

Working-Class Notes

The Newsletter of the Working-Class Studies Association

Volume 1, Issue 1

Fall 2006

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

As pleased as I am to offer my first "Message from the President of the Working-Class Studies Association (WCSA)," I am even more pleased to be the president of this important and worthy organization. We strive to provide a big tent within which scholars of working-class life, history, and culture, academics of working-class backgrounds, teachers of working-class students, labor educators, and makers of working-class culture can come together, meet and greet each other, learn from each other, support each other, and find support for ourselves and our work.

That's a mighty ambitious agenda in a culture that denies that there is such a thing as a "working class." We are told that we live in a "middle-class" society. There's a few rich folks and a few poor folks (mostly people of color), but all the rest of us are supposedly middle class. Even many unions in the United States say that they seek to build a pathway for their members into the middle class. It's more than an ideology, more than a mantra, more than a faith; it's in the very air we breathe.

But we know this is a great lie. The vast majority of Americans work for employers, work for wages, sell our time to earn a living. Whether we design widgets, make widgets, sell widgets, keep track of widgets, make advertisements for widgets, or educate others to

do the same, our lives revolve around somebody else's widgets, somebody else's definition of how life and work should be organized. But we also know that this need not be all there is to life, that above and beyond meeting our material necessities there can and should be creativity, autonomy, cooperation, mutuality---what the Wobblies in Lawrence, Massachusetts, in 1912, called "Bread and Roses."

At the heart of the project of the WCSA is the struggle to make visible the invisible, to demonstrate that there is indeed a working class in the United States, that it is alive and lively, full of potential and energy, not just shaped by the dominant society but able to shape the future itself. This project entails academic scholarship, classroom teaching, public history, making art (fiction, memoir, poetry, music, theater, visual art, film, and more), and labor journalism, as well as workplace and community organizing, political campaigning, and story-telling. The WCSA helps us marshal the resources and the stamina, test out our ideas and strategies, and find supporters, co-conspirators and even friendly critics, as we sally forth into the miasma of this culture.

The WCSA is really the means, the vehicle, through which we provide for each other. The listserv gives us a means to respond to each other's queries and quandaries.

The newsletter gives us a means to relate our activities and learn about each other's. And the conference gives us a means to try out ideas, present our work, appreciate and critique each other's, and, above all, meet each other face to face, form friendships and support networks that will nurture us in the battles ahead. The WCSA is only as strong as the energies, ideas, and commitment that we each bring to it and share with each other.

How could I not be honored to be President of the WCSA? I look forward to meeting many of you next June when the WCSA conference is held at my college, Macalester College, in Minnesota's capital city, St. Paul. We are eager that this conference provide the biggest "big tent" of all, with academics (practitioners of social sciences and arts and humanities), students, trade unionists, rank-and-file workers, artists, and more, in attendance and as presenters. There will be affordable, convenient housing, ample food, art and culture, stimulating ideas, and lots of good fellowship and conversation. Please let me know if you have ideas for the conference or have questions about your own participation (rachleff at macalester.edu). I look forward to meeting you.

Love and Solidarity,

Peter Rachleff

Working-Class Notes

Working-Class Notes is published twice a year, in fall and spring, by the Working-Class Studies Association. The deadline for submissions is October 1 for the fall issue and March 1 for the spring issue. Send submissions electronically to Sherry Linkon, sllinkon@ysu.edu. Issues are mailed to members and posted online in early December and early May.

Newsletter Editor:
Sherry Linkon
Production Director:
Patty LaPresta

Center for Working-Class Studies
Youngstown State University
Youngstown, OH 44555

Steering Committee Members:
President: Peter Rachleff,
Macalester College
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Joseph S. Murphy Institute,
Center for Worker Education at
the City University of New York
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Center for Working-Class Studies,
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Working-Class Studies Association Call for Nominations

The Working-Class Studies Association (WCSA) invites nominations (including self-nominations) for the following awards:

- Creative writing: For published books of poetry, fiction, creative non-fiction, and other genres
- Media projects: For journalism (single articles or series), broadcast media, multimedia, and film
- Books and articles: For published books or articles for academic or general audiences
- Dissertation: For completed dissertations

In all categories, we invite nominations of excellent work that provides insightful and engaging representations of working-class life and culture, issues related to the working class, and material that highlights the voices, experiences, and perspectives of working-class people. To be eligible, works must have been published (in the case of books or articles) or completed (in the case of films and dissertations) between January 1, 2005 and December 31, 2006.

To nominate a work for consideration, please send three copies (submit books and dissertations on paper, other materials may be submitted on paper or in electronic form) with a cover letter identifying the category in which you are nominating the work and a brief explanation of why you think the work deserves recognition. Nominations are due by **January 15, 2007**. Submit nominations to:

Sherry Linkon
Center for Working-Class Studies
Youngstown State University
Youngstown, OH 44555
sllinkon@ysu.edu

Winners will be announced at the WCSA conference, June 14-17, 2007, at Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota. Winners will receive free conference registration and a plaque.

**CALL FOR PAPERS
June 14-17, 2007**

**Class Matters: Working-Class Culture
and Counter-Culture**

Annual Conference of the
Working-Class Studies Association
Macalester College, St. Paul, Minnesota

Dormitory housing available

This conference will explore working-class culture in all its forms--activism, pop culture, the arts, storytelling, and more. Working-class culture can be a source of unity as well as division, and it is constructed in the workplace as well as in the realms of "leisure" and popular culture. At this conference, we hope to explore the relationships between "cultural workers" and their audiences, control over the means of cultural production (publishers, music producers, universities, etc.), and the commodification of working-class culture, among other issues. We are eager to provide a venue in which scholars of working-class culture using Humanities and Social Science frames and lenses can come together with each other and with creators of working-class culture.

How has working-class culture changed over time? Is there a diasporic, transnational, and/or global working-class culture? How do working-class people use representations, organizations, and everyday life to resist the dominant culture? How does working-class culture reflect divisions among working-class people?

We invite proposals for presentations, panels, posters, roundtables, and performances. Submit one-page abstracts with a brief biographical statement by **January 15, 2007** to:

Peter Rachleff
History Department
Macalester College
1600 Grand Avenue
St. Paul, Minnesota 55105
Or by email to rachleff at macalester.edu.

