based research, the last two years overlapping with the COVID era, suggest that social class and differing experiences with institutions are a major predictor of a willingness to comply with institutions (on COVID and non-COVID vaccination), regardless of racial or ethnic background. The pair say of their five years of interviews that:

(vaccine) hesitancy reflects a transformation of our core beliefs about what we owe one another. Over the past four decades, governments have slashed budgets and privatized basic services. This has two important consequences for public health. First, people are unlikely to trust institutions that do little for them. And second, public health is no longer viewed as a collective endeavor […]. People are conditioned to believe they're on their own and responsible only for themselves. (para. 6)

Sreedhar and Gopal's interview trends point to working-class beliefs that institutions do not impact their lives, and individuals are solely responsible for their fate, which further distances individuals from beliefs or reflection that public institutions can (and do) impact their life.

I'd like to immediately validate this basic claim connecting vaccination with trust institutions through statistics. Kaiser Polls COVID vaccination demographics reported by the *New York Times* in May 2021 also support a class-based divide. When looking at vaccination compliance/non-compliance by race, political affiliation, and other factors, statistician Molly Anne Brodie of Kaiser Polls reports that '[n]o matter which of these groups we looked at, we see an education divide' (qtd. in Leonhardt, 2021, para.6).-As the data shows, concerning non-college educated Americans, particularly in rural areas, are comprised of non-college-educated working-class whites—a group and geography typically associated with support for the Republican Party. However, the Kaiser data includes many racial and ethnic marginalized communities across the U.S. not typically associated with the Republican party. Despite these two working-class groups apparent differences (rural/urban, white/minority), it is the education divide, a major feature of class-based identity, that can strongly predict who will get vaccinated and who will not, even as COVID vaccinations were free in the U.S. for the duration of the pandemic.

This education-based finding suggests social class, here defined through educational level, is a major factor in vaccination rates. Similarly, a study led by Harvard Public Health officials in 2021 found that vaccine hesitant citizens fell into three major groups: people who relied on conservative news media for information, people who voted Republican, and, equally telling, those with lower educational levels (Viswanath et al., 2021). Although political affiliation appears in this study as well, the working-class identity defined by educational level again appears as a major factor in complying with institutional requests, leaving one to ask why this might be.

Social Class and Institutional Trust as Illuminated by COVID Vaccination Trends

Public health specialist and primary care physician Dr. Anita Sreedhar and sociologist Anand Gopal interviewed non-vaccinated citizens in New York City's South Bronx to distill reasons for vaccine hesitancy/non-compliance. The pair report that:

commentators have chalked up vaccine distrust to everything from online misinformation campaigns, to our tribal political culture, to a fear of needles. Race has been highlighted in particular. […] Dr. Anthony Fauci pointed to the long shadow of racism on our country's medical institutions, like the notorious Tuskegee syphilis trials, while others emphasized the negative experiences of African Americans and Latinos in the examination room. (2021, para. 7)

Although I will take up these larger issues in the Discussion section of this article, Sreedhar and Gopal contextualize the influence of race, saying '[t]hese views are not wrong,' but there is 'a more complicated picture' (para. 7) as, by December 2021, vaccination rates between black and white Americans 'were almost identical' (para 8.). Sreedhar and Gopal's COVID vaccination compliance data reveal that, similar to the findings of Kaiser Polls, it is college education, one determinant of social class identity, that is a reliable predictor of which Americans will get vaccinated for COVID. Sreedhar and Gopal further point beyond their own interviews, data, and trends to statistical comparisons of working-class neighborhoods from varying regions of the U.S. in both predominantly white and predominantly Black working-class neighborhoods, with little difference in vaccination rates in these working-class neighborhoods, despite large differences in racial make-up. Once again, social class seems to matter greatly in deciding to comply with the institutional request to get vaccinated. The researchers also point out that political party affiliation is often a large predictor of vaccination, with Republicans getting vaccinated at lower rates. However, when looking at the statistics across multiple demographic possibilities, Sreedhar and Gopal state that 'this gap also disappears when accounting for income and education. It turns out that the real vaccination divide is class' (para. 9)—i.e., college-educated Republicans are getting vaccinated at a rate relative to college-educated Democrats. Therein, political identity or affiliation is not as significant as assumed. If political identity mattered, one would expect to see a large difference in vaccination rates between Republicans and Democrats, regardless of educational level. Instead, education level was a decisive factor: in Sreedhar and Gopal's findings, working-class members are going unvaccinated at similar rates regardless political affiliation.

However, statistics here can only explain what is happening, not why a phenomenon is happening. Sreedhar and Gopal report that, after multiple interviews with citizens in working-class and poverty-stricken South Bronx neighborhoods, an explanatory pattern emerged. What follows are representative interview statements Sreedhar and Gopal offer from multiracial working-class New Yorkers who refused COVID vaccination. Note the major trend in the statements: a distrust or unwillingness to get vaccinated due to a sense that institutions are not helpful and have not positively impacted interviewees' fortunes. Also note in some comments the sense that institutions do serve some demographics (i.e., the middle-class and above), but not working-class and low SES interviewees' own demographic(s):

- 'When you're in a high tax bracket, the government protects you. So why wouldn't you trust a government that protects you?' –Amazon worker who refused vaccination. (para. 20)
- 'People are thinking, 'if the government isn't going to do anything for us, then why should we participate in vaccines?'' –tenant association president in South Bronx. (para. 11)

- ‘They are over here shoving money at us [to get vaccinated], and I’m asking, why are you so eager, when you don’t give us money for anything else?’ –woman defined only as suspicious. (para. 20)
- ‘I’m not going to listen to what the government says.’ --Robert Steed, Waffle House Employee who later died of COVID. (para. 2)

Sreedhar and Gopal, who began studying anti-vaccination attitudes pre-COVID, but above capture COVID-era vaccination beliefs, report that ‘for the past five years, we’ve conducted surveys and focus groups […] to better understand vaccine avoidance. We’ve found that people who reject vaccines are not necessarily less scientifically literate or less well informed that those who don’t’ (para. 5). Rather, the issue is feelings of abandonment by institutions: ‘[m]ost of the people we interviewed in the Bronx say they are skeptical of the institutions that claim to serve the poor but in fact have abandoned them’ (Sreedhar and Gopal, 2021, para. 20). This feeling of abandonment by institutions, or suspicion and skepticism of institutions, by working class and low SES demographics is underscored by other vaccine research as well.

Sociologist Jennifer A. Reich’s *Calling the Shots* reports of not adult COVID vaccination hesitancy, but parent-to-child anti-vaxx movements, that there are two unvaccinated groups, which, I’ll underscore of Reich’s research, are defined by social class. Reich’s findings on anti-vaxxers and social class reinforces working-class and low SES demographics’ abandonment by institutions versus middle-class privilege. Reich finds of working-class families, ‘On one side, there are the children who are undervaccinated because they lack consistent access to medical care’ (2018, p.14). This first phenomenon demonstrates that working-class children can be unintentionally under-vaxxed due to institutional failure toward working-class and low SES families, and I would argue that this unintentional under-vaxxing of children from working-class families also empirically reinforces the skeptical beliefs of the working class and poor toward institutions.

Yet, as Reich points out, when pockets of middle-class and upper-middle parents chose not to vaccinate their children (i.e., anti-vaxxers), it is for reasons of privilege, not lack of access. Reich explains that the average intentional anti-vaxx parent has a college education and a household income of over $75,000 a year. ‘What this means is that the choice to opt out of vaccines is almost exclusively made by families with the most resources and represents a fairly privileged parenting practice’ (p.15). Despite anti-vaxx parents’ slightly different scenario for not vaccinating their children compared to working-class families, or when comparing middle-class, anti-vaxxer privilege to working-class adult COVID non-vaxxers who are not the recipients of privilege, we see that middle-class *privilege* plays a large role for middle-class intentional anti-vaxxers, while unintentional lack of access to medical care, i.e., *institutional failure*, is the main reason why working-class and low SES children go under-vaccinated, and, as the interview statements above attest to, institutional failure (i.e., feelings of abandonment) is the main reason working-class adults did not vaccinate in the Bronx.

Thus, the previously presented COVID vaccination data and interview statements underscore working-class beliefs that institutions do not benefit the working class, but may benefit the middle class. This belief and reality in the COVID data are echoed in sociologist Reich’s anti-vaxx research, where working-class kids go unvaccinated due to lack of resources and working-class

adults learn not to trust institutions who have failed the simple task of providing access to medical services for them or their family. Moreover, when middle-class children go unvaccinated, it is due to privilege, not lack of access or resources, with the privileged middle-class foregoing available resources for reasons of personal conviction and agency. This middle-class access to resources, as well as the privilege of foregoing of available resources, likely reifies the working-class sentiment that the middle-class benefits more from institutions than the working-class do.

Social Class, Distrust, and Anti-Institutional Sentiment in Other Public Arenas

This decently circulated working-class belief, reified by COVID, that institutions do not impact working-class citizens lives, or that institutions are only supportive of some social class demographics, such as the middle-class and above, prove to be part of a similar pattern of working-class institutional distrust captured just several years ago in working-class ethnographies published during the rise of Donald Trump. Political scientist Justin Gest, whose 2016 ethnographic work captures working-class distrust in institutions as a reason that the white working class supported Trump, offers a representative sample of institutional distrust. An interviewee of Gest's states, 'The thing I like about Trump is that both sides hate him' (Gest, 2016, p. 193), a statement showing that the (white) working class of Trump may prefer no affiliation with traditional political parties at all, with the statement displaying distrust of the political institution maintained by both political parties.

Joan C. Williams, in *White Working Class: Overcoming Cluelessness in America*, similarly demonstrates that middle-class professionals who run America's various public (and private) institutions are held in low regard or distrusted by the working class, creating a resistant attitude toward institutions. Williams recounts the working-class attitudes toward a great number of institutions from her interviews and research, such as attitudes toward college-educated professionals, where she found that:

[p]rofessionals aren't necessarily admired. Many are seen as suspect. Managers are seen as college kids 'who don't know shit about how to do anything, but are full of ideas about how I have do my job.' (2017, p.25)

Williams continues with a brief review defining working-class distrust toward institutions, touching on common middle-class professions that run public institutions. Williams continues,

Barbara Ehrenreich recalled in 1990 that her blue-collar dad 'could not say the word *doctor* without the virtual prefix *quack*. Lawyers were *shysters* … and professors were without exception *phonies*.' Sociologist Annette Lareau also found mistrust of doctors and other health professionals. She also found resentment against teachers by working-class parents, who perceived their children's educators as condescending and unhelpful. (2017, p.25-26)

Williams' argument is parallel to my own argument that working-class citizens believe that institutions do not benefit them as much as the middle class. Williams points out that working-class distrust and animosity are in large part due to the constant contact between the working class and middle class, with the middle class consistently managing institutions, therein having the privilege and power to correct, judge, and manage the working class. For the working class,

feelings of judgement, insecurity, and condescension beget distrust. Thus, across a variety of institutional functions (management, education, law, medicine, etc.), social class in the United States is a major influence on institutional trust, with working-class citizens showing lower levels of institutional trust toward a variety of institutions, be it the two-party political system of U.S. government, the high school educator, those in law, or the doctor or dentist.

This feeling of distance, unhelpfulness, distrust, or condescension from the middle-class and its institutions is echoed in Sreedhar and Gopal's vaccination non-compliance data and my thesis: working-class citizens feel less obligated to reciprocate because of their perception and lived reality that their lives and concerns are not addressed by institutions: institutions' values and ways of knowing align with the middle-class demographic who manage, understand, and are empowered by these very same institutions.

Social Class, Everyday Institutional Authority, and Institutional Trust

Because the working-class social identity and its unique formulation of institutional trust are at the core of my argument, I'd like to delve farther into the literature on working-class relationships with institutions to illustrate that the COVID data insights are well supported by similar past research on working-class institutional beliefs and practices, yet COVID reveals a new wrinkle in working-class trust.

The pioneering ethnographic research of educational sociologist Annette Lareau (2003) captures how social class, regardless of race, is a large factor in citizens' perceptions and interactions with institutions. After Lareau and her graduate students were embedded in numerous homes of parents with K-12 aged children, Lareau found that middle-class parenting strategies focused on what she terms *concerted cultivation*, which is defined by the practice of parents negotiating with institutions on behalf of their children, but also encouraging children to negotiate with themselves (parents) as well as institutional adults (coaches, teachers, doctors, etc.). Lareau points out that middle-class parents, regardless of race and ethnicity, consistently felt empowered or entitled to negotiate with institutions and their figures (teachers, principals, doctors, etc.) on behalf of themselves and their children.

Middle-class mothers were often very interventionist, assertively intervening into situations. Sometimes parents were successful. Sometimes they were not. But in the process, they directly taught their children how to 'not take no for an answer' and put pressure on persons in positions of power in institutions to accommodate their needs. (p.163)

This sense of entitlement illustrates a very different relationship with the institution—one in which the institution is pliable, is viewed as responsive to request, is viewed as a place of negotiation, a place where citizens' requests are heard, often granted, and (middle-class) citizens' therein benefit from the institution. This is, of course, much different than the working-class attitudes captured in the COVID interview data and other ethnographic scholarship.

To wit, Lareau's study also recorded class-based patterns where working-class families held opposite views or practices to the middle-class views and practices above. Working-class parents felt they could not negotiate with authority figures, but must simply submit to an educational

institution's requests or judgements of their children's academic progress, personal behavior, or self- development. Lareau captures attitudes toward educational institutions, saying working-class parents 'experienced a sense of distance and distrust, of exclusion and risk, with schools' (p.227). Lareau also differentiates how social class informed how families approached something as routine as doctor's visits with different levels of trust (p.158). These findings suggest that middle-class relationships with institutions are defined by negotiation, citizen empowerment, and greater levels of trust in the institution (likely through entitlement to shape the institutional situation). Opposedly, working-class attitudes and language are often limited and controlled by middle-class standards (Attfield, 2016, p. 45), producing feelings of distrust, judgement, anger, and, to use Williams's wording from above, 'condescension.'

The middle class's more positive, empowered, negotiation-based relationship with educational institutions helps replicate a basic finding of the COVID compliance and non-compliance differences between middle-class and working-class citizens: that is, the COVID studies on institutional trust similarly underscore a *felt* difference and belief from working-class interviewees that middle-class, upper-middle class, and beyond are the beneficiaries of institutions, and that the working class does not benefit from institutions. My earlier presented public health COVID data as well as Lareau's educational research point toward this same conclusion, therein constructing a more general theory of social class and institutional trust, but with COVID interview data demonstrating a *lack of reciprocity to institutional request*, (getting vaccinated) as the outcome.

Distance and the Changing Function of 'Other Groups' in Working-Class Attitudes and Rhetoric

Working-class scholarship points to a variety of ways in which the working class feels *distant* from public institutions. Lareau's findings on working-class attitudes toward institutions overlap with working class attitudes on COVID vaccination, in that working-class citizens sometimes felt their middle-class peers received the benefits of the institution while they, the working class, did not, such as the Amazon worker, quoted previously, who acknowledged that the government 'protects you' if you are in a 'higher tax bracket.' However, concerning how *distance* from an institution is created, we see a variety of responses to create distance; Lareau captures anger and submission to authority in her research in education-based institutions, while COVID vaccination from working-class citizens demonstrates a different response of *distance*: non-compliance.

This working-class *non-compliance* initially seems the polar opposite of the *submission* to institutional authorities identified in Lareau's educational study. After all, submission to an institution is the exact opposite of not complying. However, there is similarity at the core of these different reactions to institutions: resistance and lack of participation motivate both non-compliance and submission. In educational settings, parents are required to conform to public school's basic requests by law, and the teacher or principal is an intimate, face-to-face (perceived) authority. In short, school is not voluntary and is immediately present through representative human agents—one must show up, and submit, to face-to-face authority, or face punishment—so one submits, but with anger, shame, and distrust.

The COVID vaccine request, however, is voluntary, and distant, a request made simultaneously to millions, with no face-to-face enforcement, therein allowing *non-compliance* as a working-class

option, rather than submission. Yet submission that begets anger and non-compliance are similar in kind—both are resistance to or lack of participation in the institution and its requests. Submission begetting anger or shame and non-compliance are two sides of the same coin: both stem from the working-class belief that institutions do not help or serve the working class adequately. Both submission (with attendant anger at institution) and non-compliance are responses of *distance* from the institution.

Even when vaccine compliance is mandated through employers of the working class, resistance is an option: one poll cited in October 2021 by the University of Minnesota's *Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy (CIDRAP)* demonstrates that, at the time, 30% of the unvaccinated in the trucking industry would quit if forced to vaccinate (Soucheray, 2021, para. 9). Also, New York police unions were strongly supportive of officers who wished to forego vaccination and test weekly instead (Soucheray para. 3), and organizations such as the National Retail Federation and American Trucking Association were wary to implement President Biden's mandate of mandatory vaccination for businesses of 100 employees or more. These organizations warned President Biden that employees may protest or refuse vaccination, endangering the supply chain (Soucheray, 2021, para. 7). Overall, *CIDRAP* notes that employee mandates do seem to increase vaccination (Soucheray, 2021, para. 9) in the working-class groups the article covers, even as the article's examples above outline resistance or union and organizational knowledge of working-class resistance.

Returning to the concept of distance from institutions, *distance* is certainly not the only feature of institutional distrust in working class rhetorical scholarship. Other scholarship parallels my claims that a belief in the level of institutional aid compared to other social groups is crucial in defining institutional trust. In my 2018 analysis of Donald Trump's rhetoric, I argue that a working-class ethos is often based in anti-institutional rhetoric that frames institutions as helping other groups, but not the working class (127). I argue that the Trump era revealed this facet of a working-class ethos, wherein anti-institutional rhetoric in general becomes a rhetorical commonplace for Trump, but also that Trump's rhetoric reifies the idea that non-whites, in particular, immigrants, benefit from government protections that Trump's white working-class did not receive (Kohn, 2018, p.126). Thus, the shadow syllogism behind much working-class distrust in institutions is based in the working class not receiving benefits from institutions that other groups receive (regardless of who the 'other' groups are). Sometimes the 'other' benefitting from institutions is the middle class, as with the COVID data. Or sometimes the 'other' are immigrants, as in Trump's rhetoric (Kohn, 2018, p. 126).

Thus, a subtheme in working-class institutional distrust is that other groups benefit from public institutions, but the working class does not. This theme may be a rhetorical commonplace, used to gin up anger, as with Trump's rhetoric. However, as I've argued, 'others benefiting' is not simply a convenient (Trumpian) commonplace, but is an often held working-class belief about institutions, as evidenced in the COVID non-compliance interviews, as well as multiple working-class ethnographies from Gest (2016), Lareau (2003), and my rhetorical scholarship (Kohn, 2018).

While my work on Trump reveals how non-white identity is scapegoated in anti-institutional rhetoric for Trump's white working-class audiences in the U.S., the COVID data, especially Sreedhar and Gopal's data from multiracial working-class residents of the Bronx, does not suggest

this racial component at all. Rather, Sreedhar and Gopal's COVID data illustrates that economic inequality and a sense that institutions haven't helped one personally are the major factors in vaccine non-compliance for the working class, regardless of race or ethnicity. Consequently, we see that strong blame is not cast outward, toward other groups, in the COVID data: rather, there is only a recognition, but not high resentment, that some class-based groups (the middle class and above) seem to benefit more from institutions. Moreover, the strongest reasons for not complying with vaccine requests are not due to blame or anger toward other demographics or sub-groups (i.e., immigrants) that I identified in Trump's working-class appeals (Kohn, 2018); rather, reasons for non-compliance in the COVID interviews are centered by a basic feeling of 'Why should I comply? What has the institution or government ever done for me?'

To conclude this subtheme, COVID non-compliance reveals that blaming out-groups is not always a major factor in anti-institutional rhetoric or institutional trust, even as COVID interviews of working-class citizens confirm the working class's recognition or belief that some out-groups benefit more than others from institutions. In general, we can opine that working-class attitudes toward institutions are formed by an awareness of other groups benefiting from institutions more, but both the out-group chosen, as well as the amount of blame, will differ depending on the issue (COVID v. immigration, for example) as well as the rhetorical purpose (non-compliance with public health request v. Trumpian political rhetoric). Yet it is worth noting that, despite differences in situation, *an awareness of other groups benefiting more than the working class from institutions* is a consistent factor in institutional trust, with these beliefs materially validated by various areas of working-class scholarship.

Economic Inequality, Decreasing Institutional Trust, and How They Affect the Public Imaginary

In the COVID study, Sreedhar and Gopal argue that one prominent reason for the working-class belief that institutions do not benefit the working-class and those of low SES is because of the more challenging life circumstances produced by the U.S.'s large economic inequality (poverty, health problems, poorer education, declining neighborhoods, less opportunity, etc.) found in working-class neighborhoods that, in the eyes of working-class citizens (and those below working class), go unaddressed by institutions. As Sreedhar and Gopal's research found, working class life has much larger worries or concerns than vaccination. Unsafe neighborhoods, lack of permanent employment, low wages, and other basic social and economic risks took larger precedent than COVID. Sreedhar and Gopal summarize their findings thus:

For poorer and working-class people, though, the calculus is different: COVID-19 is only one of multiple grave threats. In the South Bronx, one man who works two jobs shared that he navigates around drug dealers, hostile police, and shootings: 'I don't want my kids to see what I've seen,' he said. Another man lost his job during the pandemic and slipped back into addiction. 'Most of my friends are dead or in jail,' he said. Neither man plans to get vaccinated. Their hesitancy is not irrational: When viewed in the context of the other threats they face, Covid no longer seems uniquely scary. (para. 19)

In short, COVID appears less risky compared to other social and economic risks in the daily lives of the working class and low SES demographic in this urban area. And, as the previous

representative quotes from unvaccinated working-class citizens suggest, there is not belligerent anger directed at other groups, or even the institutions. Rather, there is indifference to the institutions, their visions and issues, and their definitions of what constitutes risk (i.e., COVID). For working-class citizens and below, the daily challenges of economic inequality are darker and more dangerous than being unvaccinated.

Sreedhar and Gopal connect COVID non-compliance in the working class and low SES groups to the U.S.'s high economic inequality. As both they and I argue, and as statistical and social epidemiological analyses consistently show, economic inequality correlates strongly with a lack of social trust (Rothstein and Uslaner, 2005, p. 41; Wilkinson and Pickett, 2019, p. 94), making economic inequality a prominent factor in social-class-based citizen assessments of trust in general, and, by extension, of finding institutions unhelpful or unbeneficial. As renowned social epidemiologists Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett report, 'The effects of [economic] inequality on social cohesion, segregation, and trust are well known; many separate studies have shown that increased inequality erodes trust' (2019, p.94). This erosion happens through a variety of factors, including the distressing psychological effects of persistent status insecurity and increased capitalistic competition, but also through the great number of obstacles that economic inequality creates, hampering well-being and social mobility (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2019, p. 64-65).

Political scientist and ethnographer Gest summarizes his similar findings, but with a more direct connection between economic inequality and working-class trust in institutions. Gest reports on the

drastic economic transformation and demographic change, which has left many people consumed by their collective and individual falls from grace. Unable to cope with the trauma from the twin collapses of commercial and social life, the [working class] are also subject to governments disconnected from their preferences, and their own incapacity to do much about this. (2016, p.116)

Here, again, in Gest's ethnography, much as we saw in Wilkinson and Pickett's statistic-driven findings, we see how economic inequality erodes social trust in general and fuels the working-class belief that governments and institutions do not represent or understand working-class needs, nor do institutions greatly benefit the working class.

To sum, the great economic inequality in the U.S. creates hard lives for those in the working class and below, and they feel that institutions are not benefitting them by lessening the burdens of inequality. Based in the current setting of the U.S's broad economic inequality compared to other market democracies (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2019, p. 3), we might reasonably deduce that any issue involving institutional trust can, in theory, be influenced by working-class or low SES citizens' very real economic inequality. Thus, perpetually high economic inequality will make working-class and other low SES citizens lowly motivated to reciprocate or comply with institutional requests in general.

Economic Inequality, Collective Memory, and Institutional Trust

The COVID data on working-class non-compliance provides a variety of general grievances that working-class citizens remembered when dismissing institutions as helpful or having an impact on

their life. If viewed as selective memory, this canny ability of citizens to remember—or personally construct a narrative of—institutional failure is a problem. It goes without saying that institutions cannot improve all aspects of a citizen's life or solve all a citizen's problems—especially when one considers that problems are as much defined by personal perception as by material reality. In short, the dissatisfactions or trials of life do not necessarily make one a victim or a recipient of lackluster institutions. Yet the human mind is one that easily assigns individual and collective victimage and seeks to blame. Also, the human mind, individually and collectively, easily scapegoats to save face, to preserve integrity, to protect identity and belonging, and to justify and rationalize individual and collective feelings. Thus, saving face and a need to blame seem to doom institutions, framing institutions as negative or ineffective forces in many working-class people's lives, especially in the U.S.'s current era of high economic inequality and low social mobility.

However, the COVID data reveals a major cause of the stoking of the collective memory toward victimage: the very real American problem of economic inequality over the last several decades. The causes, effects, and process of economic inequality, as well as the pressure that inequality puts on institutions, is well documented. That is, the hard times of the working class is not all in their imagination. Social epidemiologists Wilkinson and Pickett (2019) have been documenting for twenty years the effects of economic inequality across the spectrum of market democracies. Democracies of greatest inequality (i.e., USA, UK, Singapore) are defined by the wealthiest 20% having 6-8 times as much wealth as the lowest 20%, while more equal market democracies (Denmark, Japan, for example) show the wealthiest 20% having just 3-4 times as much wealth as the lowest 20%. As Wilkinson and Pickett have statistically illustrated over twenty years of research, the effects of high economic inequality (for example, USA) cause a substantial comparative increase in a range of social problems, including poverty, lack of educational opportunity, violence and crime, mental illness, decreased life span, greater infant mortality rate, lower social mobility, and less trust in fellow citizens, to name a few.

Many of these social problems identified by Wilkinson and Pickett aggrieve the working class much more than their middle-class counterparts. Although Wilkinson and Pickett's data consistently demonstrates that the American middle-class or upper-middle class will still suffer a greater amount of these social problems than their middle or upper-middle counterparts in more economically equal countries (ex: Japan, Denmark), the American working class, living in a market democracy with the greatest economic inequality and the highest level of social and medical problems linked to economic inequality, will suffer these problems to a greater extent than their in-nation middle-class peers (Wilkinson and Picket, 2019, p. 6) as well as their out-of-nation working class counterparts (ex: Japan, Denmark) (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2019, p. 5-6).

Thus, the American working-class belief in institutions not meeting expectations is not simply an issue of seeing inevitable dissatisfactions of working-class status or identity; rather, the American working class indeed materially suffers the litany of social problems identified by Wilkinson and Pickett to a greater extent than any other group in a market democracy on our globe. Herein, what initially seems to be the working-class's too easy application of the 'Why should I comply? What has the institution ever done for me?' commonplace becomes more understandable when viewed through the litany and degree of social problems that the American working class in particular faces in their daily existence compared to not only the American middle-class, but working-class citizens in democracies with less economic inequality and less social problems to overcome. With

public institutions being the only identifiable face for public good and human well-being across economic, social, and cultural sectors, public institutions receive the individual and collective blame for the economic, social, and cultural fallout of the USA's great economic inequality.

Discussion: Institutional Distrust Alongside Economics, Misinformation, and Politics

I'd like to close by discussing other reasons working-class citizens may not vaccinate. Clearly my theory of an unwillingness to reciprocate to institutional requests is only one factor to not vaccinate. Many factors or reasons exist external to social class identity. No single reason or factor may be enough to persuade: individuals make decisions based upon a constellation of identities and rationale. For a full closing discussion and to address potential counterarguments, I'd like to now turn to several other reasons or factors suggested by my kind reviewers that help narrow, define, and contextualize my own suggestion of a working-class *lack of reciprocity* toward institutions.

First, I'd like to discuss distrust of private institutions, particularly, for-profit medical institutions. I wholly accept that non-vaccination, because it is medical, may be based in distrust specifically of privatized, for-profit medical institutions that citizens, working-class citizens in particular, feel are overcharging them and underserving them. I previously brought up evidence of this phenomenon when mentioning Reich's research that poorer neighborhoods struggled to get access to care and vaccination, while middle-class parents refused vaccination for reasons of privilege, not access. A lack of access begets anger and distrust based upon one's relative economic and social inequality: privilege may perhaps also create these feelings of anger and distrust, but privilege suggests equality, service from institutions, and the power to negotiate with institutions. These phenomena are not common in the working-class scholarship I presented earlier.

In a more targeted analysis of social class (measured as annual income) and medical institutions, Uwe Reinhardt states in 2019's *Priced Out: The Economic and Ethical Costs of U.S. Health Care*, 'How affordable is U.S. health care? The high cost of health care in the United States threatens inexorably to price kindness out of the souls of an otherwise kind people' (p.41). Reinhardt evidences his argument with data and graphs clearly demonstrating that 'the private health insurance sector has not been able to control the growth of health spending any better than has the public sector' (p.43). Thus, not only public, but also private institutions, do not guard the working class against unaffordable medical costs. Reinhardt directly connects this phenomenon to distribution of wealth in the U.S. He states that

for a U.S. family of four covered by an employment-based PPO contract, about half of the median income of $56,000 would be claimed by health care alone if that family had to cover the annual health spending of $27,000 (2017) from its own budget. (p.43)

Even those with the median U.S. income, $56,000, would struggle to afford medical care alongside other necessities. To frame this data in working-class terms, Reinhardt presents data showing that almost a third of U.S. households had an annual income of $35,000 or less, yet could expect the average of $27,000 of annual health spending. Clearly the third of U.S. families at or below $35,000 (working-class and below) could not afford health care and would often go without, and/or simply hold a grudge or distrust against a private health system that maximizes profit over people.

Despite being a separate phenomenon, this distrust or grudge against privatized medical institutions coheres with my general theory of distrust toward public institutions, especially when one considers that the medical system in the U.S. is often an indiscernible mixture of (sometimes behind the scenes) government funding and for-profit enterprise. Moreover, individuals, in their everyday anger, may not discriminate between public and private institutions when assessing blame or feeling left behind. In short, the difference between the local public school and the local private hospital is not so apparent when one simply feels locked out by authority and institutions, by teachers and doctors, alike. There is a motivational difference however, from my own theory based in non-reciprocity: as Reinhardt's data shows, the working class may be priced out of vaccination in general, even if not COVID vaccination, which was free for most of the COVID era. Being priced out is an economic reason, whereas lack of reciprocity based in emotions and identity is a social psychological phenomenon. Despite this motivational difference, feeling unserved by institutions lies at the core of both economic and social psychological motivations.

Next, I'd like to address the role of media and political affiliation. The high-profile media politicization of COVID and vaccination (for viewership dollars), politicians' politicization of COVID (to appeal to voters), and the circulation of misinformation for both political and apolitical reasons are also potential influences in vaccination and trust in institutions. During the COVID era, the circulation of (and combatting of) misinformation or disinformation on COVID and vaccines were industries in themselves, be it through high-profile media companies such as Fox News and other mainly conservative media, or any number of mid-level podcasts or internet websites and ezines of varying ideology.

This misinformation was also distributed from the highest levels of government during the Trump era and, in much of the U.S., was sometimes parroted at state and local government by public officials. Most notable was the spread of scientifically unproven treatments announced from the White House itself during the Trump presidency, including fanciful cures such as Ivermectin and Trump's own confusing April 2020 hypothetical suggestions of injecting disinfectant into oneself or using UV light to cure COVID (BBC News). Moreover, Trump promoted a great amount of distrust toward the CDC and medical community who were promoting safe vaccines, making CDC Director Anthony Fauci his villainous foil for dramatic purpose. Perhaps the overall effect of this misinformation and drama is best evidenced by my earlier inclusion of Viswanath et al., (2021) who found that educational level, a factor of social class, was not the only influence on the unvaccinated. Other influences were overtly political: two other groups—viewers of conservative media and conservative voters—were less likely to be vaccinated. This suggests a politically motivated reason or identity external to social class that must also be included as a factor or reason to not vaccinate.

Concerning the influence of media, results of misinformation are revealed to have several effects in our current hyper-media age: Misinformation and disinformation 1) cause uncertainty; 2) allow citizens and politicians to self-select information from a private or public institutional source that accords to their viewpoint; 3) create a political and informational environment devoid of agreed upon facts (O'Connor and Weatherall, 2019, pp. 111, 145). For example, misinformation about the horse medicine ivermectin was, at best, based on decontextualized information about ivermectin killing COVID in a clinical setting, but with doses so high that humans would be

harmed (Chiu, 2022). Secondly, numerous for-profit companies touted cures for COVID with, for example, hydroxychloroquine, despite no peer review, but with large medical conferences and reports offering to educate medical professionals, especially with an early gap in peer-reviewed knowledge on treating COVID (Krans, 2022).

Each of the above effects of misinformation decreases trust in traditional institutions—while also offering opportunities to self-select information for greater feelings of agency. I would argue that the purveyors of misinformation can be framed as highly motivated alternative institutions that have none of the responsibilities that public institutions do. These alternative institutions, often media conglomerates and other for-profit entities, become benefactors, often with vested financial interests (Oreskes and Conway, 2011, pp. 249-250) counter to notions of the public good traditionally guarded by public institutions. Concerning the relationship of misinformation to working class trust, agency, and reciprocity, I would suggest that media or alternative institutions offering misinformation, sadly, can offer greater feelings of agency compared to public institutions that have 'top down' functions, such as the U.S. government's lockdown and vaccination requests and requirements during COVID. Thus, media, misinformation, and political identity, factors not related to social class, strongly influence decision making.

A third potential reason to not vaccinate is because of vaccination mandates being interpreted as an impingement of personal freedom, as well as the potential hardships of job loss and economic struggles due to lockdown measures. Concerning vaccination as an impingement on personal freedom, we can view this as an apolitical matter manifesting as belief and feeling—and the curtailing of one's agency. However, considering impingement on freedom from a political perspective, Viswanath et al. (2021) capture that viewers of conservative media and conservative voters were more likely to not vaccinate; this makes sense, as, apart from misinformation or disinformation circulated by conservative media, conservative media often offered conservative listeners/voters a narrative of the government's mask mandate and vaccination policy impinging on constitutional freedoms. These legitimate concerns about freedom, as well as media narratives, clearly affect decision making in ways different than my own theory of lack of reciprocity to institutions.

Related to protecting one's democratic freedoms, mainly toward responsibility for one's own health and economic opportunity, job loss for the working class due to a governmental-mandated lockdown could be perceived of as a bigger threat than COVID itself. This is due to the enduring financial struggles placed upon the individual, regardless of whether they contract COVID or not. This line of thought is similar to the sentiment found in interviews from South Bronx residents, where COVID was not seen as a threat larger than other threats. Recall that interviewees mentioned violence, drugs, and lack of opportunity as their immediate concerns outranking COVID: job loss clearly restricts one's economic opportunity and threatens one's survival. Thus, government mandates to close working-class job sites in the COVID era, especially in the service industry (restaurants, hotels, travel, retail, etc.), seem another reason that members of the working class may hold government policy and its public institutions responsible for creating high-level working-class risks (job loss) simply to prevent lower probability risks (contracting and/or major illness from COVID).

Finally, we need to acknowledge that other identities separate from social class influence the decision to vaccinate, or trust institutions in general. While Sreedhar and Gopal saw little influence of political affiliation in their study, Viswanath et al. (2021) found political affiliation or ideological messaging could also influence the decision to not vaccinate. Concerning other high-profile identities, such as race and ethnicity, these did not appear to be a factor in the Kaiser Polls I cited earlier: Black and white Americans vaccinated at relatively the same rates across social classes. However, the picture is more complicated than the Kaiser Poll data illustrates. Concerning race as a factor, a January 2022 publication found that Black Americans have greater decreases in vaccine hesitancy than White Americans since December 2020, mainly because of a belief to keep their communities safe (Padamsee, Bond, and Dixon 2022), a finding not pointing directly to social class, but race, as an influential identity. And while much is made of the Tuskegee experiment on Black Americans trust in institutions, a 2005 study found specifically that Black Americans' institutional distrust of the medical system did not correlate with knowledge of the Tuskegee experiment, but correlated more with personal and historical experiences (Brandon, Isaac, LaVeist, 2005). These results do point to the equal importance of racial demographics' general history with institutions, a claim not so different than my own, although here the attitude toward institutions is based in racial identity, not class identity.

Closing: On Identity, Distrust, and Dwelling

I have argued for an element of institutional trust that demonstrates that some groups are aware, or believe, or both, that they receive less benefit from institutions. Institutional trust here functions similar to Michael J. Hyde's definition of ethos, of trust, as 'dwelling places' where people can 'know together' (2004, p.1), even if the phenomenon I have identified as working-class *dwelling* reveals a habitus based in potential distrust or dismissal of the public institutions. Why is such distrust toward institutions important to point out? I might turn to Dana L. Cloud's *Reality Bites* here, where Cloud argues that the most sophisticated 'expression of the situation of the oppressed cannot sweep away the material power relations […] that are the source of the oppression' (2018, p.50). That is, despite many kind words and gestures of institutions, even free vaccination for COVID, the knowledge of oppression and disempowerment on social, cultural, and economic fronts is the bedrock for the working-class identity and reality in the USA, and even institutional 'expressions,' rhetorical or material, may struggle to overcome these gritty realities based in American inequality and working-class life.