For more information, contact Peter Rachleff, rachleff at macalester.edu, or by phone at (651) 696-6371.

Youngstown

The Center for Working-Class Studies (CWCS) at Youngstown State University (YSU) is expanding its programs both locally and internationally this year. Its "Worker Portraits: Faces of Strength" project involves YSU journalism students and faculty in Sociology, Journalism, and American Studies in creating a traveling exhibit of profiles of area workers. The project explores how work is changing in the Mahoning Valley and aims to generate conversations about how these changes are affecting the community. The CWCS has also begun a series of tours and workshops, inviting members of the local community to learn about worker housing, public art, ethnic family history and foodways, and more.

On the international front, co-directors Sherry Linkon and John Russo visited the new Center for Chinese Workers at the University of Peking in May, and the director of that center will visit YSU in February. The goal of these exchanges is to learn from each other and to explore possibilities for collaborative research projects and opportunities for student exchanges.

This year's lecture series will also feature a presentation by Dr. Carlos Diaz, from Florida Atlantic University, on the race and class inequities of educational accountability programs like No Child Left Behind; a presentation by Dr. Pepi Leistyna, producer of the documentary *Class Dismissed*;

and an exhibit and gallery talk by Cleveland photographer Steve Cagan, whose photos will be part of the "Worker Portraits" project.

The CWCS is very pleased to announce its fully revamped website, available soon at workingclass.ysu.edu. The redesigned site includes all of the material formerly available – an extensive bibliography, sample syllabi, links to a huge variety of programs and resources, online exhibits about working-class culture, and more. The new site also offers an online form for readers to submit links, bibliography items, announcements, and other resources for addition to the site. By early

workers in their successful contract negotiations with Hilton, Hyatt, and Starwood hotels. This spring we will hold our third "Getting Paid to Cause Trouble: Careers in Social Justice" workshop which will bring together young community and union organizers and college students from the Chicago area.

Looking forward to 2008, the CCWCS has formed a series of sub-committees to organize a national conference on new forms of worker organization like worker centers, minority unions, and working partnerships.

For more information on the CCWCS, contact Liesl Miller

Orenic, Department of History and American Studies, Dominican University, 7900 W. Division St., River

Forest, IL 60305, lorenic@dom.edu.

From the Centers

2007, we will add a section of resources collected during the 2006 Class in the Classroom institute.

Chicago

On November 10th the Chicago Center for Working-Class Studies (CCWCS) will launch a new interactive online version of the Labor Trail: Chicago's History of Working-Class Life and Struggle. This new format, funded by a grant from the Illinois Humanities Council, will greatly expand the use and content of the Labor Trail. Take a look at the Labor Trail website at www.labortrail.org to see the changes.

Over the summer and early fall the CCWCS helped form the Hotel Workers Rising Faculty Support Committee to raise public awareness of and support for the hotel

Michigan State

"Our Daily Work/Our Daily Lives," Michigan State University, coordinated by John Beck.

Three museums in mid-Michigan are coordinating their efforts to explore "work" in myriad ways across the year from Labor Day 2006 to Labor Day 2007. "Our Daily Work/Our Daily Lives," the joint workers culture effort of the Labor Education Program of Michigan State University's School of Labor and Industrial Relations has helped plan the multi-part project, and it has mounted a major exhibit, "Workers Culture in Two Nations: South Africa and the United States" with the MSU Museum. The State of Mich-

igan's Historical Center, the MSU Museum and MSU's Kresge Art Museum are all offering special exhibits and programming, including film showings, poetry and fiction readings, gallery walks, children's programs, labor event commemorations, brown bag presentations, and education conferences.

The "Workers Culture in Two Nations" focuses on four occupational groups - autoworkers, miners, farmworkers, and domestics - that have played important roles in the labor history and workers culture of South Africa and the United States. The exhibit features worker art and writing, work clothes and tools, union posters and buttons, and other artifacts and information that give museum-goers a deeper appreciation of the lives of workers, the creation of workers culture, and its expression in both countries. The 2006-2007 Our Daily Work/Our Daily Lives brown bag series will link with the exhibit through presentations on topics ranging from trade union beauty pageants in Capetown to Woody Guthrie's song "1913 Massacre" to the changing historiography on American slavery, as well as a conference on South African labor history in March, and the first commemoration of the Lansing Labor Holiday, the 1937 general strike that closed down Michigan's capitol city.

The Kresge Art Museum will run several exhibits on "Work" as part of this collaboration. "Tools in Motion: Works from the Hechinger Collection" displays over 50 pieces of 20th century art that represent or incorporate everyday tools and hardware, making the ordinary extraordinary. Selected from the

collection of hardware-industry pioneer John Hechinger, this exhibit features works by well-recognized artists such as Arman, Jim Dine, Claes Oldenburg, and Jacob Lawrence. "The Workers' Landscape" is a two-part exhibition that celebrates the American worker in the first half of the 20th century. Part I features over 70 paintings, prints, and photographs that show Americans at work and leisure, their places of business and homes. This diverse exhibition explores industrial culture from the farm to the factory. Part II features over 50 photographs representing three decades of work by photographer Ewing Galloway. Drawn from the Kresge Art Museum's collection, Galloway's photos show city and rural workers' culture from New York to California which were reproduced in Life Magazine and other publications from 1920 to 1950. (Also on display at the Michigan Historical Museum from February 1-June 15, 2007). Special programming at the Kresge Art Museum includes film showings (Salt of the Earth and The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter among others), lectures on the photographs of Lewis Hine and the painters of the Ashcan School, and children's activities around the theme of "work."

The Michigan Historical Museum's special exhibit "Michigan's Family Album" showcases images of Michiganders at work in settings ranging from sawmills, mines, and factories to farms, stores, and photo studios. The exhibit also features photographs, most taken between 1870 and 1930, of families and communities, scenic places and celebrations. The permanent collection of the museum features a number of displays which expose and explore

different ways of thinking about work from pre-history through the 20th century (special guidebooks for the year of "work" at the Michigan Historical Museum are available at the museum's information desk).

The broad collaboration is the first coordinated effort of this scale to be undertaken in mid-Michigan. "Work" was the chosen target because of its primacy as a theme within people's lives that transcends many of the differences that separate us. For more information on these exhibits, contact John Beck, beckj at msu.edu.

Stony Brook

The Center for the Study of Working Class Life has embarked on a program to create educational resources in the form of DVDs and pamphlets. Three are now available:

- *Meeting Face to Face: the Iraq-US Labor Solidarity Tour* – this 27-minute film breaks through mainstream media walls to bring the voices of Iraqi workers for the first time into US debates about the Iraq war and occupation. Based on a tour of six senior Iraqi labor leaders to 25 US cities, sponsored by US Labor Against the War, the film shows why the Iraqis believe that the primary condition for a peaceful resolution in Iraq is ending the US occupation, and why an independent labor movement is crucial in creating a democratic society. (\$9.95 individual price, \$19.95 for institutions) We are making an international edition of Meeting Face to Face that will have subtitles in Spanish, French, German, Ara-

bic, and Japanese – available early 2007. For more information, visit the project’s website, www.MeetingFacetoFace.org

- *Class Struggle and the Origin of Racial Slavery: The Invention of the White Race*, by Theodore W. Allen, with a new introduction by Jeffrey B. Perry - this 44-page pamphlet reprints Allen’s pioneering article that revealed the historical origins of race as a central element in a system of social control of labor beginning in 17th century Virginia. (\$5)

- *Jack O’Dell: The Fierce Urgency of Now* – this 28-page pamphlet contains O’Dell’s essay “Race, Class, and Gender in the Struggle for Substantive Democracy,” as well as essays by John Munro and Ian Rocksborough-Smith that locate O’Dell’s life and work in the context of the social upheavals of the post-World War II era. Jack O’Dell is a long-time activist in the labor, civil rights, and peace movements of the US, and a 2004 recipient of the Center’s Award for Lifetime Contributions to Social Justice for Working People. (\$5)

The Center successfully hosted the How Class Works – 2006 conference in June, the third in the biannual series. Over 200 people attended from across the US, Canada, the UK, and elsewhere. There was a good mix of academics and labor and community activists, many graduate students as well as senior scholars. The Center presented its Award for Lifetime Contributions to Social Justice for Working People to filmmaker George Stoney and English literature scholar, teacher,

and activist Annette Rubinstein.

In late 2006 the Center will co-sponsor with the Latin American and Caribbean Studies program at Stony Brook a campus exhibition of original photos of Cesar Chavez and his leadership of the United Farm Workers by photo-journalist Cathy Murphy.

For more information on Center activities, contact Michael Zweig, michael.zweig@stonybrook.edu

UK

"Our Working-Class Lives: A New Researcher’s Seminar Series,"

From the Centers

began as a follow up to the ESRC-funded “Working-Class Lives: Geographies and Sociologies” series, with the explicit aim of focusing on the work and ideas of “new researchers,” especially early career and postgraduate researchers. The series was funded locally by the Newcastle Institute for Arts, Social Science and Humanities (NIASSH), representing a continuation of the Newcastle-based interdisciplinary interest in the changing and continued nature of class inequalities. Dr. Alison Stenning of the Centre for Urban and Regional Development Studies at Newcastle was particularly supportive in ensuring a legacy from the first ESRC-funded series, where established international scholars in the field of class theorization presented and attended.

“Our Working-Class Lives” is now in its second year, having held

three very successful and well attended seminars. New researchers from France, Italy, Denmark and the UK have shared ideas and issues, focusing on class matters in international contexts. Understandably, there has been much attention to class in higher education: both Sarah Evans, University of Kent, and Trish Reid, University of North Wales, spoke on the impact of higher education on working-class femininities, while Paul Wakeling, Manchester University, had us debating whether there was such a thing as a working-class academic. Susan Parker took this further in the interrogation of the emphasis on “our” working-class lives, as an essentialized claim to knowledge-

-albeit one often at odds with institutionalized, middle-classed, knowledges.

Local processes of regeneration versus degeneration were also differently discussed in relation to Glasgow (Kirsteen Paton, “Gentrification and the Glasgow Harbour Development”) and Newcastle (Gemma Metcalfe, “Women Against Pit Closures”), while the “past” was not forgotten in Irene Wilson’s discussion of “The Cross-over Apron--an Icon of the Working Woman 1920-1960.”

As the fourth seminar approaches (June 2007) there is reason to reflect on whether the series has contributed to the development of a working-class studies in the UK. The working-class mailing list (working-class-studies@jisc-mail.ac.uk) continues to provide a space for interested researchers to link together and even plan future events in the long drive to establishing institutional credibility, and

funding, for a subject which clearly matters--and is researched--a great deal. Presenters and attendees at "Our Working-Class Lives" have demonstrated their commitments and intentions of fostering working-class studies within and even beyond academia: thanks to everyone who has participated so far and an invite to those who have not yet come along.

For more information on "Our Working-Class Lives," contact Yvette Taylor, Newcastle University, Yvette.Taylor@ncl.ac.uk, or visit the project's website, <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/niassh/workingclasslives/>.

Class Action

Class Action exposes the insidious impact of classism on individuals, organizations, institutions, and our culture and works to change the system that undermines equity, justice, and liberty for those at the bottom of the economic ladder. Over the past two years:

- Class Action has reached over 3,500 people through workshops, lectures and organizational consults.
- Class Action developed an interactive web site www.classism.org, which receives over 8,000 visits per month, reaching individuals across the U.S. and abroad.
- Class Action distributed e-newsletters to over 4,000 individuals per month, featuring topics such as, Class and Higher Education, Class and Immigration, Class and the

Global Economy Class and Work/Leisure.

- Contributed to national dialogue on class:
 - Media Campaign reaches 148 radio programs
 - Articles about Class Action in print and online media
 - Identified Class Action program participants featured in New York Times series "Class Matters"
 - Published "Class Warrior," a magazine on class

In 2007, Class Action will increase awareness about the impact of class through face-to-face trainings and the media, work in educational institutions, especially higher education to expand access for first generation college students, and increase dialogue about class within communities of color.

We also have several new publications and resources planned, including a Cross-Class Dialogue Manual, a pamphlet on Myths and Facts about Classism, a special issue of the journal *Equity and Excellence in Education* on "Class and Education," and an educational video and curriculum on class for high school and college students.