And what of non-compliance as a form of working-class agency in response to this oppression? Non-compliance to institutional requests such as vaccination can be viewed as a form of working-class agency alongside, for example, working-class public rhetorics of anger and coarseness as a form of agency (Attfield, 2016, p. 45). A review of working-class scholarship published as recently as 2021 demonstrates that the working class typically have lower levels of trust in general due to having less agency or control over their lives, having less resources to lose, or having less treatment of respect and kindness in their experience (Quiang, Lee, Han, 2021). Keeping in mind the lack of agency and control in working-class life, not fulfilling an institutional request can be viewed as a type of agency, although limited. However, the testimonies recorded by Sreedhar and Gopal do not seem to based in a sense that working-class citizens are somehow gaining control, resources, or respect by refusing to get vaccinated. Simply put, working-class citizens who pass up vaccination appear to not wish to reciprocate to institutions they feel haven't helped them, and

their daily working-class existence contains larger challenges than COVID. This is not agency, but indifference. To the working-class mindset, what the working class needs is not offered through COVID policies.

In the end, theories of working-class trust, whether my own theory of *lack of reciprocity*—'what has the government done for me lately?' or related theories of working-class institutional relationships, can highlight why the working-class does not always support, or feels distant from, institutions whose purpose it is to help them. Moreover, as briefly touched on at moments in this article, more conventional (and potentially demeaning) explanations for non-vaccination, such as misinformation or lack of scientific literacy, do not fully explain working-class non-vaccination rates. Something else is going on, and my theory of indifference and non-compliance as part of working-class (dis)trust in institutions helps explain how the working class experiences institutions, relates to institutions, recognizes or believes other groups are better served by institutions, and do not greatly value public policies that address only low-level needs or risks of the working class.

Armed with this knowledge of why the working class feels institutions are failing them or are not trustworthy or worth participating in, institutions may better address working class beliefs, feelings, and responses to rebuild the fracturing ties between the working class and public institutions.

Author Bio

Liberty Kohn is an Associate Professor of English at Winona State University in Winona, Minnesota. His research interests are public and technical writing, genre theory, and pedagogy. His scholarship has appeared in the edited collections *Class in the Composition Classroom* and *Technology in the Literature Classroom* as well as journals such as the *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication, Composition Forum, Journal of Interdisciplinary Humanities, Journal of Language Literacy and Education, Journal of Working-Class Studies, Techno culture*, and more.

He also serves as Writing Center Director, founded Winona State's Writing Across the Curriculum program, and chaired the university's faculty development program. He is currently completing a book project entitled Mapping Publics that focuses on sustainability and market rhetorics in the public sphere. Liberty is also a first-generation, working class student from Southern Wisconsin.

Bibliography

Allen, Danielle S. *Talking to Strangers: Anxieties of Citizenship since Brown v. Board of Education*. U of Chicago Press, 2004.

Attfield, Sarah. 'Rejecting Respectability: On Being Unapologetically Working Class.' *Journal of Working Class Studies,* vol. 1 no. 1 2016, pp. 45-57.

Aune, James Arnt. *Selling the Free Market: The Rhetoric of Economic Correctness.* Guilford, 2001.

BBC News. 'Coronavirus: Outrage After Trump Suggests Injecting Disinfectant as Treatment.' 24

April 2020. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-52407177. Accessed 12 December 2022.

Botsman, Rachel. *Who Can You Trust? How Technology Brought Us Together and Why It Might Drive Us Apart.* Public Affairs, 2018.

Brandon, Dwayne T., Isaac, Lydia A. and Thomas LaVeist. 'The Legacy of Tuskegee and trust in Medical Care: Is Tuskegee Responsible for Differences in Mistrust in Medical Care?' *Journal of the National Medical Association* vol. 97, issue 7, 2005, pp. 951-956.

Chiu, Allyson. 'Q&A: What is ivermectin and Where Did People Get the Idea It Can Treat COVID?' *Seattle Times* 10 Sept 2021. https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/qa-what-is-ivermectin-and-where-did-people-get-the-idea-it-can-treat-covid/. Accessed 24 Jan 2022.

Cloud, Dana. *Reality Bites: Rhetoric and the Circulation of Truth Claims in U.S. Political Culture*. Ohio State UP, 2018.

Engels, Jeremy. *The Politics of Resentment: A Genealogy*. Penn State UP, 2015.

Gest, Justin. *The New Minority: White Working Class Politics in an Age of Immigration and Inequality*. Oxford UP, 2016.

Gilbert, Christopher J. 'In Dubiis Libertas: A Diogenic Attitude for a Politics of Distrust.' *Rhetoric Society Quarterly,* vol. 42, no. 1, 2012, pp. 1-25.

Hyde, Michael J. 'Introduction: Rhetorically, We Dwell.' *The Ethos of Rhetoric*, edited by Michael J. Hyde. U of South Carolina Press, 2004, 1-12.

Hoff-Clausen, Elisabeth. 'Attributing Rhetorical Agency in a Crisis of Trust: Danske Bank's Act of Public Listening After the Credit Collapse.' *Rhetoric Society Quarterly,* vol. 43, No. 5, 2013, pp. 425-448.

Kohn, Liberty. 'Working-Class Culture as Political Participation: Reading Trump as Revolt Against a Middle-Class Public Sphere.' *Journal of Working Class Studies,* vol. 3 no. 1, 2018, pp. 115-131.

Krans, Brian. 'The Big Business of Medical Misinformation.' Healthline 22 Oct. 2021. https://www.healthline.com/health-news/the-big-business-of-medical-misinformation#1. Accessed 24 January 2022.

Lareau, Annette. *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life*. U of California Press, 2003.

Leonhardt, David. 'The Vaccine Class Gap.' *New York Times* 24 May 2021. https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/24/briefing/vaccination-class-gap-us.html?name=undefined&region=BELOW_MAIN_CONTENT&block=storyline_reading_list_recirc&action=click&pgtype=Article&variant=1_reading_list. Accessed 22 January 2022.

Muirhead and Rosenblum. *A Lot of People Are Saying: The New Conspiracism and the Assault on Democracy*. Princeton UP, 2019.

O'Connor, Cailin and James Weatherall. *The Misinformation Age: How False Beliefs Spread.* Yale UP, 2019.

Oreskes, Naomi and Erik M. Conway. *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Climate Change*. Bloomsbury, 2011.

Padamsee, Tasleem J., Bond, Robert M., and Graham N. Dixon. 'Changes in COVID-19 Vaccine Hesitancy Among Black and White Individuals in the US.' *JAMA Network Open* Vol. 5, Issue 1, 2022. https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2788286. Accessed 13 Dec. 2022.

Quiang, Ruichao, Xiang LI, and Qin Han. 'The Relationship Between Social Class and Generalized Trust: The Mediating Role of Sense of Control.' *Frontiers in Psychology: Personality and Social Psychology.* 27 Sept 2021. https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.729083/full

Reich, Jennifer A. *Calling the Shots: Why Parents Reject Vaccines*. NYU Press, 2018.

Reinhardt, Uwe E. *Priced Out: The Economic and Ethical Costs of U.S. Health Care.* Princeton UP, 2019.

Roberts-Miller, Patricia. *Demagoguery and Democracy*. The Experiment, 2017.

Rothstein, Bo and Eric M. Uslaner. 'All for All: Equality, Corruption, and Social Trust.' *World Politics: A Quarterly Journal of International Relations,* vol. 58, no. 1, 2005, pp. 41-72.

Soucheray, Stephanie. 'Police Unions, Business Groups Protest COVID-19 Vaccine Mandates.' *Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy*. 26 Oct 2021. https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/police-unions-business-groups-protest-covid-19-vaccine-mandates. Accessed 12 Dec. 2022.

Sreedhar, Anita and Anand Gopal. 'Behind Low Vaccination Rates Lurks a More Profound Social Weakness.' *New York Times* 3 Dec. 2021. https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/03/opinion/vaccine-hesitancy-covid.html. Accessed 15 December 2021.

Viswanath, K., M. Bekalu, D. Dhawan, R. Pinnamaneni, J. Lang, and R. McLoud. 'Individual and Social Determinants of COVID-19 Vaccine Uptake.' *BMC Public Health,* vol. 21, art. 818, 2021. https://bmcpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-021-10862-1#author-information. Accessed 19 Jan. 2021.

Wilkinson, Richard and Kate Pickett. *The Inner Level: How More Equal Societies Reduce Stress, Restore Sanity, and Improve Everyone's Well-Being*. Penguin, 2019.

Williams, Joan C. *White Working Class: Overcoming Class Cluelessness in America*. Harvard Business Review Press, 2017.

Academic Work as Factory Work: A Former Blue-Collar Worker's Observations on Class and Caste in the Academy

Kenneth Atkinson, University of Northern Iowa

Abstract

What was it like to have come of age after the Glorious Thirty (1945-1975), an era Jack Metzger (2016; 2021a) describes as a time when the working-class bettered their lives? I had the misfortune to have worked in several Metropolitan Detroit factories during the period of decline after the Glorious Thirty. During that time, I witnessed what the journalist George Packer (2013) has called 'the Unwinding,' the unraveling of the social contract that has left the working class to their own devices to find success and salvation. In keeping with the tradition in working-class studies of sharing lived experienced of class (Linkon, 2021, pp. 20-31; Strangleman, 2005, pp. 137-51), I highlight my multiple working-class lives to show that academic life is increasingly becoming more like blue-collar labor. Through a discussion of the concepts of class and caste, and the uniqueness of working-class culture, I propose that working-class academic crossovers are essentially ghosts trapped in a liminal limbo in an intellectual version of a contemporary factory that is largely devoid of the benefits of working-class culture.

Keywords

Working-class academic, working-class culture, social class, caste, factory labor, crossover, deindustrialization, precarious work, globalization, Detroit, Metro Detroit

Coming of Age and My Working-Class Life After the Glorious Thirty (1945-1975)

Jack Metzgar writes nostalgically of the period the French call *les Trentes Glorieuses,* which he translates as the Glorious Thirty.[1] He notes that this time, from 1945-1975, was a sort of golden age for the working class of all races and genders. During this era, those in the so-called blue-collar professions were able to better their lives and, for a time, achieve an amazing degree of freedom and dignity (Metzgar, 2021a, pp. 27-41).[2] The economist Mark Levinson describes this

[1] *Trente Glorieuses,* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trente_Glorieuses; Metzgar, 2016, pp. 23-27; 2021a, pp. 27-41.

[2] Metzgar appropriately acknowledges that this was not a golden age for all, particularly for African Americans, women, and non-cisgender persons, among others. Rather, he longs for this period's better qualities when working class and middle-class alike prospered. Although, like Metzgar, I write from the perspective of a white heterosexual male, I have spent most of my working-class life and graduate education among minorities. My description of working-class prosperity during my youth, during the period also known as Fordism (described below), reflects a male employment model and the so-called male breadwinner. Few women where I grew up worked during my youth; those who did occupied positions in the lower economic realm of the working-class with few of the protections and rights taken for granted today. I grew up hearing horrible stories from women who worked in factories and other manual labor jobs. Working-class minorities of both sexes fared even worse where I grew up and

period as an 'extraordinary time' when jobs were abundant, food plentiful, decent housing affordable, and the social contract protected individuals during times of unemployment, illness, and old age (Levinson, 2016, pp. 4-5). Levinson believes the Glorious Thirty was a unique period of history that will never occur again. Metzgar remarks that its conclusion marked the end of rising standards for the working-class and middle-class alike (Metzgar, 2016, pp. 23-27; 2021a, pp. 34-41). It was my misfortune to have come of age shortly after the end of the Glorious Thirty, whose passing Metzgar and others rightly lament.

When I was a child during the 1960s, I knew I was destined to be a factory worker. This is because nearly everyone in my hometown worked in a factory. The Michigan city in which I grew up, Sterling Heights, is one of Detroit's suburbs, and part of the tri-county region known as Metropolitan Detroit, commonly referred to as Metro Detroit.[3] Sterling Heights is an odd place because it has no downtown. Its center is a six-mile-long and one-mile-wide corridor of automotive and industrial factories that extend to Detroit's border, '8 Mile Road,' a street the local rapper Eminem made famous when he named a song and movie after it.[4] My father, grandfathers, and great-grandfathers labored in factories on both sides of 8 Mile Road. With no other options available, I became the fourth generation in my family to work in a factory: a place where I labored off and on beginning four years after the Golden Thirty's end until late 1989. During that time, I thought I would never leave the factory and my rather gritty industrial town with its many social problems.

The working-class communities of Metro Detroit and the nearby city of Detroit during my youth were places of great racial tension. One of my most vivid childhood memories is sitting on my grandmother's porch watching armed troops of the U.S. Army pass by on their way to Detroit to suppress the 1967 riot: an event accurately depicted in director Kathryn Bigelow's 2017 film, 'Detroit.'[5] I recall wondering why it occurred since my working-class relatives and neighbors told me that all races worked together in the local factories in oppressive conditions yet got along quite well.

The public-school teachers in my working-class town did not encourage me or my classmates to chase our dreams since they assumed we would end up working in the local factories. There was no reason to think otherwise since the prosperity of the Glorious Thirty still reigned. Factory-working families in Metro Detroit during my childhood paid off their mortgages, had fully funded

---

also suffered from rampant discrimination: I too grew up hearing many of them share their tragic stories. Although the Glorious Thirty was perhaps the best period for the working-class, the experiences of my youth taught me that we should recognize it was not a prosperous or fair period for all.

[3] For the city's population, income level and racial composition, see Sterling Heights: Quick Facts (2021): United States Census Bureau. https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/sterlingheightscitymichigan/POP010220. For Metro Detroit, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metro_Detroit#:~:text=The%20Detroit%20metropolitan%20area%2C%20often,Detroit%20and%20its%20surrounding%20area

For Macomb County, in which Sterling Heights is located, see Data USA: Macomb County, MI. https://datausa.io/profile/geo/macomb-county-mi.

[4] 8-Mile: Internet Movie Database (2002). https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0298203/. For major Sterling Height's major industries, see Sterling Heights Economic Development. https://www.sterling-heights.net/1373/Top-Employers.

[5] 'Detroit': Internet Movie Database (2017). https://www.imdb.com/title/tt5390504/. Detroit has burned to the ground three times because of race riots: 1863, 1943, and 1967 (Boyd, 2017, pp. 31-32, 150-53, 202-09).

employer healthcare, guaranteed pensions, and sufficient money left over for a modest family vacation each summer. I recall the parking lots of the local factories full of workers, and the city of Detroit thriving. No one expected the working-class prosperity of the Glorious Thirty to end.

Because nearly everyone in my town worked in a factory, public education was essentially a training ground for future factory workers. Consequently, schools focused their instruction on the skills students needed to survive in the factory: listen to the boss and do not do anything stupid or else you will lose your job, my teachers often said. I recall as a young boy a teacher showing my class industrial prints by such famed twentieth-century photographers as Paul Strand, Alfred Stieglitz, Alvin Langdon Coburn, and Margaret Bourke-White, all of whom sought to portray the factory as a modern wonder (Freeman, 2018, pp. 148-54). The intended message was that we should be thankful to the factories for the prosperity they provided for our families and communities. The image that most impressed me was Charles Sheeler's photograph of the Ford River Rouge auto plant in nearby Dearborn with its intricate crisscrossed conveyors and giant smokestacks.[6] The site was an architectural and industrial wonder, our teacher said. Later, I had a different impression of this photo when I made occasional deliveries to the Rouge plant. While there, I marveled at the giant flames in its foundry and the thick layers of dark soot covering its walls and the clothing of its workers; I felt like I was in a place of sheer horror.

I recall some of my classmates asking my teacher why the famed industrial photographers whose pictures we looked at in class did not include workers. None documented the frenzied movement and clamor of the factory. Rather, they created images that one critic, commenting on Sheeler's photographs, referred to as 'the industrial landscape pastoralized' (quoted in Freeman, 2018, pp. 152-53). Who, we wondered, operated these factories? We found out during a field trip to the Detroit Institute of Arts to see Diego Rivera's fresco 'Detroit Industry' (Freeman, 2018, pp. 155-59). While standing before this colossal masterpiece that fills the museum's courtyard, our teachers pointed out Rivera's majestic portrayal of the strength of man and machine. They stressed that Rivera was celebrating our factory-working families and neighbors. I ignored their commentary along with my young classmates. Instead, we marveled at Rivera's depictions of the factory workers' contorted faces as their bodies struggled to keep pace with the assembly line, while others strained their muscles to operate heavy machinery.[7] We all grew up hearing tales of this toil from our factory-working families and neighbors. This, we knew, would likely be our lot in life. When I took my first job in a factory, the Glorious Thirty had ended four years earlier.

During my time as a factory worker, I witnessed a period of global decline for the working-class and a profound decay in their lifestyle. Like everyone else in Metro Detroit, I watched as what the journalist George Packer (2013) has called 'the Unwinding' began: the unraveling of the social contract that has left the working class to their own devices to find success and salvation. As layoffs and unemployment became rampant, I also saw terror in the faces of the working class as they feared that what Studs Terkal referred to as 'the planned obsolescence of people' (Terkel. 1974, p. xxviii) had begun. Since the end of the Glorious Thirty, millions of laid-off factory workers have

[6] Sheeler (1927) https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/265132.

[7] Rivera (1932-1933) https://www.dia.org/art/collection/object/detroit-industry-murals-58537. My recollection here refers to the struggling workers depicted in the central panel of the mural's 'north wall.'

failed to find new jobs (Alden, 2016, pp. 107-26; Stockman, 2021, pp. 265-81): I still see the desperation and hopelessness in the faces of many of them whenever I return home.