To become involved in Class Action, contact Felice Yeskel at fyeskel@classism.org. You can sign up for the monthly e-newsletter (www.classism.org), guest edit an e-newsletter on a topic of your interest, or invite Class Action to your campus or community.

WORKING-CLASS TEACHER EDUCATION: A PROPOSAL

by Patrick J. Finn and Mary E. Finn

American schools are the most potent force in reproducing society along economic lines. Because of systemic barriers, not the least of which is the resistance of their students, urban educators have been frustrated in their efforts to instill in children of working families a sense of their own power and the knowledge and the skills necessary to negotiate with politicians, owners, and managers for a better standard of living and a more democratic and equitable society.

Unions have historically been the most potent force in challenging the system and championing the cause of working Americans. They too are frustrated in their efforts to instill in workers a sense of their own power and the knowledge and the skills necessary to organize and negotiate with politicians, owners, and managers for a better standard of living and a more democratic and equitable society.

Today a sizeable number of teacher educators and trade union educators and organizers consider themselves disciples of Paulo Freire. The methods and goals of these educators, whether in public schools or unions, are nearly identical. We propose that mutual effort and support between critical teacher educators and popular labor educators and organizers in preparing social justice teachers, would help meet both parties' needs.

Labor would profit from a better educated public, one that under

(continued p. 8)

WORKING-CLASS TEACHER EDUCATION: A PROPOSAL (cont'd)

stands and supports the role of trade unionism in a democracy, one that has the same critical inquiry, analytic, and literacy skills that elite families have, and one that engages in social justice campaigns for economic equity. Imagine how much easier and effective the work of unionists would be if a generation of children of working families graduated from high school with an understanding of their right and duty to be heard, the power of joining together in common cause, and the skill to speak in their own behalf.

On the other hand, imagine how much easier the work of teachers of working-class students would be if, through unionization, the lives of working families could be improved. The top administrator of an urban school district recently commented to us that if the minimum wage were raised, she was sure the test scores of students in her district would increase. So we have proposed a collaborative, critical, “three-strand working-class teacher education program” (Finn, SUNY Press, forthcoming, March 2007), to prepare teachers to educate working-class children in their collective self-interest:

- First strand -- an undergraduate minor in Working-Class Studies: literature, art, music, history, and economics taught from a working-class perspective. All students have a right to access to the culture of the nation and to understand and appreciate the ways the working class has contributed to that culture.
- Second strand -- professional education; history, philosophy, sociology of education, and curriculum and instruction taught from a critical/Freirean perspective. Students have a right to the knowledge and skills necessary to advance their self-interest.
- Third strand -- preparing teachers to become activists and organizers, taught in one-hour courses that might continue during the graduates’ first year of teaching. Students could also earn credit for internships with unions or community-based organizations.

We see many parallels between popular/worker education and progressive social justice teacher education that could be the basis of this collaboration. Both utilize pedagogies that:

- focus on a “liberating” theory and a “critical, reflective practice” (Barnard, 2002) rather than “domesticating” pedagogies (Finn, 1999),
- emphasize the critical analytic inquiry and literacy skills that are necessary for members of working families to act in their collective self-interest,
- seek social justice and equity through participatory, experiential, rigorous, and activist education grounded in the lives of the students (Finn, 1999),
- believe “the hallmark of popular [and progressive education] is constructing educational environments in which working people [and their children] can ask and answer questions about why the society they live in is structured the way it is and how it can be changed for the better” (Schurman., 2002).

Before this collaboration can be developed, however, both labor and teacher educators have to share a vision of the benefits. The first step forward, therefore, might be a dialogue between teacher educators and labor educators and organizers where these ideas can be discussed. Please contact us at finn at buffalo.edu with your ideas and responses to this proposal.

References:

- Barnard, E. (2002) Popular Education: Training Rebels with a Cause. In L. Delp, M. Outman-Kramer, S. Schurman & K. Wong (Eds.) *Teaching for Change: Popular Education and the Labor Movement*. Los Angeles and Silver Spring, Md.: UCLA Center for Labor Research and Education and The National Labor College.
 - Finn, P. (1999) *Literacy with an Attitude: Educating Working-Class Children in their own Self-Interest*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
 - Finn, P. (forthcoming, March 2007) *Teacher Education with an Attitude: Completing the Revolution*. In P. Finn & M. Finn (Eds.) *Teacher Education with an Attitude: Preparing Teachers to Educate Working-Class Children in their Collective Self-Interest*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
 - Schurman, S. (2002) *Labor Deserves Credit: The Popular Education Foundations of the National Labor College*. In L. Delp, et. al (Eds.) op. cit.
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WCSA Member News

In October, **Michelle Tokarczyk** gave two talks at Newcastle University, UK. She spoke to the Department of Geography and Sociology on "Class in the Kitchen: The Meanings of Food in Lower-Class Lives." She also spoke at the Young Working-Class Scholars Conference.

Earlier this year **Terry Easton** completed his dissertation "Temporary Work, Contingent Lives: Race, Immigration, and Transformations of Atlanta's Daily Work, Daily Pay" at Emory University. He currently holds a temporary position in the Department of Literature, Communication, and Culture at the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta.

Diane Gilliam Fisher recently returned from a West Virginia writers tour of mountaintop removal sites. The tour was sponsored by the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition. The group visited a site on the ground, then did a flyover tour, courtesy of volunteer pilots with South Wings. Coalfield residents who are being directly affected by the violence and poison of mountaintop removal came to Charleston to tell their stories. Together, the group of writers composed an open letter to the citizens of West Virginia and to Congress. West Virginia is a war zone. Please visit www.ilovemountains.org to find out what is happening and how you can help.

An excerpt from **Dale Maharidge's** new documentary novel "Child of the Flood" appears in the Fall/Winter issue of *Double-Take*. It's a working-class novel set in New Orleans during and after Katrina, with photos by **Michael Williamson**. Maharidge and Williamson were awarded a Katrina Media Fellowship of \$30,000 for this project from the Open Society Institute. Photos from the project are also available on the Washington Post website, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/gallery/2006/08/29/GA2006082901094.html>.

Graduate Student News

by Michele Fazio, SUNY-Stony Brook

At the Stony Brook "How Class Works" conference in June, graduate students met to discuss how they can contribute to the organization. The meeting produced a lively discussion of ideas about how to disseminate information publicizing working-class studies and related events to other graduate students and to create an annual meeting for graduate students at upcoming conferences. I have submitted these recommendations to the Steering Committee for further review.

As promised, I would like to introduce another graduate student who will soon be completing her dissertation entitled "Women's Work: The Intersection of Class, Gender and Sexuality in Women's Proletarian Fiction." Cherie Rankin attends Illinois State University and has presented at both the Youngstown and Stony Brook conferences. Her project explores the unique position working-class women find themselves in regarding such issues as reproductive choices, domestic work, mothering, and bodily safety (including the access they have to health care and social service resources). Cherie is particularly interested in keeping important women's works such as Tillie Olsen's *Yonnonandi* and Meridel Le Sueur's *The Girl* in print and in the classroom. She's taught a number of literature and composition classes in which she urges students to think through the complexities of class, as a concept and as an experience, and how it intersects with other categories and experiences of identity. Cherie's work has been published in the *Illinois English Bulletin* and the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings *Journal of Florida Literature*. She may be reached at the following address: wibblet68@mchsi.com. Please join me in wishing her continued success.

Communications

The Communications Committee is considering three important elements of WCSA activity: the newsletter; the website and e-mail listserve; and the possibility of creating a journal. We seek input from all WCSA members. Please convey your thoughts on how these communications tools should be structured best to serve your needs as a scholar and activist. We welcome volunteers as well. Contact Michael Zweig, WCSA Secretary and chair at the Center for Study of Working Class Life, Department of Economics, SUNY, Stony Brook, NY 11794-4384, (631) 632-7536, michael.zweig at stonybrook.edu.

Outreach

The Outreach Committee is just swinging into action. Our list serve reaches more than 800 subscribers but the Association has fewer than 200 members. There is lots of room for growth! Our goal is to spread the word about the WCSA, particularly through our presence at conferences and our distribution of WCSA pamphlets and our Call for Papers at them. The Outreach Committee consists of the following members Chairperson Peter Rachleff, Alessandra Senzani, Terry Easton, Mary Romero, Michele Fazio, Andrew Ross, Christie Launius, Sarah Attfield, and Cheri Rankin. We would welcome any additional volunteers and we welcome

Committee Reports

Finance

The Finance Committee now consists of the following members: Fred Gardaphe, Sandi Dahlberg, Pepi Leistyna, David Bernatowicz, and WCSA Treasurer Michele Fazio. Membership renewal letters were sent out to current members at the beginning of November. The WCSA currently has almost 200 members. For more information, contact chair Michele Fazio, mfazio at ic.sunysb.edu

Conference

The Conference Committee, chaired by WCSA President-Elect Kitty Krupat, has begun planning for the 2007 conference in St. Paul. See p. 3 for the Call for Papers. For more information or to volunteer to serve on this committee, contact Kitty Krupat at Kitty.Krupat at mail.cuny.edu.

suggestions about how else to build our membership. Please contact committee chair Peter Rachleff, rachleff at macalester.edu.

Awards

The Awards Committee has developed a call for nominations for the WCSA's first annual awards recognizing excellence in working-class studies, see p. 2. Nominations have already begun to pour in. The deadline for submissions is *January 15, 2007*. The committee is also developing a proposal to name the awards, as a way of honoring people whose work exemplifies the goals of the awards and the association. An invitation to submit suggestions was sent to all WCSA members in October. We expect to submit a proposal for naming the awards to the WCSA Steering Committee in December. For more information, contact Sherry Linkon, sllinkon at ysu.edu.

Call for Papers

Papers are sought for a book/special issue of a journal on the topic of "working-class humor" in any discipline (literary studies, cinema, art, folklore, anthropology, history, etc.) and using any theoretical approach. The focus of the collection is on the interplay of the category of humor (roughly defined as anything that can be perceived as funny, amusing, etc.) with the working class. Of particular interest are essays that pursue the topic of working-class humor in relation to gender, ethnicity, race, geography, and history. Both papers that deal with the representation of the working class in humorous discourse and/or on the use of humor by the working class are welcome. Expressions of interest are due anytime, actual papers will be due in *April 2007*.

Contact:

Salvatore Attardo
Editor-in-Chief
HUMOR: International Journal
of Humor Research
English Department
Youngstown State University
Youngstown, OH 44555

humor@cc.ysu.edu or
sattardo at neo.rr.com

Lectures & Events

Michigan State University "Our Daily Work/Our Daily Lives" Brown Bag Series
(12:15-1:30 pm in the MSU Museum Auditorium)

November 3, 2006

Mark Nowak

College of St. Catherine

"Writing in the First Person Plural: The Ford/NUMSA Worker-poets of Pretoria and Port Elizabeth"

November 10, 2006

Peter Alegi

Michigan State University/History

"Rewriting Patriarchal Scripts: Trade Union Beauty Pageants in the South African Textile Industry, 1970s-Present"

December 1, 2006

Louis Galdieri and Ken Ross

Documentary Filmmakers

"'1913 Massacre': The Woody Guthrie Song and the Michigan Copper Strike Tragedy that Inspired It"

January 19, 2007

Diana Ramey Berry

Michigan State University/History

"'Reap in the Harvest What You Sow': New Directions in Slavery Scholarship"

February 9, 2007

Coreen Derifield

Purdue University/History

"Negotiating the American Dream: Industrial Manufacturing and Working Class Community in Burlington, Iowa, 1960 -1980"

March 12, 2007

Susan J. Bandes

Director/Kresge Art Museum

"American Images and the Workers' Landscape"

April 6, 2007

Doug Rademacher

UAW/Local 602

"Life and Work in the Shadow of the Verlinden Plant: The UAW Local 602 Oral History Project"

Center for Working-Class Studies at Youngstown State University 12th Annual Lecture Series

November 14, 2006, 7:30 pm

Carlos Diaz

Florida Atlantic University/Curriculum and Instruction

"Accountability Efforts in U.S. Schools: Examining the Impact Across Racial, Class and Linguistic Groups"