I began my life as a factory worker while a community college student in the late 1970s, a time the American historian Jefferson Cowie describes so well in his classic book of working-class life in that decade, appropriately titled *Stayin' Alive.* Cowie writes that the 1970s marked the end of the postwar boom (Cowie, 2010, p. 12; see also Levenson, 2016; Thompson, 2017, pp. 192-216). While in 1972 earnings for factory workers in my hometown peaked, starting in 1973-1974 the entire Metro Detroit region experienced layoffs, plant closures, union decertification drives, and the replacement of many workers with industrial robots. I am old enough to remember the prosperous Detroit of my childhood before the 1967 riots and during the Glorious Thirty, when my factory working family and neighbors lived far better lives than those employed in manufacturing today. Nevertheless, the warning signs of impending doom were there. Between 1954 and 1960, over 90,000 jobs were lost in Detroit alone. However, this statistic does not take into account the trauma caused by the decimation of the city's minority urban districts through the construction of highways to the suburbs where many industries moved their operations (Thompson, 2017, pp. 26). Following the 1967 riot, Detroit's population dropped from 1.7 million to 1.2 million within a decade (Maraniss, 2015, pp. 89-92, 367-69; Sugrue 1996). I literally watched the city empty out as entire blocks suddenly become abandoned as there was little work for anyone. Consequently, when I entered the factory, I knew that something profound had changed and that the age of prosperity for blue-collar workers was over. Life in the decade after the Glorious Thirty was a horrible time. It was particularly grueling and unstable for the industrial working class.

I held a variety of positions in several factories, including working as a drill press operator, an aluminum grinder, a sand blasting equipment worker, performing heat treatment of metals, assembling car breaks, manufacturing automobile dashboards, doing industrial painting, packaging spaghetti, and other manual labor jobs. Like many employed in industry after the Glorious Thirty, I often worked in precarious short-term contracts. While struggling to get by in the factory, I watched as the great economic downturn of the early 1980s resulted in massive unemployment for Metro Detroit, as Detroit was named the arson and murder capital of the nation (Thompson, 2017, p. xiii).[8]

During the mid-1970s and into the 1980s, a factory worker at Ford's Wixom plant named Dewy Burton became a local hero when the *New York Times* and other media outlets picked him to represent the typical disgruntled factory worker in my area because of his ability to provide reporters with succinct newsworthy quotes. Commenting on the time when I worked in the factories, Burton remarked:

> Something's happening to people like me—working stiffs, as they say—and it isn't just that we have to pay more for this or that or that we're having to do without this or make do with a little less of that. It's deep, and hard to explain, but it's more like more and more of us are sort of leaving all our hopes outside in the rain and coming into the house and just locking the door—you know, just turning the key and 'click,' that's it for what we always thought we could be (quoted in Cowie, 2010, p., 12-13).

[8] For statistics of Detroit's decline, see Gowman (2014); https://the-other-america.com/stats.

I shared Burton's frustration as I worked extremely hard but felt I was struggling to get by in life with little hope for the future.

Factory work is exhausting. It is physically and psychologically draining in ways other types of labor are not. The twentieth century French philosopher Simone Weil (1909-1943) grew up in an upper-class family but spent much of her career advocating for the rights of the oppressed. She felt she could no longer write about labor issues unless she experienced the life of the working class. In 1934, she he took a twelve-month leave of absence from her teaching position to operate machinery in an engineering factory and in the Renault auto plant. She wrote of her typical workday:

> [The] Body may often be exhausted evenings upon leaving the factory, but [my] mind is more so and invariably so. Whoever has experienced this exhaustion—and remembers it—may read it in the eyes of nearly all the workingmen filing out of a plant (Weill, 1946, p. 371).

But what most upset Weil was not the conditions she faced in the factory, which nearly destroyed her health, but society's attitude towards her fellow workers.

Working class of all backgrounds have encountered the common middle-class stereotype that manual laborers are lazy: success, it is commonly held, is something that is earned (Jensen, 2012, pp. 193-95). I believe that the local factory sage Dewey Burton summed up best the lot of the factory worker as I experienced it when he described his failed effort to leave the factory and pursue college at night after working a full shift: 'It takes so much to just make it there's no time for dreams and no energy for making them come true—and I'm not so sure anymore that it's ever going to get better' (quoted in Cowie, 2010, p. 11). I recall many times being so tired that I had to summon up what little energy was left in my body to make it to the time clock to punch out at the end of my shift. This was life after the Glorious Thirty, a time some have dubbed the Post-Fordist era.

Fordism is another name for the period Metzgar and others refer to as the Glorious Thirty, the long postwar boom between 1945 and the early 1970s when the working class prospered (Barrow, 2015, pp. 2-45; Heffernan, 2000, pp. 39-71). The Post-Fordist era began during my childhood; it continues to the present. Post-Fordism marked the start of globalization, the implementation of technology that increasingly displaced workers, and the casualization of labor that eroded the social safety net and opportunities for the working class. During the Post-Fordist era, factory jobs increasingly disappeared as the locations of production were rapidly moved offshore. Since these changes, the share of social wealth enjoyed by wage-earners has consistently diminished, along with many benefits (Heffernan, 2000, pp. 1-28). Watching the effects of Post-Fordism in my community, I feared I was doomed to a lifetime of toil so vividly described in Ben Hamper's (1991) autobiographical account of working-class life on the General Motors assembly line in Flint, Michigan, *Rivethead: Tales from the Assembly Line* (I occasionally made deliveries to this plant and witnessed the oppressive conditions Hemper described.). Desperate not to remain in the factory for the rest of my life, I did what many working class before me have done to escape their plight and joined the military.

My transition to life in the U.S. Army as a private was easy because the military is essentially a working-class community. Nearly everyone I encountered during my time as a soldier joined the Army to flee the limited options available to them in their working-class communities following the Glorious Thirty's end. I was fortunate to receive an elite assignment during the Cold War in West Berlin, where I transported classified documents for the military and U.S. government through the Berlin Wall, across Communist East Germany, and past the Iron Curtain.[9] It was an exciting job that brought me into frequent contact with high-ranking military and civilian personal, as well as spies and numerous interesting working-class locals.[10] I received special status, despite my low rank, to walk through Checkpoint Charlie into East Berlin at will: I visited the city, its historical sites, and museums frequently, always followed by government agents.[11] While strolling through Communist East Berlin, I often marveled at the statues and murals celebrating the working class. Reflecting on my four years in the army, I realize how much the military, factory work, and working-class communities are alike: all are cultures that emphasize community and collaboration rather than individuality (Jensen, 2012, pp. 28-50; Metzgar, 2021a, pp. 77-131; 2021b, pp. 100-31, 231-41).

Working-class culture is based on cooperation in which family, community, social and religious institutions, and getting along are paramount.[12] Unlike middle-class culture, and the world of academia I now inhabit, the working class eschew competition whenever possible. Rather, everyone is expected to pitch in to get the job done. In the factories in which I worked, only a few supervised a vast legion of laborers. There was no need for throngs of bureaucrats to oversee workers, for everyone knew what had to be done and always pitched in whenever there were problems. Likewise, I found the same true in the army as I transported some of the nation's most sensitive documents by myself: everyone trusted me to do the job. Whenever I needed help, all I had to do was ask.

[9] Berlin Brigade, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin_Brigade. Berlin Wall, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin_Wall. Iron Curtain, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iron_Curtain.

[10] Capital of Spies, https://www.deutsches-spionagemuseum.de/en/espionage/capital-of-espionage.

[11] Checkpoint Charlie, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Checkpoint_Charlie

[12] Culture is a notoriously difficult concept to define. My approach to culture combines insights of sociological and anthropological theory (e.g., Bourdieu, 1984; Geertz, 1973, pp. 3-83; Lamont and Lareu, 1988, pp. 153-68; Marcus and Fischer, 1986, pp. 45-76) and several working-class scholars (e.g., Case, 2017, pp. 16-35; Jensen, 2012, pp. 51-145; Metzger, 2021a, pp. 77-131; 2021b, pp. 231-41; Linkon and Russo, 2016, pp. 4-13; Streib, 2021, pp. 242-51). For this study, I define culture as a way of being, relating, and thinking. It is a system of inherited conceptions often expressed in symbolic forms by means of which people communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life. What makes culture difficult to define is that it encompasses nearly everything, from the way we relate to others, speech, dress, food, hobbies, and much more. For reasons described in this article, I believe the working-class constitute a distinctive culture that is characterized by, what Jensen identifies as, 'being and belonging' in contrast to middle class culture that emphasizes 'doing and becoming.' I have found middle class culture more individualistic in orientation. In contract, the working class with whom I have toiled and lived prefer not to stand out but to seek solidarity with their community. From my own industrial working-class experiences, I have discovered that non-verbal clues and solidarity are essential features of working-class culture. This is particularly true in noisy industrial environments where non-verbal expressions and signals often function as an insider language that is frequently meant to go undetected by middle-class management.

After my military service, I moved to a kibbutz in Israel, where I worked as an avocado picker, a chicken handler, a foundry worker, and as a manual laborer.[13] Once again, the transition was seamless as the kibbutz is perhaps the closest place to a working-class paradise one can find. It is a collective society that regards manual labor and cooperation as the most prized of virtues. The sense of belonging I experienced on the kibbutz is unlike anything I have encountered in my life. It was a settlement comprised entirely of working-class individuals who lived, dined, and labored together in physically taxing jobs for the mutual benefit of all. During my time on the kibbutz, members frequently held sessions discussing the kibbutz's socialistic ideology. At these gatherings, working-class values were praised and held up as a model for the middle-class world. Although as with any society personalities sometimes clashed, the mutual bond of kibbutz life and its members' commitment to socialist principles generally resolved disputes.

After my kibbutz experience, I pursued and realized my dream of becoming an archaeologist in the Middle East and Europe, working my way up to a supervisor overseeing major portions of large excavations. During that time, I discovered a temple in a biblical city visited by Abraham, uncovered a city where Jesus stayed with his twelve apostles, excavated battle sites from the Roman and Crusader periods, unearthed a gladiator arena, and worked on excavations from the prehistoric era to medieval period. I count these experiences too as part of my working-class history since archaeology is like factory work: it requires intense physical labor and cooperation. Having saved my money during my military service, after my kibbutz experience, I put on my backpack and wandered between Europe and the Middle East for nearly 2 ½ years. This too was very much a working-class experience as I largely lived and interacted with the working class and poor. I traveled mainly on foot to many remote places, frequently sleeping alongside roads, in parks, in train and bus stations, and in many undesirable lodgings often filled with vermin where I sometimes had to share a bed (always with a male!). I was fortunate to meet and stay with several tribal communities, who lived in tents and mud houses. They and the other working-class and poor I encountered often helped me by providing shelter and food: I never once asked anyone for assistance. Up to this point in my life, having lived and worked among the working class in several countries, I had always felt part of a community wherever I found myself. All this changed when I returned to the U.S., completed three graduate degrees, and entered a place more exotic and hostile than any of the remote, dangerous, and distant locations I visited during my travels—the academy.

Class, the Working Class, and the Academy After the Golden Thirty

Those from the working class who successfully navigate the unfamiliar world of academia and its middle-class culture to achieve tenure often find the process leaves them psychologically wounded and traumatized. In the acclaimed and appropriately named book, *Strangers in Paradise: Academics from the Working Class*, Jake Ryan and Charles Sackrey write:

[13] Kibbutz Kfar Hanassi: https://www.khanassi.org.il/objDoc.asp?PID=309259&OID=325018. Kfar Hanassi is the most British kibbutz in Israel and is associated with the Habonim Dror socialist movement. See, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Habonim_Dror. During my six-month stay as a volunteer, residents were still talking about the future British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and his sister, both of whom also worked as volunteers there. Elmas, 2019, https://www.israelhayom.com/2019/07/24/when-boris-johnson-visited-israel-as-a-20-year-old/. Like many Kibbutz settlements in Israel, Kfar Hanassi is no longer a collective society following the country's economic crisis that began in the 1980s. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kibbutz_crisis.

> In short, our conclusion is that the academic work process is essentially antagonistic to the working class, and academics for the most part live in a different world of culture, different ways that make it, too, antagonistic to working class life (Ryan and Sackrey, 1984, pp.112-13).

In a recent study of working-class academics' perceptions of the academy, several researchers found that little has changed:

> Working-class academics described the academy as prestige-obsessed, snobby, exclusive, ego-driven, pretentious, and relying on arcane jargon. Authors wrote of discomfort in professional settings because of these class-based differences between themselves and the perceived dominant, hierarchical, middle-class culture of the academy (Pifer, Riffe, Hartz, and Ibarra, 2022, p. 8).

While I share most of these sentiments, what most surprised me about academia is its lack of cooperation. But what I find most disconcerting is that I view academic work as similar to factory work after the Glorious Thirty, but without the communal benefits of working-class culture.

Frederick Winslow Taylor's book *Principles of Scientific Management (1913)* largely created the prosperity of the Glorious Thirty and the modern factory workplace. But Taylor's philosophy, which helped generate the economic benefits the working-class enjoyed during this period, came at a great cost to the workers by stripping them of their independence and pride. According to Taylor, managers should assume the burden of gathering all knowledge, then classify, tabulate, and reduce it to rules, laws, and formulae that workers must follow (Taylor, 1913, p. 36; see further Freeman, 2018, pp. 107-08. 174-79). The following is a brief distillation of the central elements of Taylor's philosophy, followed by selected observations on how it now plagues academia.

1. Separate planning and doing.
2. Management should limit an individual to a single task.
3. Preparation and servicing tasks should be stripped away to be performed by unskilled and cheaper workers as far as possible.

By removing the cognitive aspects of a factory job from the workers and making it the exclusive provenance of a separate management class (#1), Taylor deprived the working class of the creativity to improve their products and take any control of how they performed their labor. To facilitate the manufacturing process, he urged management to subdivide complex jobs into individual repetitive tasks that could be easily taught thereby reducing training costs (#2). Ultimately, Taylor argued (#3), skilled jobs, as much as possible, should be simplified to be performed by unskilled laborers at a lower rate of pay (Taylor 1913, pp. 37-39; see further Crawford, 2009, pp. 38-40; Littler, 1978, pp. 185-202). In his drive for obsessive optimization of individual factory operations, Taylor disregarded the human side of work by rigidly separating thinking from doing. Workers were required to do exactly as they were told (Gibson, 1992, pp. 149-57; Locke, 1982, pp. 152). In conjunction with this principle, Taylor emphasized that the most important job of managers should be training the worker to perform '…at his fastest pace and with the maximum of efficiency' (Taylor, 1913, 12).

The early twentieth-century social theorist Antonio Gramsci recognized that Fordism was based on Taylorism. Although he highlighted its increase in wages and benefits as positive, Gramsci believed that society's adoption of Taylorism came at great cost to the working class. He emphasized that Fordist elites knew the physically and psychologically demanding nature of Taylorism, yet they did not care (Gramsci, 1971, pp. 277-318; see further Antonio and Bonanno, 2000, pp. 33-77). The consequence of this indifference has resulted in the dangers of industrialization Marx warned about, namely the current precarious position of workers as all security has been removed from the workplace: labor is in constant flux and workers are forced to continually adapt to their oppressive conditions (Marx, 1976, pp. 794-802). But Marx's observations today are not only true of the working-class, but of academia as well.

The modern university operates in a strict hierarchical manner in accordance with Taylor's principle to separate planning and doing. Management has taken over many functions of the faculty, from the design of syllabi, the revision of curriculum, the determination of course content, the requirement of administrative-led assessments, to the implementation and increasing control of on-line teaching. This is nothing less than the adoption of Taylor's principle that management should limit the tasks workers perform; consequently, faculty no longer have full control over how and what they teach. Administrators, moreover, simplify academic labor so that contingent faculty can perform work formerly done by full-time faculty. The increased replacement of tenured faculty with contingent labor fulfills Taylor's recommendation that managers decrease costs by replacing more expensive full-time employees with cheaper workers on a contingent basis, whose contracts can abruptly be terminated depending on budgetary needs. To be blunt: in today's academy, in keeping the tenants of Taylorism, the faculty is expendable.

Today's world of academia reminds me of the years I spent struggling to get by in Metro Detroit when most industrial jobs were temporary, pay was low, and the pace of operations swift. I see little difference between academic employment and the factory as the academic workforce has become subjected to a form of domination that has become an intrinsic component of capitalism: the at-will contract (Kaufman-Osborn, 2021). Today's university operates increasingly like a factory: it is to be run in the most efficient and cheapest manner possible (Ginsburg, 2011, pp. 167-99). Contingent labor has made the academic workforce as vulnerable as factory workers in today's global economy as well as those in the gig economy who toil worldwide with few benefits or security (Bousquet, 2008, pp. 3-70. 186-209; Greenhouse, 2009, pp. 184-220). Marginally employed academics are subject to many systemic abuses such as the inequitable distribution of labor, working for free to publish and prepare courses, and the stress of not knowing when or if their contracts will be renewed (Prior, 2017, pp. 136-42; Reynolds, 2017, pp. 143-54; Towers, 2019, pp. 98-115; Vossen, 2017, 121-35).

In addition to Taylorism, the academy suffers from an equally pernicious malady that Henry Ford's factory workers in Detroit dubbed 'Forditis.' Ford's workers used it to refer to the increased speed, dexterity, and endurance required to remain employed. They also came up with this term to describe the increasingly inhumane conditions on the auto assembly lines to combat the hypocrisy of Ford's public statement of how management should oversee labor: 'Reasonable work is natural; work is all right if it is not man-killing or too prolonged' (Ford, 1923, # 7). The pace of Ford's assembly lines aged workers quickly and left many unsuited for their jobs before middle age

(Freeman, 2018, pp. 126-32; Meyer, 1981, pp. 1, 40-41). I too have felt its consequences, as well as suffered the pernicious effects of what Barbara Jensen (Jensen, 2021, p. 253) has referred to as the 'colonized culture' of the working class in which the pains, toils, and disabilities of manual labor are the scars left behind by the conquerors. Those over forty were rare in the many factories in which I was employed: excessive workloads and the increased speed of production led to workers' physical, mental, and spiritual decline.

In a recent article titled 'What Is the Real Cost of Academe's Fixation on Productivity?,' Maria L. Wisdom (2022) writes that faculty struggle with institutional pressures to produce as much as possible, as fast as possible, and at any cost. As academics witness the increasing adjunctification of their profession, academic work is rapidly becoming the equivalent to blue-collar labor in which managers rather than professionals control the workplace from hiring, to teaching, to the length of employment, and the pace of work (Chin and Senter, 2011, p. 122; Clark and Filinson, 2011, p. 127; Johnson, 2003, pp. 61-89). Just like I once struggled to keep up with production quotas to manufacture a minimum number of dash boards per hour during an eight-hour shift, I now struggle to keep up with the increasing workload and expectations of my academic job from expanded service obligations, growing publication expectations, requirements for the creation of on-line curriculum, and an ever-growing 'Faculty Handbook' whose numerous job expectations seem impossible to fulfill. But there is one important difference between academic and factory labor: academic labor never ends. Liz Mayo (2019) laments of the current expectations of professors: 'We are not people who require sleep and food to persist; we should be available at all hours and willing to pick up a late shift if needed. We are service-industry workers.' Like factory work, academic work too exhausts the body, but the mind more so. This is especially true for those who have left behind their working-class life to crossover to the academic middle class only to find that they suffer from the pernicious effects of caste.[14]

Caste, the Working Class, and the Academy After the Golden Thirty

In her best-selling book *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents,* Pulitzer Prize winning author Isabel Wilkerson defines caste as an artificial construction that ranks human value and sets the presumed supremacy of one group against the presumed inferiority of other groups. Caste, she notes, uses arbitrary boundaries to keep ranked groups apart, distinct from one another, and in their assigned places (Wilkerson, 2020, pp. 99-164). But what Wilkerson warns is the greatest threat to the caste system is not the lower-caste failures, but the lower-caste successes, which undermines the core assumptions upon which a case system is constructed to which the identities of people on all rungs of the hierarchy are linked (Wilkerson, 2020, pp. 224-37). Those with lower-caste status are expected to adjust to the expectations of the dominant caste and be willing to remain in their present position to thrive.