Presidential Suite, Kilcawley Center

Co-sponsored by YSU/Beeghly College of Education

February 14, 2007, 7:30 pm

Tong Xin

University of Peking/Sociology

Director, Center for Chinese Workers,

"Women and Work in Modern China"

Presidential Suite, Kilcawley Center

Co-sponsored by YSU/Sociology & Anthropology Department and Labor Studies Program

March 1 thru May 4, 2007

Steven Cagan, photographer, and the CWCS

"Working Ohio/Working Youngstown: A Photographic and Poster Exhibition"

Youngstown Historical Center of Industry and Labor

March 22, 2007, 7:00 pm

Steven Cagan and Alyssa Lenoff

Director, Journalism Program/YSU

"Working Ohio/Working Youngstown: Reception and Gallery Talk"

Youngstown Historical Center of Industry and Labor

Co-sponsored by YSU/Journalism Program

April 16, 2007, 7:30 pm

Pepi Leistyna

University of Massachusetts (Boston), Applied Linguistics

"Laughing Matters: Entertainment Television's Mockery of the Working Class"

Ohio Room, Kilcawley Center

Co-sponsored by YSU/American Studies Program

Working-Class Studies Across Cultures: One Scholar's Perspective

by Jody Mellor, Centre for Women's Studies,
University of York

I'm currently a PhD student in York, England, working on a project that analyses the intersections between class, ethnicity and gender. Presently in the UK there has been a resurgence of interest in class, led in the main by feminist social scientists (eg. Skeggs 2004; Lawler 2000; Walkerdine 2001). The advantage of class analyses stemming from a feminist perspective is that it situates the class-gender intersection at the center. However, the problem is that race and ethnicity do not occupy a significant place in this revival of class in the UK, the implication being that class analyses are based almost solely on the white (and non-religious) community in Britain.

This year, I spent three months in New York City and Youngstown, Ohio. There are many advantages of going abroad for a short time, especially considering that in Europe, British-born (and American-born) scholars are considered culturally and linguistically insular, a claim that does have a lot of truth! I attended the conference at SUNY Stony Brook, *How Class Works*, and was struck by how, almost as a matter of course, class is theorized alongside race and ethnicity in the US. This difference from the UK, which is partly down to varying migration patterns, geographical location, and historical formation of these countries, has enabled Americans to connect class with race in a

way that British scholars have not.

I also attended two conferences in Europe this year: *Gender and Citizenship in a Multicultural Context*, which took place in Lodz, Poland, and *Qualitative Diversity Research*, held in Leuven, Belgium. Though the themes of these conferences were ethnicity and gender, the differences between UK, US, and European theories about the ethnicity-class-gender intersection is stark. At both European conferences, class was almost entirely absent. Out of about 400 presentations at *Gender and Citizenship in a Multicultural Context*, only mine focused on class. This silencing of class is surprising at a conference on gender and ethnicity, especially considering the attention UK feminists have paid to class-gender and the links US scholars have drawn between class and race.

What I got from these experiences, then, was access to many key debates about the class-ethnicity and ethnicity-gender intersections that ordinarily would not have been open to me in the UK. Scholars (from America and Europe, as well as Britain) can gain much from engaging with debates in other countries about class-gender-ethnicity, and that such interactions could build international networks of academics and activists working on themes of class and its intersections.

Book Review: Paul Clemens, *Made in Detroit: A South of 8 Mile Memoir*, (Doubleday, 2005)

Reviewed by Deborah Hicks,
University of Cincinnati

The flickering images of a home movie capture the nuances of a boyhood lived amid a unique racial and class-bound strain of urban American life. As Clemens narrates in his memoir, *Made in Detroit*, these images have a certain "automotive fixation" to them: "My mother, hand on hip, is standing around, talking with our aunt, and my father and uncle, in the next reel, are splattered with mud from head to toe, now racing dune buggies somewhere well outside Detroit . . . the film goes black for a second, and when it comes back up there I am, a couple years old, wearing my uncle's flame-covered racing helmet, steering his hot rod" (33-34).

Clemens recounts the experience of growing up white, working-class, and Catholic in Detroit, the son of a laborer for whom the auto industry was as much a part of the fabric of everyday life as religion. As he writes early in the memoir, "General Motors cars were the constant of our life, like Catholicism" (33). Theirs was a changing social world--that of father and son. For the younger heir to a working-class life grew up in the era of Mayor Coleman Young's administrative rein in Detroit, a time when the ratio of urban blacks to whites shifted to the point where the latter were now the minority. Clemens recounts the perplexed response of some to the continued existence of the remnants

(continued p. 13)

Book Review: *Made in Detroit: A South of 8 Mile Memoir (cont'd)*

of Detroit's white working-class past. A black cop, called in when someone had smashed the windows of the family car, gives Clemens the look that, as he writes, suggested: "What are you doing here?" (7).

The world that Clemens inherits is one defined by his family's Catholicism and the traditions of male labor. Writing of his father, who spent his working years putting in 60-hour weeks on the shop floor, Clemens notes the paradox of the kind of intelligence with which men shaped lives outside of the middle-class world of the suburbs. It is a story that has been told before – of masculinity, whiteness, class-bound labor, the working man's mental life. Like other sons and daughters of the working classes who have gone on to shape literary histories of their experiences, Clemens will fashion an alternative world for himself through his engagement with literature. Throughout his memoir we see him coming to grips with his whiteness through engaging with the words of Baldwin, Ellison, Malcolm X. We find him struggling to put into literary terms the complexity of a coming of age experience that hardly fits the trendy liberal mantra of "white privilege."

What are the fruits yielded from the rich narrative detail of this memoir of growing up south of 8 Mile – the geographic artery (famously portrayed in the popular film, *8 Mile*) separating expanding urban decay from houses with well-groomed lawns? For those of us who study and write about how class is lived on American soil, several insights are yielded across its pages. The first is the class-bound nature of whiteness – the very specific gradations of class and regional background that make the ramblings of educated white liberals about their privilege and guilt seem blind to the particulars of their own race. Down the street from Clemens's modest brick bungalow was a stretch of neighborhood settled by whites of Appalachian origin, some fitting Clemens's boyhood clichés of white trash. His own class status, however, was at the same time difficult to distinguish from such a loaded term, whose meaning was always relative to where one stood on a ladder of geography, economics, education, and cultural history.