I became acutely aware of academic caste a few years ago when I received a joint invitation from a distinguished Oxford don, from an elite academic dynasty, and a Regius Professor, to speak on my recent book at the University of Oxford. During my visit, my hosts invited me to High Table

[14] I prefer the term crossover rather than straddler (Lubrano 2014) since I do not believe it is possible to have dual affiliation and identity with my former working-class community. Rather, to crossover to a new social class is to erase much of one's working-class self, making it impossible to return (see further Eribon 2013; Hurst, 2010; Jensen, 2012; Metzgar, 2021a, pp. 88-95).

in the famed Christ Church dining hall, the inspiration for the Harry Potter movies (the paintings do move and talk!).[15] It was thrilling to witness the majestic traditions of the occasion and meet many of Oxford's elites. However, an experience during my visit reminded me that I did not belong in this upper middle-class environment, but to a lower academic caste.

My intellectual hosts were elated at my presentation since a knight came to hear me speak. Unfortunately, I had little contact with students or ordinary faculty. The distance my distinguished hosts placed between themselves, faculty with lesser status, and students made me realize how different the hallowed halls of Oxford were from the sense of community and belonging I felt in my working-class life. An accidental encounter between one of my hosts and two working class employees made this clear.[16] When we arrived at the prestigious center he directs, a truck with numerous large boxes next to it on the pavement blocked access to his reserved parking spot. Although there were plenty of other spaces, my host excused himself and said he needed to dismiss these folk. He pointed to the reserved parking sign bearing his name and demanded the two workers move their boxes into their truck and immediately move aside so he could park in his spot. The two workers politely asked if he could wait until they were finished moving their heavy boxes into the basement. I enjoyed the smirk on the workers faces as he repeated his request to no avail, this time informing them of his prestigious academic title. My host angrily returned to his car and parked in an adjacent spot while making a rude remark to me about the working class. I have wondered what his reaction would have been if he had known his invited guest was a working-class crossover who has spent many hours moving similar heavy loads.

Academia is increasingly become a caste in which a few from elite universities, like my distinguished Oxford colleague, make up an increasing percentage of the professorate (Schultz and Stansbury 2022). Academic castes follow the rules the sociologist Max Weber observed in his classic study of India's caste system, namely a strict distribution of occupational positions and the reproduction of status hierarchy (Weber, 1916, pp. 396-415). This results in inferior treatment of those holding lower caste positions, which over time acquires ritual sanction. Today, the acceptance of the academic caste system, and the growing distinction between tenured and tenure-track faculty members on the one hand and tenure-illegible faculty is undermining the *raison d' être* of contemporary institutions of higher learning. In the opinion of two academic philosophers: 'This system is capricious, discriminatory, and unjust' (McHenry and Sharkey, 2014, p. 35). The academic caste system has become a self-perpetuating hierarchy through the widespread tendency to dole out full-time positions to those with prestigious degrees: institutions which working-class academics are less likely to have attended. Yet, the tragedy of this unjust system is that there is no correlation between faculty productivity, success, and degree status (Burris, 2004, pp. 239-64). But it is a system in which the working-class suffer the most (Case 2017; Lee, 2017).

In a job market where only an estimated 7% of PhDs will find academic employment, the current academic caste system leaves little opportunity for working-class academics other than marginal employment (Craig 2021). In their recent study of the academic gig economy, several academics lament:

[15] Christ Church Hall. https://www.chch.ox.ac.uk/visiting-christ-church/hall.
[16] I have deliberately avoided all departmental affiliations to obscure this person's identity.

> Non-tenure track faculty members, now 70 percent of the faculty within US higher education, average pay of $22,400 for teaching eight courses, making less than most fast-food workers and often with less job security and benefits than fast-food workers (Kezar, DePaola, and Scott, 2019, p. 1).

This proliferation of temporary academic employees leaves fewer long-term and stable faculty to interact with students thereby depriving them of a community that is central to a quality learning environment (Kezar, DePaola, and Scott, 2019; Tolley, 2018). With part-time and non-tenure track positions exploding at a rate of 600 percent more than tenure lines between 1975 and 1995, those fortunate enough, such as myself, to have a full-time academic position face oppressive and demoralizing workloads (Angulo, 2008, p. 13; Spalter-Roth and Scelza, 2009, p. 3). But it is worse for those marginally employed in academia, who are clearly made to feel that they occupy a lower-caste status (Prior, 2017, pp. 136-42; Reynolds, 2017, pp. 143-54; Towers, 2019, pp. 98-115; Vossen, 2017, 121-35).

To survive in today's hostile factory-like world of academia requires all the resilience the working-class academic can muster from his or her past. But living in this middle-class dominated world comes at a great cost, especially for those from industrial working-class backgrounds who live in a state of perpetual trauma. They are haunted by the ghosts of a lost future: having abandoned their working-class past to become academics they suffer from the melancholia caused by the injustices of the academic caste system, which prevents them from achieving the sense of belonging they expected in their new environment. Unable to return to their working-class homes, they are trapped in a state of limbo deprived of the future they expected with no true home (Derrida, 1994, pp. 61-95, 156-221; Fisher, 2014, pp. 2-29).

Mourning and Melancholia among the Working Class and in the Academy after the Golden Thirty

The working-class poet Cynthia Cruz describes the melancholia that ensues when a person abandons his or her working-class background as a symbolic death because leaving one's working-class origin means assimilation. It entails becoming a ghost trapped in a liminal limbo, becoming a form of the living dead, caught between deaths, as the working-class academic is neither a member of the working class nor the new class in which he or she lives and works (Cruz, 2021, pp. 1-10, 102-09 103; see also Case, 2017, pp. 23-25). Cruz describes her transition from working-class to the academy as a tragedy that still haunts her because: 'What I lost, haunts, because, as it was happening (as my working-class origins were being lost), I did not experience it' (Cruz, 2021, p. 65). But the greatest tragedy is that the working-class academic largely does not exist.

Although working class academics are among the elite of the working class, they are ironically an invisible minority group (Pelz, 1995, p. 284). They are what Simon Weil referred to as 'truly uprooted beings, exiles in their own land' (Weil, 1946, p. 369). The irony is that our neoliberal society insists there are no social classes, hence there is no working class (Cruz, 2021, p. 7). In his examination of media perceptions of the working class, Christopher Martin, professor of digital journalism, writes: 'But with few exceptions, America's working class is invisible, deemed no longer newsworthy' (Martin, 2019, p. 5). The gradual erasure of social class and class difference in the media and society, and our focus on meritocracy, has largely removed social class from

public discourse to such an extent that the term 'working-class' is largely avoided (Martin 2021). Consequently, culturally constructed stereotypes of the working class continue.

In his study of the working class, the economist Michael Zweig writes that to be working class is to be in a place of relative vulnerability—on the job, in the market, in politics, and in culture (Zweig, 2012, pp. 4, 11). In our society that values equality of opportunity, the existence of a distinct class is a contradiction, which perhaps is why so many are reluctant to say working class. Yet, the working class comprise a unique caste with its own history, namely one characterized by resilience: it is nothing less than a distinct culture (Jensen, 2012, pp. 51-78; Metzgar, 2021a, pp. 8-14, 77-99; 2001b, pp. 231-41). It is a culture I have observed growing up in my hometown, in the factory, in the military, in the kibbutz, and during my travels, but not in the academic world.

Caste and classicism are rapidly diminishing opportunities for the global working-class community to make the great, painful, leap forward and crossover to the middle-class world of the academy (Towers 2019). Academic class and caste perpetuate the injustices of the modern workplace by either ignoring the working-class academic's existence, or by making the academic environment so intolerable that the working-class academic feels forced to assimilate and erase his or her identity. The irony is that because education is a marker of class, and to some extent moral worth as well, it cannot be open to all (Hurst, 2010, pp. 137-56). This is true of academic caste: those from the working-class who reach the upper echelons of academic success remain a threat to those at the top who no longer feel superior because they are employed alongside colleagues from a working-class background who hold the same academic position.

Professors from the working class find themselves trapped in what the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu refers to as an 'ill-gotten' culture, for they have abandoned their world to adopt the ethos and language of their new class (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 91). Yet, these working-class academics realize they will never be fluent in the language of the middle-class-dominated academy as their performances always reveal them (Eribon, 2013, pp. 169-79; Fisher, 2014, pp. 30-47; O'Dair, 1995, pp. 203-04). As the philosopher Didier Eribon has written of his own working-class origin: 'Whatever you have uprooted yourself from or been uprooted from still endures as an integral part of who or what you are' (Eribon, 2013, pp. 17-18). Those from the working-class can never truly assimilate, for they are constantly reminded of the past they have struggled to leave behind. All they can do is try to persevere.

The psychologist Barbara Jensen has written what is perhaps the best description of working-class resilience: 'Working-class people are iron weeds that sprout out of cracks in the cement of inequality, contorting but continuing to survive' (Jensen, 2021, p. 222). It is tough to be in the working class; however, it is a place of great creativity and strength whose members have much to teach the middle class, if only they would acknowledge the working classes' existence and recognize it as a distinctive culture that should be cherished by all.

Conclusion

Academia is not the paradise I expected it to be, but it is a far better place than the many factories in which I worked. But I did not leave the factory and obtain my present position because of my resilience. Rather, I attribute it largely to luck. Although I have crossed over to a new social class

that provides grater pay, creativity, and that does not require me to perform what I consider real work, namely manual labor, I still feel a sense of guilt when I think of those more talented I left behind in my former working-class community. The irony is that I find my present position as an academic increasingly resembling my former working-class life, but devoid of the clamor, soot, oil, grease, dangerous machinery, and oppressive heat of the factory. My working-class past makes it difficult for me to acknowledge the successes of my current life. But I am not alone in harboring such feelings. There are many of us from the working class in the academy, although we are largely invisible and uncomfortable in our positions because many of us feel it necessary to assimilate to survive. However, as working-class academics, we are acutely aware of injustice and oppression more so than our middle-class colleagues. Therefore, we need to identify ourselves as working-class, and denounce the injustices and subjugations of the modern academy for the good of all. If we band together and acknowledge that we do exist, who knows what we can do with our resilience and our experiences. Although we cannot make academia a paradise, perhaps we can make it a better place for all.

Author Bio

Kenneth Atkinson is a Professor of History at the University of Northern Iowa in Cedar Falls.

Bibliography

Alden, E. (2016) *Failure to Adjust: How Americans Got Left Behind in the Global Economy*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield.

Antonio, R. J. & Bonanno, A. (2000) A New Global Capitalism? From 'Americanism and Fordism' to 'Americanization-Globalization.' *American Studies* 41(2/3), 33-77. https://journals.ku.edu/amsj/article/view/3102

Angulo, A. J. (2008) From Golden Era to Gig Economy: Changing Contexts for Academic Labor in America. In Tolley, K. (Ed), *Professors in the Gig Economy: Unionizing Adjunct Faculty in America* (pp. 3-26). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Barrow, H. B. (2015) *Henry Ford's Plan for The American Suburb: Dearborn and Detroit.* DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press.

Berlin Brigade (2022, March 6) In *Wikipedia.* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin_Brigade.

Berlin Wall (2022, July 25) In *Wikipedia.* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin_Wall,

Bourdieu, P. (1984) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste.* Nice, R. Trans. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Bousquet, M. (2008) *How the University Works: Higher Education and the Low-Wage Nation.* New York: New York University Press.

Boyd, H. (2017) *Black Detroit: A People's History of Self-Determination.* New York: Amistad.

Burris, V. (2004) The Academic Caste System: Prestige Hierarchies in PhD Exchange Networks. *American Sociological Review* 69(2), 239-64. https://doi.org/10.1177/000312240406900205

Capital of Spies, https://www.deutsches-spionagemuseum.de/en/espionage/capital-of-espionage.

Case, K. A. (2017) Insider Without: Journey Across the Working-Class Academic Arc. *Journal of Working-Class Studies* 2(2), pp. 16-35. DOI: https://doi.org/10.13001/jwcs.v2i2.6081.

Checkpoint Charlie (2022, June 16) in *Wikipedia.*

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Checkpoint_Charlie
Chin, J., M., & Senter, S. (2011) Love to Teach, but Hate Assessment? *Teaching Sociology*, 39(2), 120-126. https://doi.org/10.1177/0092055X11401562
Christ Church Hall. https://www.chch.ox.ac.uk/visiting-christ-church/hall.
Clark, R., & Filinson, R. (2011) Kicking and Screaming: How One Truculent Sociology Department Made Peace with Mandatory Assessment. *Teaching Sociology* 32(2), 127-37. https://doi.org/10.1177/0092055X11400439
Cowie, J. (2010) *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class.* New York: The New Press.
Craig, K. (2021) First-Generation Academica and False Promises. *Inside Higher Ed*, June 1, 2021. https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2021/06/01/first-generation-grad-student-laments-lack-career-opportunities-academe-opinion
Crawford, M. B. (2009) *Shop Class as Soulcraft: An Inquiry into the Value of Work.* New York: Penguin.
Cruz, C. (2021) *The Melancholia of Class: A Manifesto for the Working Class.* London: Repeater.
Data USA: Macomb County, MI. https://datausa.io/profile/geo/macomb-county-mi.
Derrida, J. (1994) *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International.* Kamuf, P. Trans. New York: Routledge.
Detroit: Internet Movie Database (2017). https://www.imdb.com/title/tt5390504/.
8-Mile: Internet Movie Database (2002). https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0298203/.
Elmas, D. S. (2019) When Boris Johnson Visited Israel as a 20-Year Old. *Israel Hayom*. July 24, 2019. https://www.israelhayom.com/2019/07/24/when-boris-johnson-visited-israel-as-a-20-year-old/.
Eribon, D. (2013) *Returning to Reims.* Lucey, M. Trans. South Pasadena: Semiotext(e).
Fisher, M. (2014) *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures.* Winchester, U.K.: Zero Books.
Ford, H. (1923) *Henry Ford's Sayings.* New York: The League-for-a-Living.
Freeman, J. B. (2018) *Behemoth: A History of the Factory and the Making of the Modern World.* New York: Norton.
Geertz, C. (1973) *The Interpretation of Cultures.* New York: Basic Books.
Gibson, J. E. (1992) Taylorism and Professional Education. In Heim, J. A., & Compton, W. D. (Eds), *Manufacturing Systems: Foundations of World-Class Practice*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, pp. 149-57.
Ginsburg, B. (2011) *The Fall of the Faculty: The Rise of the All-Administrative University and Why it Matters.* New York: Oxford University Press.
Gowman, K. (2014) The Other America. https://the-other-america.com/stats.
Gramsci, A. (1971) *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, Hoare, Q., & Smith, G. N. (Eds). London: Lawrence & Wishart.
Greenhouse, S. (2009) *The Big Squeeze: Tough Times for the American Worker.* New York: Anchor Books.
Habonim Dror (2022, July 25) In *Wikepedia.* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Habonim_Dror.
Hamper, B. (1991) *Rivethead: Tales from the Assembly Line*. New York: Warner Books.
Heffernan, N. (2000) *Capital, Class and Technology in Contemporary American Culture: Projecting Post-Fordism.* London: Pluto Press.
Hurst, A. (2010) *The Burden of Academic Success: Loyalists, Renegades, and Double Agents.* Lantham: Lexington Books.

Iron Curtain (2022, July 23) in *Wikipedia*. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iron_Curtain.
Jensen, B. (2012) *Reading Class: On Culture and Classism in America.* Ithaca: ILR Press.
Johnson, B. (2003) The Drain-O of Higher Education; Causal Labor and University Teaching. In Johnson, B., Kavanagh, P., & and Mattson, K. (Eds) *Steal This University: The Rise of the Corporate University and the Academic Labor Movement.* New York: Routledge, pp.61-89.
Kaufman-Osborn, T. (2021) Shared Governance within the Autocratic Academy. *Inside Higher Ed*, October 22, 2021. https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2021/10/22/shared-governance-fatally-flawed-opinion
Kezar, A., DePaola. T., & and Scott, D. T. (2019) *The Gig Academy: Mapping Labor in the Neoliberal University.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
Kibbutz Crisis (2022, August 18) In *Wikipedia*. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kibbutz_crisis
Kibbutz Kfar Hanassi: https://www.khanassi.org.il/objDoc.asp?PID=309259&OID=325018.
Lamont, M., & Lareu, A. (1988) Cultural Capital: Allusions, Gaps and Glissandos in Recent Theoretical Developments. *Sociological Theory* 6(2), pp. 153-68.
Lee, M. (2017) Where People Like Me Don't Belong: Faculty Members from Low Socioeconomic-Status Backgrounds. *Sociology of Education* 90(3), pp. 197-212. doi.org/10.1177/0038040717710495
Levenson, M. (2016) *An Extraordinary Time: The End of the Postwar Boom and the Return of the Ordinary Economy.* New York: Basic Books.
Linkon, S. L. (2021) Class Analysis from the Inside: Scholarly Personal Narrative as a Signature Genre of Working-Class Studies. In Fazio, M., Launius, C. and Strangleman. T. (Eds), *Routledge International Handbook of Working-Class Studies*. New York: Routledge, pp. 20-31.
Linkon, S. L., & Russo, J. (2016) Twenty Years of Working-Class Studies: Tensions, Values, and Core Questions. *Journal of Working-Class Studies* 1(1), pp. 4-13. DOI: https://doi.org/10.13001/jwcs.v1i1.5799.
Littler, C. R. (1978) Understanding Taylorism. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 29(2), 185-202. https://doi.org/10.2307/589889.
Locke, E. A. L. (1982) The Ideas of Frederick W. Taylor: An Evaluation. *The Academy of Management Review*, 7(1), 14-24. https://doi.org/10.2307/257244
Lubrano, A. (2004) *Limbo: Blue-Collar Roots, White-Collar Dreams.* Hoboken: Wiley.
Maraniss, D. (2015) *Once in a Great City: A Detroit Story.* New York: Simon and Schuster.
Marcus, G. E., & Fischer, M. J. (1986) *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Martin, C. R. (2021) Bringing Ourselves to Say 'Working-Class.' *Working-Class Perspectives*, March 29, 2021. https://workingclassstudies.wordpress.com/2021/03/29/bringing-ourselves-to-say-working-class/
Martin, C. R. (2019) *No Longer Newsworthy: How the Mainstream Media Abandoned the Working Class.* Ithaca: IRL Press.
Marx, K. (1976) *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy Volume One.* Fowkes, B. Trans. London: Penguin Books (original edition 1867).
Mayo, L. (2019) Students, Would You Like Fries With That? *Inside Higher Ed*, May 30, 2019.

https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2019/05/30/students-should-stop-treating-faculty-expendable-opinion.

McHenry, L., & Sharkey, P. W. (2014) Of Brahmins and Dalits in the Academic Caste System. *Academe* 100(1), 35-38. https://www.aaup.org/article/brahmins-and-dalits-academic-caste-system#.YtmsL3bMKM8.

Metro Detroit (2022, July 12) In *Wikipedia.* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metro_Detroit#:~:text=The%20Detroit%20metropolitan0area%2C%20often,Detroit%20and%20its%20surrounding%20area.

Metzgar, J. (2021a) *Bridging the Divide: Working-Class Culture in a Middle-Class Society*. Ithaca: ILR Press.

Metzgar, J. (2016) Nostalgia for the 30-Year 'Century of the Common Man.' *Journal of Working Class Studies* 1(1), pp. 23-27. DOI: https://doi.org/10.13001/jwcs.v1i1.5903.

Metzgar, J. (2021b) There is a Genuine Working-Class Culture. In Fazio, M., Launius, C. and Strangleman. T. (Eds), *Routledge International Handbook of Working-Class Studies*. New York: Routledge, pp. 231-41.

Meyer, S. (1981) *The Five Dollar Day: Labor Management and Social Control in the Ford Motor Company, 1908-1921.* Albany: State University of New York Press.

O'Dair, S. (1995) Class Matters: Symbolic Boundaries and Cultural Exclusion. In Dews, C. L. B., & Law, C. L. (Eds), *This Fine Place So Far From Home: Voices of Academics from the Working Class*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, pp., 200-08.

Packer, G. (2013) *The Unwinding: An Inner History of the New America.* New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Pelz, W. A. (1995) Is There a Working-Class History? In Dews, C. L. B., & Law, C. L. (Eds), *This Fine Place So Far From Home: Voices of Academics from the Working Class*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, pp., 277-85.

Pifer, M. J., Riffe, K. A., Hartz, J. T., & Ibarra, M. V. (2022) Paradise, Nearly Forty Years Later: The Liminal Experiences of Working–Class Academics. *Innovative Higher Education,* April, 2022, pp. 1-21. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10755-022-09601-0

Prior, S. (2017) The Poverty of Academia: My Life as Non-Tenure Track Faculty. *Journal of Working-Class Studies* 2(2), pp. 136-42. https://doi.org/10.13001/jwcs.v2i2.6097

Reynolds, D. (2017) Ending Adjunct Apartheid. *Journal of Working-Class Studies* 2(2), pp. 143 54. DOI: https://doi.org/10.13001/jwcs.v2i2.6099.

Rivera, D. M. (1932-1933) Detroit Industry Murals, 1932-1933 Frescoes. https://www.dia.org/art/collection/object/detroit-industry-murals-58537.

Ryan, J., & Sackrey, C. (1984) *Strangers in Paradise: Academics from the Working Class.* Boston: South End Press.

Schultz, R., & Stansbury, A (2022) Socioeconomic Diversity of Economics PhDs. *Peterson Institute for International Economics.* Washington, D.C.: Peterson Institute for International Economics. https://www.piie.com/publications/working-papers/socioeconomic-diversity-economics-phds

Sheeler, C. (1927) Criss-Crossed Conveyors, River Rouge Plant, Ford Motor Company. https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/265132.

Spalter-Roth, R., & Scelza, J. (2009) *What's Happening in Your Department with Assessment.*

Washington, D.C.: American Sociological Association. https://www.asanet.org/research-and-publications/research-sociology/research-briefs/whats-happening-your-department-assessment.

Sterling Heights Economic Development. https://www.sterling-heights.net/1373/Top-Employers. Sterling Heights: Quick Facts (2021): United States Census Bureau. https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/sterlingheightscitymichigan/POP010220.

Stockman, F. (2021) *American Made: What Happens to People When Work Disappears.* New York: Random House.

Strangleman, T. (2005) Class Memory: Autobiography and the Art of Forgetting. In Russo, J., Linkon, S. L. (Eds), *New Working-Class Studies.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, pp. 137-51.

Streib, J. (2021) Class, Culture, and Inequality. In Fazio, M., Launius, C. and Strangleman. T. (Eds), *Routledge International Handbook of Working-Class Studies*. New York: Routledge, pp. pp. 242-51.

Sugrue, T. (1996) *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Taylor, F. W. (1913) *Principles of Scientific Management. New York: Harper & Brothers (original edition 1911).*

Terkel, S. (1974) *Working: People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do.* New York: Pantheon.

Thompson, H. A. (2017) *Whose Detroit?: Politics, Labor, and Race in a Modern American City With a New Prologue.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Tolley, K. (2018) *Professors in the Gig Economy: Unionizing Adjunct Faculty in America.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Towers, G. W. (2019) The Precarious Plight of American Working-Class Faculty: Causes and Consequences. *Journal of Working-Class Studies* 4(1), pp. pp. 98-115. DOI: https://doi.org/10.13001/jwcs.v4i1.6195.

Trente Glorieuses (2022, July 8) In *Wikipedia* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trente_Glorieuses.

Vossen, E. (2017) Publish And Perish: On Publishing, Precarity and Poverty in Academia. *Journal of Working-Class Studies* 2(2), 121-35. DOI: https://doi.org/10.13001/jwcs.v2i2.6095

Weber, M. (1916) India: The Brahman and the Castes. In Gerth, H. H & Mills, C. W. (Eds), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology,* Oxford: Oxford University Press (1946 reprint), pp. 396-415.

Weil, S. (1946). Factory Work. Givoanelli, F. Trans. *Politics,* December, 1946, pp. 369-75.

Wilkerson, I. (2020) *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents.* New York: Random House.

Wisdom M. L. (2022) What Is the Real Cost of Academe's Fixation on Productivity?, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 5. 2022. https://www.chronicle.com/article/what-is-the-real-cost-of-academes-fixation-on-productivity

Zweig, M. (2012) *The Working Class Majority: America's Best Kept Secret,* 2d ed. Ithaca: IRL Press.

Wilkinson, C. (2021). *Perfect Black.* University Press of Kentucky.

Review by Michelle B. Gaffey

In the final pages of her multi-award-winning book of poetry, *Perfect Black*, Crystal Wilkinson announces that 'People are always surprised that black people reside in the hills of Appalachia.'

In this compilation of poems and lyric essays, Wilkinson challenges and deepens our understanding of what it means to be working-class and Appalachian. In *Perfect Black*, we see no miners or loggers, no factory or mill workers, aside from an allusion to the Great Migration in 'Bones.' We do see men and women working with their hands, yes, but the working-class lives poetically rendered here are on tobacco farms, in kitchens, and in other people's homes. And they live on Black ancestral land in Appalachia, a region that is still frequently characterized by white cultures rooted in Scotch-Irish, English, and German traditions. In many ways, *Perfect Black* is a much-needed poetic response to this oversimplification of Appalachia.

Moments of profound loss and deep joy ground *Perfect Black*, which won both the Tillie Olsen Award for Creative Writing from the Working-Class Studies Association and an NAACP Image Award in 2022. Rising from the intersecting identities of class, race, and gender, the poems and stories chronicle a young girl's coming-of-age with her voice, a girl who initially chose to unlearn the 'accent that carried a map from the boonies' of her rural Appalachian home. But this girl ultimately realizes 'that being country [is] as much a part of [her] as being black or being a woman.' These poems and essays weave various cadences in a poignant and beautifully composed indictment of white supremacy and, to use a term from Roxane Gay, 'rapist culture.'

Perfect Black follows a loose structure, with part I mapping the 'terrain' of a young girl's growing up, from being raised by her grandparents on a tobacco farm, to her infrequent visits with her mother who lived with schizophrenia, to her budding sexual desire, and to the repeated violation of her young body.

The lyrics of part I often work metaphorically to create crisp images; the opening poem, 'Terrain,' reveals a mature woman who has traveled away from home, donning a 'voice [that] has moved downhill to the flatland a time or two.' Still, she knows she's been 'country all [her] life': she is 'plain old brown bag, oak & twig, mud pies & gut-wrenching gospel in the throats of old tobacco brown men.'

Sexual assault is a frequent subject in these early poems, first introduced in 'Baptism.' Throughout this poem the young girl directly addresses her readers, inviting us to 'see' her as she 'stand[s] in the water up to [her] knees.' After the 'Bible is handed to the deacon,' we bear witness to something terrible, yet unnamed. She beckons us:

> See me submerged in the cold creek water

that seeps into my nostrils
tastes like danger in my mouth

The innuendo here is clear with the poem's juxtaposition of the words 'deacon,' 'mouth,' and 'danger.' Then, in 'Dig If You Will the Picture,' this young girl confirms that she learned to keep secrets: listening to Prince behind closed doors and experiencing her sexual awakening—all while being sexually violated by a church leader and the 'white boys at school.'

Readers also discover in part I that the young girl's grandmother was often her 'lifeboat' and safe 'harbor.' In the first of the 'Water Witch' poems, for example, she recounts a story about 'salvation' from her grandmother's point of view with regional expressions that Wilkinson transcribes with due diligence:

When the horses took off with the wagon
& my grandbaby inside, i chased it.
My legs nigh on seventy, moved like a lightning twenty—
…
& old Trigger stopped,
stood still & straight, real proud,
cutting his black eyes like he was saying
You old sumbitch, i showed you.
I lifted the baby out, rested her on the ground—safe.

While themes, images, and even lines of poems are echoed throughout the next section, part II more directly addresses the pernicious effects of racism and white supremacy. Wilkinson reflects upon the embodied 'rage / that seeps through' the 'pores' of Black women, the 'arias' and 'sacred songs' that remind us:

of every unfed mouth
of every furious word
of every strap across every back
of every lover gone unloved
of every black woman's breast
sucked dry until it cracks
& bleeds

She also dreams of a time in the future when 'nobody [is] afraid' of a 'gang / one million strong' of Black boys and men:

This gang
they walked the streets in great numbers

& nobody cuddled their purses

This gang
they stood up

& spoke up
when justice showed
its true colors

& the swat team didn't come

Part II culminates in Wilkinson's perfectly composed acceptance and celebration of her 'full lips…wide hips…dreadlocks…high cheekbones.' She refers to her Appalachian 'twang' with enjambed images and colloquialisms; her home language is 'distinctively wood burning stove, come in & sit a spell, patchwork quilt, summer swimming hole, sweet iced tea, you are always welcome here…warm.'

The reverence she has for her ancestral mothers, her voice, and her body is amplified throughout part III of *Perfect Black*. In 'Bloodroot,' Wilkinson begins by honoring the young girls of her childhood. Together, they 'daydreamed' about growing up when 'horizon-kissed feathers / would float newborns / into the fleshy round of [their] bellies.'

These childhood fantasies of motherhood and 'imaginary husbands' mature into reflections on trusting partnerships grounded in love—love that is deeply felt and joyfully celebrated within the lines of her poetry. 'Witness,' for example, offers a series of conditional statements to craft a love song to Wilkinson's partner, Ron Davis, who provided stunning illustrations for the book, often to extend the embodied experiences within the poems. Presumably addressing Davis, Wilkinson writes, 'if you just could have seen the hair rise up / on granddaddy's arm like that, like offerings to god, / when his elbow touched hers…then you'd know how much i love you.'

In a later poem, she reiterates that this man has danced his way into her heart, a familiar idiom recast with playful wordplay reminiscent of poems in Harryette Mullen's *Sleeping with the Dictionary*; she tells him:

All day long
you lindy-hop
through my mind

But most memorable in part III are her poems and essays about the 'women that make [her] a woman,' the 'strong sisters' who 'kiss sense into [her] head sometimes.' Wilkinson's 'Praise Song for the Kitchen Ghosts' is a tremendous achievement, pulling together many of the themes from throughout the book. But the anchor of this lyric essay is food or, rather, sustenance and love. She integrates conversations with cousins and aunts about recipes that have nourished her family's soul for generations. These recipes, sometimes written down, sometimes recalled orally, transmit her women ancestors' knowledge and wisdom about community, fortitude, and the quiet power of land and food rituals.

Overall, Wilkinson's poems and essays celebrate all that is abundantly and perfectly Appalachian, woman-centered, and Black. For her readers from rural Appalachia, especially those of us who have moved away from home, her book is a gift to help us recall swimming holes and lightning bugs, canned beans and 'dinner' at mid-day. But her ability to craft palpable story poems to make

visible the Black working-class lives of rural Appalachia—all while speaking truth to power and to those who may feel unheard or unseen—makes *Perfect Black* a necessary addition to libraries and classrooms across the country.

Reviewer Bio

Michelle B. Gaffey grew up in a northern Appalachian town known for powdered metal production, outdoor sporting, and elk viewing. Her research focuses on documentary poetry and poetics and, more recently, literary representations of adoption in the works of Octavia E. Butler. Michelle currently lives and works in northern Virginia.

Giunta, E. and Trasciatti, M., eds. (2022) *Talking to the Girls: Intimate and Political Essays on the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire*. New Village Press.

Review by Janet Zandy

On the evening of March 3, 1991 freezing rain fell on the city of Rochester, New York. The storm lasted about 17 hours and destroyed more than 10,000 trees. Trees crackled and broke in the night. It was beautiful and horrifying. I escaped the cold and ice and eleven-day power loss by flying to New York City so I could immerse myself in stories of fire—newspaper articles, labor journals, poetry then and now, any writing I could find—about the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire of March 25, 1911. I had a small grant to support my scheduled research at the Tamiment Library, located inside NYU library, on Washington Square, near the current Brown Building and the site of the Triangle fire. As all accounts attest, the building survived, but the fire took the lives of 146 workers, mostly Jewish and Italian immigrant girls. I realized then and can confirm even better now—because of the publication of this important collection—that I am not alone in being drawn to this fire and its cultural and political implications. It is braided personal and public history.

Talking to the Girls is an insightfully constructed anthology of threaded history, scholarship, memory, family lore, teaching practices, and labor activism. In their Introduction, the editors Edvige Giunta and Mary Anne Trasciatti state their intent: 'to show how these [Triangle] workers are remembered today, and how their stories have inspired people, and even changed lives.' The Triangle Fire is a usable past and a record of 'what if's.' What if the Triangle workers had won their strike during the clothing workers Uprising of the 20,000 and gotten the safety conditions they demanded instead of a meager raise in pay? What if the switchboard operator on the eighth floor warned the workers on the ninth floor, and not just the bosses on the tenth floor? What if the fire hoses could reach to the upper floors and not just stop at the sixth floor? What if a door had not been locked? What if the fire escape had not collapsed? What if the bosses had not been acquitted by a jury of their clothing producing business peers? What if, in Rose Schneiderman's language, 'the good people of the public' cared as much for the sewers of their clothing as for the latest style in shirtwaists? These questions and many more have no end point. They are retold in

contemporary commemorations, some poignantly ephemeral like chalking the names of dead workers in front of buildings where they lived in Lower Manhattan and one soon-to-be permanent marker, the Triangle Fire Memorial, stainless steel panels affixed to the corner of the Triangle building with etchings from a collectively stitched ribbon.

This international anthology embraces answerability, call and response, through multiple individual voices orchestrated as a collective chorus. It is organized around key words: Witnesses, Families, Teachers, Movements, and Memorials, including an essay in translation from the Italian and an interview with Bangladeshi labor organizer, Kalpona Akter. Before highlighting a few selections, I want to call particular attention to the smart organizational decisions the editors made. They solved the problem of balancing private voices with scholarly research by eliminating foot and end notes, including instead summary sections where contributors comment on their sources as well as offer brief biographies, more personal than academic, and then from the editors, an excellent survey of the literature of the Triangle Fire and a sturdy bibliography. It works as a useful model for building anthologies appropriate for classrooms and personal reading.

This is a book of wishful rescue and determined remembrance. The selections range in tone and voice—shouts and laments, roars and whispers, reports and elegies. Like an epic prose poem, they carry a refrain: 'those poor girls, those poor girls.' Annie Rachele Lanzillotta draws a 'topography of loss' linking the twenty-four girls who left their no-future Sicilian towns only to perish in a New York fire to the loss of affordable housing in that gentrified city. In 'Girl Talk' Paola Corso movingly evokes triangles—the confluence of three rivers in her native Pittsburgh, the triangle of class, gender and ethnicity of her father's fellow Calabrian-American steelworkers, to the triangle she sews onto a segment of the 320-foot Collective Ribbon as she poetically links the lives of girls sewing in China, Indonesia, Vietnam, Mexico, Bangladesh, sewing to live. A few contributors speak of family relations: the grandson of Frances Perkins, first female labor secretary and member of the Factory Investigating Commission; Ellen Gruber Garvey's recollection of distant relative Abraham Bernstein, who escaped the fire and testified in Yiddish on behalf of the owners at their trial and 'made himself unknowing'; Suzanne Pred Bass's account of her great aunt Rosie who died in the fire, but whose sister Katie survived; Martin Abramowitz's story of his father Abraham who may or may not have started the fire. Historian Annelise Orleck sees the Triangle as a foundation story linked to global garment workers today as she tells the story of her grandmother Lena who was a child worker at Triangle. Teaching about the fire is personal, too, for Laura Ruberto in California and Kimberly Schiller on Long Island, Jacqueline Ellis in New Jersey, and Michele Fazio in a rural Southern university. Fazio recalls her grandmother's suppressed memory of witnessing the fire, 'the fire was bad, very bad,' and then through interviews and historical records recovers her family's involvement in the Italian American labor movement. So many stories linked to the fire.

If English is not your first language, then images matter even more. Imagine the families seeing the oval portraits of their children in the newspapers following the event. Illustrations as well as photos told the Triangle story. On March 28, 1911 the *New York Call* published on its front page an illustration of a triangle pyramid of bones and skulls. The triangle became a symbol of greed. In this collective iteration of the Triangle story, the editors and writers include family photos, snapshots of chalked sidewalks and of sewers adding to the ribbon or making kite shirtwaists.