Further insights are yielded about the dynamics of race in a city such as Detroit, where the working-class whites of Clemens's boyhood – auto shop laborers, cops, Catholic clergy – clung to a disappearing past. The most gripping narrative tension found in the book is that of Clemens's changing relationships with blacks, the racial majority in urban Detroit though not in the Catholic schools and close knit communities where he spent much of his boyhood. Early encounters with black youth in the neighborhood and on the football field evolve into dialogues penned into the margins of works by black writers – neither kind of encounter being without tension, even angry conflict.

Intersecting with such complex encounters is yet another thread of identity – that of the Catholic cultural experience that shaped life in Clemens's family. "Cars and Catholicism" is the title we find for one chapter. "Were we white trash?" opens this chapter. "We were Catholics, first of all – ethnic Catholics, on my mother's side – and it never seemed to me, growing up, that Catholics could be white trash" (40). This religious thread running through the fabric of a working-class life took me back to my girlhood, where going to Vacation Bible School and listening to southern preaching was an integral part of the whole – something we can understand in sociological terms as a class-specific experience, yet with academic portrayals often missing the fine-grained, layered meanings that narrative and memoir can provide.

What such a storied approach provides is an inside perspective on how class and race are lived in urban America, a necessary perspective in academic fields often dominated by the more distant perspective of the sociological, the historical, or the economic. Among its contributions to the study of class in America is this intimate voice, recounting the complex intersections of place, class-specific shades of whiteness, and religion in a way that allows us to ponder such issues with emotion and moral depth. It is a book that would be the ideal complement to academic or journalistic studies of the intersection of class and race in American social life, though it also easily stands its own ground as a literary text that brings us inside the experience of being white and working class in Detroit.

Being at Work Poetry Project Nears Completion by Paul Tulloch

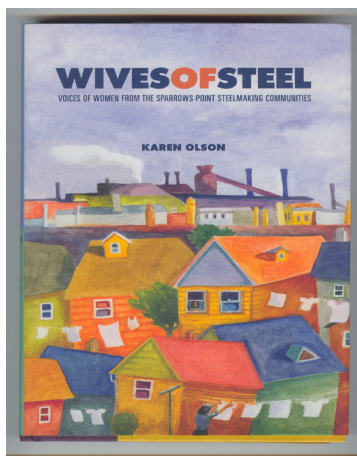
The “Being at Work” poetry challenge ran from February through until July 2006. The contest offered both experienced and beginner poets a unique opportunity to share their thoughts, experiences, emotions, and stories from the home floor and the shop floor of work. The judging panel included three well-respected poets, Tom Wayman, Maureen Hynes, and Susan Eisenburg, supported by special “guest” judges Buzz Hargrove, the president of the Canadian Autoworkers, and Ken Neumann, the Canadian Director for the United Steelworkers of America. We hoped that including labor leaders would create a more inclusive judging panel that would help beginner poets feel more comfortable submitting their work and entice more experienced poets by presenting them with a unique challenge. The goal was also to further the relationship between the labor community and the arts community -- a very important relationship to cultivate.

The project turned out to be more successful than we had envisioned. We received over 700 poems from more than 350 poets from 19 different countries. We originally set our sights on Canada and the US, however the internet allowed us to reach writers all over the world. With basically zero budget for promotional expenses, the internet proved to be an amazing low cost communication vehicle. Mind you, it did take a lot of volunteer work and a lot of help from some kind people, such as Eric Lee from LabourStart, to offer up their websites and lists to get the word out. It also took the help of many individuals behind the scene.

The whole project started roughly six years ago. I remember that day quite well. It was a cold February day, and I had just finished work. It was shortly after 5:00 pm and already dark and particularly cold, so I am not sure if it was the brightly lit store, the cold, or what, but I spotted something in the window of a bookstore I was walking by on my way home. It was a poetry collection entitled *What Work Is*, by Philip Levine. It was like a loud beacon, shining the promise of an answer to a question that I had been asking myself for sometime: “What the hell is work anyway and why does it rule over so many peoples lives?” I will be quite frank, I am a labour economist by trade and poetry had always been somewhat intimidating to me, as I was raised on the standard high art notion of poetry. Originally I thought what could this little book offer me? Would I even understand it? I bought the book, went over to my favorite pub and read the entire collection, four or five times. I was amazed at Levine’s ability to get at some of the notions I had felt on many occasions but did not formally acknowledge. I decided then that I must somehow capture more of those voices and emotions from as many people as I could. I wanted to hear stories of work, the emotions of work, and how work affected other people. These voices needed to be heard not just by me but by everybody. So I decided -- in an economist type fashion -- that I would conduct a survey of the emotions of work. Poetry was going to be my questionnaire and the prose within the poems was going to be my numbers.

Six years later, we are now in the final stages of the judging process and hope to announce the winning poems by late November. We raised over \$500 from donations received as entry fees. I was happy to hand over an envelop full of checks to a local literacy project. We have so many great entries that picking the winning entries will be a tough process. In fact, it’s been so difficult, and we have received so many great poems, that we are exploring the possibility of producing an anthology from a cross section of the entries from both the beginner and experienced contests. I have been busy putting together a small editorial group to help out with the process. I am also quite happy and honored to say that Philip Levine has sent us in a poem to be included in the anthology. It was quite a day for me, seeing that poem appear in my email inbox. How nice to finish off the work for this project, sitting back with a cup of tea, my son on my knee, and a new Philip Levine poem to read. Who knows, maybe in a couple of years from now we’ll try another attempt at this project.

This project has been more fun than I would have ever imagined. Thank you to all those who helped; a list of participants and more information on the project are available on my website, www.livingwork.ca.