Reminiscent of the competition for the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, D.C. won by then Yale architecture student Maya Lin, there was an international competition for a Triangle Fire Memorial in 2013. Uri Wegman and Richard Joon Yoo won the competition for their design: a stainless-steel ribbon attached to the corner of the Triangle Building etched with marks from collaged materials sewed onto the fabric ribbon. The ribbon descends from the 9th floor then splits 12 feet above the sidewalk revealing the names and ages of the lost workers as well as quotes from witnesses (see www.trianglefirememorial.com). My rough description of the soon-to-be constructed monument is clarified in Richard Joon Yoo's contribution, 'The Fabric of Memory.' His essay is compelling reading because of the intersections he elucidates and also because it opens a larger conversation about the agency of monuments and memorials. 'We were guided by a desire to maximize the emotional experience of remembering the fire by utilizing a minimum of material,' he writes. He and Wegman wanted 'a memorial *for* the public *from* the public.' On March 16th and 17th, 2019, volunteers associated with the Triangle Fire Coalition gathered in the great hall of NYC's Fashion Institute of Technology and, seated around four long tables (like a sweatshop floor?) sewed bits of fabric, personal cloth memories, onto the long canvas that would be cast as a steel ribbon affixed to the corner of the Triangle Building where it intersects Greene Street and Washington Place. When I study the agency of art, I think of hinges opening and closing. Richard Joon Yoo envisions a fulcrum, tilting us to look up and look down, see what's there and what's gone, and inspiring us to 'reframe ourselves.' He sums up the monumental work of the memorial: 'This memorial does not remember people who died going to war; it remembers people who died going to work. It pays respect to immigrants looking to make a better life—the simple American promise that was betrayed.'

I will try to be there on March 25, 2023 for its unveiling.

Out of an ancestry of German/Russian Jews and Southern Italian Catholics, I evoke both strains in remembering Vincenza:

Missing Minyan for Vincenza

Working-class daughter
sister, friend
I want to know you.

Your name was Vincenza Billota
you were 16 years
you worked at Triangle
Handed your parents your pay
Needed. Momma gave you a bit for yourself.

I imagine your hair
thick brown with hints of red
and waved from braiding and unbraiding.

I imagine your full body

your bosom and skin
neck and throat

Not falling.

Your *famiglia*, loving but strict
Your father knowing, yes, this is your body
because the *calzolaio*, the shoe repairer, left a mark
on your boot

You lived in Hoboken.

I was born there
As a Ballotta

Reviewer Bio

Janet Zandy is emerita professor of English and American Studies at Rochester Institute of Technology. She is the author of *Hands: Physical Labor, Class, and Cultural Work*, *Unfinished Stories: The Narrative Photography of Hansel Mieth and Marion Palfi*, and other books on working-class culture. Her current work is on artmaking, class, and democracy.

Chibber, V. (2022). *Class Matrix: Social Theory after the Cultural Turn.* Harvard University Press.

Review by Michael Beyea Reagan

In his new book, *The Class Matrix: Social Theory after the Cultural Turn*, Marxist scholar and activist Vivek Chibber seeks to further explore the promise of Marx's materialism. Part defense of materialism, part modification to address the critiques of the 'cultural turn,' Chibber gives us a strong case for the power of materialist theory. However, in the final analysis Chibber's version of materialism is too closely hewn to unreconstructed Marxism, leaving many of the problems and questions present in materialist thought unaddressed. Since Marx we've had more than a hundred years of scholarship that sought to build from the materialist foundation in a meaningful way, taking its contributions and moving beyond its limitations. And even a quick look at history tells us that material class analysis is important, but ultimately constitutes only part of a compelling social theory.

At its strongest, the book demonstrates the continuing power of materialism. In five chapters Chibber shows how class structure relates to the process of class formation, a contingent and elusive phenomenon of workers coming to class consciousness and collective political action. Class formation, he tells us, doesn't necessarily lead to resistance. Instead, it is dependent on questions of consent and what he calls 'resignation,' a position by which the working class makes individual decisions to accommodate the system, rather than challenge it headlong. This process contributes to social stability and is a materialist explanation for why we haven't seen the types of collective revolutions predicted in Marx. Using game theory, Chibber says the economic structure produces resignation, a rational response to a constrained set of conditions. He then weaves together the relationship between structure and agency in a way that allows explanatory power for both, before concluding with an analysis of how his 'class matrix' framework can help us understand the current political economy.

Chibber's big contention is that class is special. 'The peculiarity of class,' he writes, 'resides in that fact that it is the only social relation that directly governs the material well-being of its participants'(p. 17). This fixed materiality places peoples' 'meaning orientation' as 'causally dependent' on their structural location in the class system. Culture, for all its independent variability, Chibber says, is ultimately rooted in one's class position, and class at its base is unique from other forms of social formation in that it is material. Important for him is that a 'causal arrow thus runs *from* the class structure *to* the meaning orientation of its actors'(p. 17). Infrequently this will lead to collective action of resistance, Chibber says, as workers seek individual solutions to class problems, try to overcome free-rider issues of collective action, and only rarely may seek to contribute to Marx's 'class for itself' conception of collective political struggle against all these obstacles. This is the foundation upon which the 'class matrix' operates. Class formation is far from a determined process, but a highly contingent and even difficult process. As workers 'resign'

themselves to the basic rules of class society, the system therefore produces its own stability 'not because [workers] are duped by ideology but because it is rational to do so,' he says (p. 20).

Where Chibber's book struggles is in its treatment of cultural thinkers, which at times hardly engages with the specificity of their work. Take for example Stuart Hall's concept of 'articulation,' one of his leading contributions to social theory, and absent in Chibber's retelling. Hall argues that rather than any singular 'determination' of social causality, every era is given to particular forms of 'articulation' – that is the political, discursive, cultural, and material forces that compose and define each historical moment. Hall saw materialism as important but incomplete and sought ways to supplement our understanding of social change. Indeed, in Hall's thinking culture itself emerges as a kind of social 'structure,' one with as much determinative power as the economic. This aspect of cultural studies is absent from Chibber's engagement.

Perhaps the biggest struggle in the book is its conception of the material. Chibber's argument about class as uniquely material is faulty. Yes, class has fundamental ways in which it is material, but in looking at class formation it is also profoundly a cultural phenomenon, defined by how people understand their identities and experiences. The entirety of EP Thompson's work is founded on this idea; historical contingency, especially on questions of consciousness, is important. But the bigger problem here is in thinking about class as uniquely material against other aspects of social formation. In this telling race, gender, sexuality, citizenship lose their material composition, a grave mistake. As Cedric Robinson argues in *Black Marxism*, racial thinking profoundly shaped the material basis and expectations of early capitalism, giving race and white supremacy a material composition that lives on in the structure of labor market competition, housing market prices, and innumerable other material factors of race today. The lack of engagement on this work and others, like the new developments in social reproduction theory, is a weak point for *Class Matrix*.

Currently, a wide array of thinkers in black studies, feminism, anarchism, and others, both materialist and cultural, have developed a tradition moving toward a synthesis of social causality that takes materialism as an important contribution, but only part of a broader whole of social theory. At his best, Marx himself explored these ideas in his concept of social 'totality,' the ways in which material and cultural factors, consciousness and experience, all co-form particular moments of history. Rather than looking to readymade explanations of causality, we would do well to foster curiosity about the complexity of society, to take action to move to brighter futures, and then to see where we can go from there.

Reviewer Bio

Michael Beyea Reagan is the author of *Intersectional Class Struggle: Theory and Practice* with AK Press. He teaches at Princeton, Rutgers, and the University of Washington

Berry, J., and Worthen H. (2021) *Power Despite Precarity: Strategies for the Contingent Faculty Movement in Higher Education.* Pluto Press.

Review by Jeremy E. Baker

Power Despite Precarity: Strategies for the Contingent Faculty Movement in Higher Education should be required reading for anyone who gives a damn about contingent[1] faculty. As a non-tenure track faculty member and a veteran unionist, the book spoke to me. The authors achieve the rare balance of keeping their work approachable for beginners but detailed enough for experienced activists.

Power Despite Precarity is broken into three portions. The first portion is an oral history of academic organizing in California. Significant portions of this section of the book were based on interviews with John Hess and other front-line organizers. Hess's understanding of both organizing and Marxist theory adds an enjoyably militant tone to this section. The second portion examines the historically-based causes of academia's labor organizing difficulties. This section is reminiscent of Zinn's 'A People's History,' particularly its emphasis on the story of grassroots faculty organizing. The final portion reads like an organizing handbook complete with legal advice, answers to frequently asked questions, and thoughts on breaking down elitism and false consciousness among academics.

Chapter One starts the exploration of the relationship between radical and more conservative union activity; this is a thread that continues through the book. The entrenched conflict between service-oriented bureaucratic culture and social movement unionism (Lopez, 2004) is certainly very real in modern organizing. This divide often manifests in arguments over what is 'professional' and what is 'unprofessional' (p. 19). Barry and Worthen argue this form of elitism is a tool that management uses to divide full-time and contingent faculty. Thus, the authors identify arguments over who is or is not 'professional' as a matter of false consciousness. Berry and Worthen point out that as long as tenure-track academics are thought of as 'the standard,' union organizing in academia will not reach its full potential (p. 73). The authors propose that this barrier may be diminished if we shift to viewing teaching as a craft, consisting of a set of skills, rather than a profession (p. 17).

While emphasizing the need to find common ground that can be shared by all faculty, the authors highlight some of the many issues specific to contingent faculty. These include dealing with the

[1] What exactly to call non-tenure track faculty is one of the first issues addressed by the authors. Other commonly used titles for these workers include adjunct faculty, lecturers, temporary faculty, and part-time faculty. These terms vary mostly based on institution, but inconsistencies between departments within institutions is not unheard of. The authors settle on contingent faculty early in the book to emphasize the tenuous nature of these positions.

flurry of titles held by contingent workers, the fact that teaching in a contingent position will (almost) never lead to a tenure-track position, huge class sizes, low wages, last minute schedule shifts, extreme isolation, and the deeply troubling reality that the average contingent faculty must work for multiple employers to make ends meet (p. 32). In addition to these major issues, contingent faculty are also subject to near-daily institutional insults including shared workspaces with no privacy, working out of offices with no name plates or mailboxes, being forced to turn in keys each semester, and having to buy their own parking passes (p. 34). While any one of these slights may not be that big a deal, the combined effect of these institutionalized microaggressions send constant reminders to contingent faculty that we are both expendable and lesser to our full-time counterparts.

The second portion of the book examines the historic roots of the structural issues that have long plagued efforts to organize academics. This entirely appropriate application of C. Wright Mills' sociological imagination grants considerable insight into organizing contingent faculty by comparing our current struggle with the historic journey of the American labor movement in the 20th century. Barry and Worthen point out that the same trends in other industries have also taken hold in academia. I found the comparison between Taylorism and modern standardized testing to be quite apt. As America became obsessed with business ventures in the 1980s, administration in higher education became convinced that colleges should be run on neoliberalist principles (p. 77). Similarly, as corporations of the 1990s became obsessed with downsizing and staying 'lean,' academia started to move away from the tenure-track standard to a model dependent on the labor of contingent faculty. The authors are careful to point out that this move toward casualization was not driven by a unified push from the top of the university system (at least not at first.) Rather, the trend was driven by the actions of many middle-managers in hundreds of departments who were trying to make ends meet (p. 81). Thus, if the administrative culture of higher education had internalized a concern for workers' rights, the move to casualization may never have happened. However, this was not the case. Hundreds of individuals made their decisions from capitalist, middle-management mindsets and acted exactly as we would expect them to.

The final portion of the book resembles a handbook for union organizing. It addresses many issues that are commonly discussed in such handbooks (such as the importance of strategic planning), but it also addresses more complex issues of organizing. I was impressed by the nuanced discussion of sticky topics such as conflicts between unions, the fact that decertification elections may occasionally serve strategic purpose, and that some contracts just plain suck (p. 36). I have personally shied away from pursing these topics in my own writing for fear that my work could add even an ounce of fuel to union busting efforts. However, the authors presented this conversation with the clear conviction that discussing these sensitive issues is critical for the future of labor in Higher Ed.

While my opinion of this book is overall positive, there is one element that bothers me. Within multiple conversations on organizing, the authors explicitly advocate for the Inside/Outside Strategy. This strategy requires activists to infiltrate a larger organization in order to achieve the ends of their sect. The infiltration of the Modern Language Association (MLA) is one example given. In this instance, the MLA was used by a group of radical members to springboard organizations that would advocate for more politically radical objectives (page 138). I am not denying that this type of internal organizing may be used to achieve powerful ends. However, it is

also incredibly risky for the larger organization. It is one thing for a union salt to organize a hotel from the inside out, it is another thing to infiltrate a scholarly, democratic organization to achieve political ends of which significant portions of that organization may not approve. Furthermore, basic sociological theory of organizations reminds us that once cliques become established, they tend to undermine the stability and effectiveness of the larger group. It is true that the Inside/Outside Strategy has a long history among Marxist/Trotskyist organizations, and it certainly can be powerful in moments of truly revolutionary struggle. However, if we care about the organization we are organizing within, we must be careful to not undermine the long-term stability of that group.

In closing, this book is a little library including legal advice (p.198), emotional support for organizers (p. 220), and a handbook for organizing (p. 89). Despite the diversity of content, the overarching message to contingent faculty is 'you are not alone.' As stated on the opening page, 'We are now the majority, between two-thirds and three-fourths of all faculty.' Contingent faculty are the ignored proletariat majority that props up the bottom of the Ivory Tower. Once we build class consciousness among contingent faculty, we may be able to extend our vision to include all workers in the university system, thus bringing workplace democracy to higher education.

Reviewer Bio

Jeremy E. Baker is a sociologist and contingent faculty at Otterbein University, University of South Carolina, and The Ohio State University. He is also a veteran union activist and proud member of AAUP.

Eng, A. (2022). *Our Laundry, Our Town: My Chinese American Life from Flushing to the Downtown Stage and Beyond.* Fordham University Press.

Review by Michelle M. Tokarczyk

As the subtitle of his memoir suggests, Alvin Eng's book chronicles his physical, intellectual, and emotional journey as a Chinese American man. He is the youngest of five sons born to undocumented immigrants whose marriage was arranged. Class is thoroughly entwined with ethnicity in *Our Laundry, Our Town*, and the class markers are unmistakable. The family runs a hand laundry in Flushing (part of Queens, NYC). For years their living quarters are behind this business. Eng realizes that customers who left their clothes at his family's laundry had class privilege. They did not do manual labor for twelve hours a day. He describes the scars on his older siblings' hands caused by rope burns from the twine used to tie packages. (Eventually, tape replaced rope.) His parents and the majority of the post-World War II Chinese immigrants came from the Toisan region of China. In many ways, Toisanese immigrants are similar to Sicilians. Each group is poor, from the south of its nation, and disparaged by more cosmopolitan country members. Immigrants from regions such as these become working-class Americans. Those of us from working-class families cringe when we remember being embarrassed by our parents. When Eng's father comes to his school wearing the baggy worn clothes of a Chinese immigrant laundry man, Eng feels shame for his father and himself.

Many people are unaware of the history of anti-Asian racism in this country, and Eng is careful to supply crucial information. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 barred Chinese immigration and forbade legal residents from becoming citizens, marrying US citizens, or bringing their wives to the United States. It was not until 1965 that the Immigration and Nationality Act specified the same flat quota for all nations outside the western hemisphere; previously, the only immigrants permitted entry were from northern and western European countries. Eng also notes that during the Cold War many Americans were fearful of China and extended their suspicions to Chinese immigrants. Sadly, this dynamic resurfaced in full force during the COVID-19 pandemic.

From a young age Eng wanted his life to be different from that of his parents, but he did not have a vision of his role in American society and in the Chinese American communities within this society. Today, according to the 2010 census, close to seventy percent of Flushing's population is Asian-American. Yet when Eng was growing up, there were few Asians or other non-white people in this area, which intensified feelings of isolation.

Today Alvin Eng is a performer, playwright, college educator, and political activist. In his memoir he reflects on pop culture providing both a portal into American life and a means of talking back to it. His early love is rock music, but his tastes evolve as he moves from being a listener to a

performer. Punk channeled anger and rebelliousness for many youths in the 1970s. For Eng and his fellow Asian American musicians, this genre rebuts Model Minority stereotypes. He and another punk performer, Ray Wong, fantasize demonstrating to audiences that all Chinese boys are not nice, good at math, and yearning to be doctors, lawyers, or engineers.

After graduating from Queens College Eng works in a dream job as a publicity assistant for a record company. As he matures, he begins to feel a pull toward other forms of work and self-expression. Coming of age during the time of the 'gorgeous mosaic' when multiculturalism is flourishing, he continually reframes his American story. Throughout the memoir he refers to the Eng Dynasty, the Empress Mother (his mother), and, less frequently, to the Emperor, his father, showing how he fuses his Chinese heritage with his American life. In time he finds a way to tell stories and satisfy his performative urges. In playwriting he sees elements of what he loved about music—both forms require a dialectic between isolated reflection and community engagement. A theater production is a community effort. It is also a way of giving voice to community and opening up dialogues. Theater can be a kind of activism.

Eng first takes classes at the Writer's Voice and eventually attends New York University's Graduate Musical Theater Writing Program. His short pieces are performed in downtown spaces such as La Mama and The Nuyorican Café. During all of this, he is still living with his mother in Flushing. (Eng's father died when he was fourteen). Because he is the only son still at home, Eng is his mother's caretaker. He shops, cooks, and attends to her personal hygiene. When she dies, he is forty years old, without a mother and a home. He realizes that most people go through the transitions he is experiencing in their twenties. But his trajectory isn't slow; it's just shaped by different ethnic norms.

Eng does not write about young romance, but after his mother's death he meets Wendy, a woman who shares his love of theater and outlook on life. They live together, and eventually marry. As the book draws to a close, they are conducting a theater workshop in Hong Kong. Here students respond to Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* with dramatizations based on their lives. This play was chosen partially because Wilder, Eng learns, spent part of his childhood in Shanghai and Hong Kong and was influenced by Chinese theater and opera.

The book's ending represents Alvin Eng building community. He does not choose between East and West, but blends them—as he has throughout the book. Eng is a punk rocker who lives in uncool Flushing with his mother. He does not leave his working-class family to develop his career, and his family does not leave him. His mother cannot speak English, but she and his older brother Herman attend his plays, and his mother particularly offers moral support. Ultimately, Eng's memoir celebrates the continual evolution of a Chinese American and his American dreams.