BOOK NOTES


***Wives of Steel: Voices of Women from the Sparrows Point Steelmaking Communities* (Pennsylvania State University Press), Karen Olson**

Most books about the steelmaking communities focus on the experiences and perspectives of steelworkers, most of whom are men. Even books that examine steelmaking communities rarely focus on women's lives. Karen Olson's study, *Wives of Steel*, offers a gender-focused study of the relationship between steelwork and family and community life. Based on more than 80 interviews conducted over 15 years, Olson examines the gendered worlds inside the mill and in the home, how family life was shaped by the rhythms of steelwork, and how the loss of steelworking jobs affected families and the roles men and women play. Her analysis also explores how race intersects with gender and class, through comparisons between white and African-American families in the Sparrows Point area.

***Inside Toyland: Working, Shopping, and Social Inequality* (University of California Press), Christine L. Williams**

Williams draws on her own experiences working in toy stores to offer an insightful analysis of the social impact of shopping for toys. Her study explores the politics of how we shop, exposes the realities of low-wage retail work, and shows how class, race, and gender manifest and reproduce themselves in our shopping-mall culture. Williams argues that toy stores perpetuate social inequality in a variety of ways: through work assignments based on gender and race, the racial dynamics between staff and customers, and labor conflicts. She also notes how adults teach children lessons about shopping that legitimize economic and social hierarchies. In the end, however, *Inside Toyland* focuses not on critiquing consumers but rather on specific changes in labor law and in the organization of the retail industry that can better promote social justice.

***Real Country: Music and Language in Working-Class Culture* (Duke University Press), Aaron A. Fox**

Fox examines the relationship between country music, conversation, and working-class culture in Lockhart, Texas, a rural town south of Austin. He argues that country music is the cultural and intellectual property of working-class people and not only of the Nashville-based music industry or the stars whose lives figure so prominently in popular and scholarly writing about the genre. Based on observations and participation in conversations and musical performances and jam sessions in bars, garages, and trailer homes, Fox describes and analyzes everyday life, with a focus on the human voice. His study considers how working-class people talk and how they sing, and he connects these with ideas about place, memory, music, working-class social history, race, and gender. In *Real Country*, working-class Texans re-imagine their past and give voice to the struggles and satisfactions of their lives in the present through music.

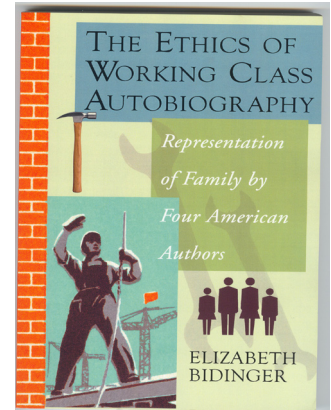
***The Resisting Muse: Popular Music and Social Protest* (Ashgate Publishing), Ian Peddie**

Peddie's new collection focuses on how protest music has been used as a tool of critique and opposition. Popular music has traditionally served as a rallying point for voices of opposition across a huge variety of genres. The book argues that popular protest music can best be understood as part of a complex dialectic that appeals to different audiences, helps to create oppositional communities, and challenges varied hegemonic structures. The book focuses on contemporary music, largely post-1975, with chapters examining artists such as Billy Bragg, Michelle Shocked, and Bono, as well as music movements such as hip hop, heavy metal, and reggae. In this respect, *The Resisting Muse* examines how the forms and aims of social protest music depend upon the audience's ability to invest the music with political meaning.

BOOK NOTES

***The Ethics of Working-Class Autobiography: Representation of Family* by Four American Authors (McFarland & Company), Elizabeth Bidinger**

Autobiography has been an important genre in working-class writing, providing important insight into the experience and perspective of working-class people and their families. But writing about one's own life raises ethical questions for writers and for readers. *In The Ethics of Working Class Autobiography* Bidinger analyzes four writers who grew up working-class and became intellectual professionals: Russel Baker, John Edgar Wideman, Agate Nesaule, and Bobbie Ann Mason. The book examines how these writers construct themselves and their families. Bidinger also provides an overview of ethical issues in autobiography and trends in working-class autobiography.



***American Working-Class Literature* (Oxford University Press), edited by Nicholas Coles and Janet Zandy**

A new anthology ranging from early colonial times to the present, *American Working-Class Literature* presents more than 300 literary texts that exemplify this tradition. It demonstrates how American working people live, labor, struggle, express themselves, and give meaning to their experiences both inside and outside of the workplace. The collection includes work not only by the industrial proletariat but also by slaves and unskilled workers, by those who work unpaid at home, and by workers in contemporary service industries. As diverse in race, gender, culture, and region as America's working class itself, the selections represent a wide range of genres including fiction, poetry, drama, memoir, oratory, journalism, letters, oral history, and songs. Works by little-known or anonymous authors are included alongside texts from such acclaimed writers as Frederick Douglass, Upton Sinclair, Tillie Olsen, Philip Levine, Maxine Hong Kingston, and Leslie Marmon Silko.

***Faces and Voices* (Bird Dog Publishing), Larry Smith**

Bird Dog Publishing, a new imprint from Bottom Dog Press, has released a new collection of stories by Larry Smith, *Faces and Voices*. As Bonnie Jo Campbell writes, "In Larry Smith's *Faces and Voices*, the work of telling stories is the work of both healing wounds and shaping the world. A prostitute details how she got started and how she'll get out, perhaps by taking a job at K-Mart; a fellow who's gotten to a senior position at Dairy Queen tells us: 'You just come in on Monday and point your nose to Friday'; in one of the book's loveliest pieces, a man just wants to take his mattress to the dump. Larry Smith's middle American characters are hard workers, grateful for jobs they cannot possibly love, whether they are coal miners or shelf-stockers or motel maids. A list of the jobs described in this book could be a guide to the overworked and underpaid of our nation."

***Crow Call* (West End Press), Michael Henson**

West End Press announces publication of *Crow Call*, poems by Michael Henson. This poetic sequence commemorates the death of Buddy Gray, grassroots activist and founder of the National Coalition for the Homeless, murdered 10 years ago in Cincinnati. Some poems deal directly with his murder while others take up issues of exploitation, homelessness, grief, and the sacrifice necessary to create a common voice.

***The State of Working America 2006/2007* (The Economic Policy Institute), Lawrence Mishel, Jared Bernstein, and Sylvia Allegretto**

This latest edition offers an in-depth description of working conditions, wages, living standards, and employment patterns, through both statistical data and critical analysis. Some of the information from the book is also available online at www.StateOfWorkingAmerica.org.