Reviewer Bio

Michelle M. Tokarczyk is professor emerita of English at Goucher College. She is a past president of WCSA and one of the founders of the field. Her poetry book *Bronx Migrations* is available from Cherry Castle Publishing.

Schor, J. (2020). *After the Gig: How the Sharing Economy Got Hijacked and How to Win It Back*. University of California Press.

Review by Ric Kolenda

Juliet Schor's *After the Gig* is rather unique among the recent spate of literature on what has come to be known as the gig economy. As she points out in her introduction, most work in this area is either optimistically supportive or dystopian in its criticism of this new type of work (p. 12). In contrast, Schor offers a middle path including both critique and hope, rooted in years of carefully acquired empirical evidence, and concluding with some practical solutions for making the gig economy work for everyone.

Schor's work with the Connected Consumption and Connected Economy Project is the basis for both the theoretical framework and the empirical data for this text. Reflecting over a decade of research with this project, she and her team—Schor is very keen to make it clear that this is a team effort—lucidly and systematically lay out both the history of the gig economy and the arguments pro and con. The text is loaded with illustrative anecdotes and data, all compiled in a very straightforward style that comes off as more journalistic than academic (and I mean this in a positive way).

What really sets this book apart from many others is Schor's optimism about the *true* sharing economy, which she terms 'collaborative' or 'connected consumption.' She concludes with a chapter on specific ways that the initial promise of what began as the sharing economy might be fulfilled. This chapter, entitled 'Co-ops, Commons and Democratic Sharing,' describes a small but growing segment of gig work that Schor believes holds some promise for returning to the earlier vision.

The unfulfilled promise of the sharing economy

Not unlike other texts on the subject, the core of this study looks at how the changes in the sharing economy have impacted workers and consumers, sometimes positively, but more often by reducing earnings, worker protections, and consumer protections, even as consumer prices have risen.

In her early chapters, Schor surveys the literature and explicates some key definitions, even including an appendix devoted solely to terminological issues. Capturing the nomenclature of this rapidly changing sector is a challenge, and this text does as good a job as I've seen in clarifying various terms and concepts. She does, however, take for granted the term *platform* itself, which is used in this context to describe any digital meeting place where transactions occur. One key distinction made is between *capital-based platforms* (e.g., Airbnb and Getaround) and *labor-based platforms* (e.g., PostMates, TaskRabbit and Uber). This distinction creates what Schor calls the 'platform hierarchy.' Another key distinction is based in the motivation of workers: those who use

platform work for some extra cash and those who are dependent on their earnings. Both of these distinctions contribute to that hierarchy, and as in other sectors, capital is privileged over labor. This leads to very different experiences for these groups of workers. This hierarchy is exacerbated by the modern version of scientific management using algorithms to replace human managers. These algorithms appear neutral, while typically reinforcing worker inequalities.

Regulation, cooperation, and sharing (again)

The final chapter explores the future of the sharing economy and ways to address the inequalities and inefficiencies of 'platform capitalism.' Schor begins with a lengthy discussion about attempts to regulate platforms and the backlash by companies, who increasingly are wielding teams of lobbyists and public relations professionals to oppose attempts by (mostly local) government-imposed limits on their business practices. Regulation ultimately presents challenges, both because of the jurisdictional variations inherent in local regulation, and the varying impacts on different classes of workers. One example is the oft-proposed but seldom enacted proposal making freelance workers 'employees,' which while offering stability and benefits for many dependent, full-time workers, might negatively affect those who require the flexibility and independence of the current arrangement. With regulation, as with many things, there is no one-size-fits-all solution.

One of the most interesting concepts to emerge from the platform economy is that of 'platform cooperativism.' Rooted in historical cooperative models as applied to modern technology platforms, activist academics like Trebor Scholz (see his Platform Cooperativism Consortium https://platform.coop/) have been working to advance worker-owned alternatives to the corporate models. One recent example includes the Drivers Cooperative, a worker-owned platform of ride-hail drivers in New York City.

Ultimately, Schor is interested in advancing the concept of *collaborative consumption* that was the early promise of this sector. She ends the chapter and the book by looking at models for 'sharing cities,' and ways to expand this sharing globally as a critical way to address climate change.

Some limitations

There are some limitations to the research. First, all of the interviews were done in the Boston area. While Schor makes a compelling case for being representative of the larger U.S. phenomenon, I would like to have seen data that captures a larger range of experience of gig workers nationally. Boston may very well be more representative than New York or Los Angeles, but I wonder how similar it is to, for example, Lincoln, Nebraska or Tucson, Arizona.

The data here is also almost exclusively qualitative in nature, mostly based on open-ended interviews. There is one quantitative dataset from Airbnb, and though I know it is difficult to get even aggregated and anonymized data from the for-profit corporations in the sector (because I've tried myself), I do believe more could be done to quantitatively augment and analyze what was learned from the interviews with workers.

Conclusion

All in all, Schor and her team of researchers have presented possibly the strongest and most accessible overview of the gig economy to date, especially when it comes to addressing the

downside issues. I strongly recommend this book for academics and researchers, and also for anyone with an interest or involvement in the broader sharing economy. The main text is relatively short (175 pages) and well-written, and there is plenty in the appendices for those who wish to delve a bit deeper.

Reviewer Bio

Ric Kolenda is a Clinical Assistant Professor in Public Administration at Pace University in New York, former Internet entrepreneur and gig worker. His research focuses on the future of work, especially around equity for gig workers and creative economies.

Stockman, F. (2021) *American Made: What Happens to People When Work Disappears*. Random House.

Review by Joseph Varga

There is an old academic joke about an anthropologist who gathers the leaders of the Indigenous group he has been studying for years, to relate to them his research findings. The learned professor goes into great detail on family groups, kinship ties, food, dress, politics, and culture of the indigenous group. Finally, at the end of his report, he looks out at his audience and says, 'But enough about me. Let's talk about you for a while.'

Farah Stockman's much-lauded journalistic ethnography of a factory closure in Indianapolis, backgrounded against the rise of right-wing populism, is ostensibly about the lives of American workers under global capitalism. She examines the closure of a long-standing ball bearing manufacturer, Rexnord, which had provided steady, well-compensated union work for several generations of workers. But like our anthropologist, it seems just as much about Stockman herself, as she struggles to understand people very unlike herself and other people she has known.

This does not take away from the value of the work, or its importance. This is a good book and well worth reading. But at this point, the re-discovery of the vaunted Midwest working class has become a cottage industry in the mainstream publishing world, from JD Vance's ill-conceived *Hillbilly Elegy* (2016) through works such as Beth Macy's *Dopesick* (2018*)*, Phillip Meyer's *American Rust* (2009), and Joan Williams' *White Working Class* (2017). We have been treated to numerous works dissecting the foibles and misdirected anger of a group of people who have been portrayed, at least in this political moment, as the helpless victims of the global economy, poor souls who turn to drugs, authoritarianism, religion, and other irrational pursuits as they witness the destruction of the world their parents and grandparents knew. The result is a mixed bag of sometimes valuable insights that allow the workers themselves to speak (Meyer) to pornographic works like Vance's, whose workers become a self-parody of working-class angst and anger. But all of them, like Stockman's book, *American Made: What Happens to People When Work Disappears*, reflect their author's background and worldview every bit as much as they represent the very workers they are trying to understand.

Stockman, a Pulitzer Prize winning author and lauded *New York Times* journalist, is upfront about her class privilege. She is the offspring of college professors who were a generation removed from their own working-class roots. She readily confesses her befuddlement at some of the behavior she observes, and owns up to her ignorance regarding the overall devastating effects of free trade on the working-class people she portrays. This is the root of the story being told here, not that working people need jobs to complete their identities, nor that a good union job, while difficult and precarious, can deliver the American Dream for a white woman, a Black man, and a union supporter. What Stockman thinks she reveals is the disconnect that the rise of Trumpism and right-wing populism has exposed: the cultural rift between those who have benefitted from the global

economy, and those whose trajectories out of the daily grind and precarity of working-class life have been derailed by the search for ever-growing corporate profits at the expense of community. For folks like Farah Stockman, the point is not to lead a fulfilling working-class life, but to escape it, to utilize the union-won wage and health care to strive for something better. For Stockman, what happens to people when work disappears is that the escape routes she would choose for her working-class subjects close, and therein lies the tragedy. By far the most interesting aspects of this book are its depictions of upper middle-class life, as seen through Stockman's interactions with her subjects, and her writing.

That writing is elegant. She is careful, cautious, even loving, in her treatment of her subjects. They are, in turn, Shannon, the working-class white woman who represents the feminist movement; Wally, the Black man from a troubled background, who represents the triumphs of the civil rights movement; and John, the white man who proudly represents his union and the victories of organized labor. Stockman uses each in turn as stand-ins for these respective social movements. For Shannon, the job at Rexnord, where she becomes the first woman to operate the dangerous furnaces, offers autonomy from failed relationships and dysfunctional family. For Wally, the union wage affords him the opportunity to try his hand at a small business (barbeque) while providing the satisfactions of a job well done, a certain pride that overcomes the indignities of racial prejudice and a disadvantaged upbringing. For John, Rexnord's union wage provides redemption and rescues him from the shame many workers feel (my father, for one) at the loss of a previous high-paying union job.

While some of the prose may be a bit overdone, Stockman takes her subjects seriously, and goes to great lengths to present them in a fair and fairly objective light. She recognizes early on the importance of a 'good job' to her working-class subjects. She sensitively handles the sometimes-checkered life histories that many working-class people lead, people like myself, whose own narrative includes drug use, arrest, and delinquency. She does not gloss over some of the negative aspects and attitudes of some of the Rexnord workers. Stockman deals head-on with racism, sexism, xenophobia, and other issues that divide workers on the shop floor and in the community. But she also captures the joys and small triumphs of working-class life, such as Shannon's joy when her daughter receives a hard-earned scholarship, or when John and his wife find their next house, not exactly the dream house in the woods, but good enough.

Stockman's subtitle, 'What Happens to People When Work Disappears,' is drawn from William Julius Wilson's 1996 work that attempted to explain entrenched poverty not through the infamous lens of 'culture' but through the direct relationship between community health and sustaining wages. But work does not simply disappear. Our three characters do not lose their jobs to some conjuror's trick, but rather to the relentless pursuit of profit. All three suffer from the closing of Rexnord, and one, Wally, succumbs to one of the 'deaths of despair' made famous by Angus Deaton and Anne Case in their 2020 book of the same title. Shannon's politics are altered as she comes to understand the emptiness of Trumpist populism, while John clings to his unionist beliefs, and soldiers on, because he has little choice. Jobs disappear, others jobs emerge, and our workers work.

Away from its downtown towers and monolithic sports stadiums, Indianapolis is very much a working-class city. I write this review while staying at a friend's home on Indy's very working-

class west side, about three miles from the site of the closed Rexnord plant. It's a neighborhood of modest shotgun bungalows whose various states of repair and disrepair reflect the ambiguity of working-class life. A working rail line literally runs through the backyard, while two blocks away the locally famous Workingman's Friend restaurant serves up artery-clogging fare to crowds of retirees and current workers. My home-buying friends are tech workers, with little interest in the neighborhood, which is dotted with old industrial plants, both shuttered and active, set amidst the homes. She and her partner purchased the renovated bungalow to 'crash' in on nights she does not feel like driving back to Bloomington, where we all live full-time. They are part of the gentrification that already threatens this working-class enclave, a place where one can still buy a two-bedroom home for under 100K, and rents are still (barely) affordable.

The point is not that these working-class enclaves are threatened (they are) or that the working class will disappear along with good union factory jobs (they won't). Capitalism needs the working class. Indeed, it cannot function without a group of workers from whom it extracts profit. Some jobs do 'disappear,' but the working class remains, albeit in a constantly evolving, emergent form, as global capital links, de-links, creates and re-creates. The working class survives but seldom under conditions of their own choosing. The working class in contemporary Indianapolis still makes things, and the owners still extract profit from that making. But now, ball bearings are replaced by services, by provision of health care, and yes, there are still factories on the city's west side making things for the global economy. Until something replaces the system of capitalist exploitation, the working class will still work, still create community, still raise their kids, and make a life for themselves. It is important that we continue to make certain that their stories are told, and that we recognize that the precarious conditions of our contemporary working class are not normal or natural, but are the result of political decisions. Farah Stockman has done us a service by telling these stories. She has also done a service by telling her own story, even if that is not what she set out to do.

Reviewer Bio

Joseph Varga is Associate Professor of Labor Studies at Indiana University in Bloomington and former president of the Working-Class Studies Association. A long-time labor activist before becoming an academic, he is the author of *Hell's Kitchen and the Battle for Urban Space: Class Struggle and Progressive Reform in New York City, 1894-1914*.

Winant, G. (2021). *The Next Shift: The Fall of Industry and the Rise of Health Care in Rust Belt America*. Harvard University Press.

Review by John Lepley

In 1976 the University of Pittsburgh Press reissued the Thomas Bell novel *Out of This Furnace*, which had originally been published in 1941. The multigenerational story chronicles the struggles of Eastern European steelworkers in the East Pittsburgh borough of Braddock from the non-union era to the halcyon days of the CIO. It takes place in steel mills and saloons and in row houses crowded with boarders, children, and laundry; it concludes with Dobie, a rank and file steelworker and Steel Workers' Organizing Committee organizer, patting the stomach of his expectant wife Julie, saying '*Okay kid. Any time you're ready*.' The baby on its way is a sign of a bright future for Dobie, Julie, and thousands of other steelworkers.

Bell's (né Belejcak) upbringing in Braddock in the early 1900s inspired *Out of This Furnace.* During this period the steel industry was ubiquitous in and around Pittsburgh, from soot and ash on porches to the domestic labors of housewives that revolved around their husbands' mill shifts. This way of life helped cement the archetypal image of a white working-class patriarch toiling in heavy industry. However, as Gabriel Winant explains in *The Next Shift*, it was partly illusory and already well into its long decline when *Out of This Furnace* reached new readers in 1976.

The Next Shift intervenes in multiple questions. Its thesis is that Pittsburgh's health care industry expanded in the latter decades of the 20th century as it came to manage the social and economic fallout of the steel industry's decline. Numerous studies have documented the devastating impacts of mill closings. Winant contributes to this literature by showing how 'class relations of the postwar period were undergoing dramatic disintegration and recomposition in deindustrializing cities, a process that manifested itself in expanding social reliance on the health care system' (p. 224). In other words, the working class did not disappear with the steel industry; rather, a new one—more female and more Black than its steel predecessor—formed in Pittsburgh's hospitals and nursing homes.

A major strength of *The Next Shift* is how it locates the origins of Pittsburgh's health care system in collective bargaining between steel companies and the United Steelworkers of America. In 1948 the Supreme Court ruled that health care was a mandatory subject of bargaining, and the USWA gained employer-provided insurance the following year after a 42-day strike. Winant limits his study to the United States, but it's instructive to note that the United Kingdom's National Health Service also began operating in 1948. In the absence of a comprehensive national welfare state, American unions negotiated private ones at the enterprise level. It's hard to overemphasize what these benefits meant to steelworker families. As Winant tells us, 'health care became a source of empowerment and social support for many working-class people' (p. 162). Had *Out of This*

Furnace been published in 1961 instead of 1941, for example, its closing scene may have taken place in a maternity ward at Braddock Hospital instead of in Dobie and Julie's home.

Employment in the steel industry peaked at mid-century, and it slowly contracted from the 1950s to the 1970s. Black people were often the first affected because of contractual provisions that organized seniority by department instead of overall plant employment. Rising economic precarity and changing populations in steel communities (white flight in some areas; Black and white people co-existing in others) led to racial conflict. Women played key roles in organizing mutual aid that tried to mitigate the impacts of the hardship. Here, Winant shows how residential patterns shaped the structure of these resources. '[W]here much of the process of mutual support for white working-class people flowed through communal institutions built up over time–church, school, hospital, ethnic club–it flowed more directly from person to person and family to family in Black Pittsburgh,' he writes (p. 119). The difference between Pittsburgh and cities that experienced upheavals like Watts, Newark, and Detroit in the 1960s was thus one of degree rather than kind. Just as in the latter cities, Black Pittsburghers waged individual and collective struggles for access to jobs and housing while the material basis for whites' economic security receded.

One of the primary questions Winant asks is why so many of Pittsburgh's health care workers haven't gained the social citizenship that steelworkers won in the postwar era? Race and gender are major factors. Necessity compelled Black and white women to enter this field at different points during the steel industry's decline, but the work was always pitched as public extensions of their domestic duties. Federal and state policy also contribute to the low wages and stressed working conditions in health care, especially the Medicare reimbursement formula. It's an industry with bad actors, too. In August 2022, a federal judge found a mother and daughter who operate an in-home care service for seniors in Pittsburgh's Greenfield neighborhood guilty of cheating 345 workers out of $2.4 million in overtime pay. Workers with little bargaining power are vulnerable to multiple forms of legal and illegal exploitation.

'Eds and meds' is a common description that residents of the Pittsburgh-metro area apply to the region's economy. Although it's not the subject of this monograph, it's worth considering how the city's colleges and universities compare with the evolution of health care. While higher education is not embedded in the steel industry like health care, its stunning transformation over the last several decades is related to the same economic and social changes that Winant discusses. As readers of this journal will recognize, job polarization is pervasive in academia. Many schools have lopsided ratios of adjunct-to-tenure track faculty, top-heavy administrations, and large custodial, maintenance, service, and clerical workforces. Adjunct professors have little hope of landing tenure-stream positions, while custodial and service workers experience another form of precarity since schools often contract that work out to service providers like Aramark and Sodexo. In October 2021, after three unsuccessful organizing attempts since the 1970s, faculty at the University of Pittsburgh voted 1511-612 to become Steelworkers, and as I write the university's staff was underway with their own campaign to unionize.

Pittsburgh's steel industry inspired writers from Thomas Bell to William Attaway (*Blood on the Forge*, 1941) to Phillip Bonosky (*Burning Valley*, 1953) to Phillip Meyer (*American Rust*, 2009). These works are common readings in labor history and working-class studies courses because they depict people who made, and whose lives were molded by, steel. Health care workers are now writing about their experiences on the job. Theresa Brown, a nurse (B.S. in Nursing from the

University of Pittsburgh) and English PhD, has written about her experiences as a worker and patient in Pittsburgh. In April 2022 she discussed her recent book, *Healing*, with Winant. Reflecting on how undergoing cancer treatment led her to reassess her own role in patient care, she commented that 'over the past few decades health care has changed from people-centered to profit-centered.' It's a notion that's echoed widely, and Winant's remarkable book is an excellent way to learn how it happened.

Reviewer Bio

John Lepley is a labor educator in Pittsburgh and a member of United Steelworkers Local 3657.