



# CENTER FOR WORKING-CLASS STUDIES AT YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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## NEW WORKING-CLASS STUDIES

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Even as traditional blue-collar jobs seem to be disappearing, the working class remains a vital part of America's culture and economy. It includes everyone from an autoworker to the waitress who serves you lunch. Yet the experiences and views of working-class people are often ignored. At the Center for Working-Class Studies (CWCS), we challenge myths about the working class, sponsor arts and education projects that honor workers, and engage local, national, and international communities in conversations that take working-class experience and concerns seriously. Americans like to believe that we're all middle class. But in a [national survey](#), about 45% of Americans identified themselves as working class, and some economists say that as many as 62% of Americans are working class. Today's working class is diverse and changing. Working-class people make auto parts and tennis shoes, clean offices and hospital rooms, pack meat and pick vegetables, and provide hundreds of services that we all rely upon.

Class is not simply about how much money you make. If you earn an hourly wage and a supervisor manages what you do at work every day, if you have a high school diploma but not a college degree, if you believe in hard work and plain talk, then you're probably working class. At the CWCS, we see class as based on a combination of factors -- what kind of work people do, how much they earn, their social and economic power, their education, lifestyle, and culture. We also recognize that class is closely related to race, gender, religion, and other social categories.

Class shapes the lives of individuals as well as the policies of our society. For individuals, class affects not only whether you go to college, but also where you go and how well prepared you are to succeed. It also shapes attitudes about work, community, and our expectations for ourselves and our children. In American society, class divisions generate public policies that allow the "haves" to get more while the "have nots" keep falling further behind. And sadly, our belief that class doesn't exist keeps us from understanding how much it matters.

Neither Working-Class Studies as a field, nor the Center for Working-Class Studies, advocates any single definition of what constitutes the working class. We recognize, instead, that the term has multiple meanings and associations. Individuals involved in Working-Class Studies approach class in diverse ways, and discussions across these perspectives help all of us to deepen our understanding of how class works. Discussions of class should consider class as a category of identity, a socio-economic category, an aspect of social structures of power and privilege, and as an aspect of discourse. We must also consider the complex relationships among class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, place, and other social and political groupings. Instead of focusing our energies on trying to pin down who belongs to the working class, the CWCS advocates for public and academic discussions that explore how class works in the lives of individuals, communities, and societies.

Working-Class Studies values work and workers. Through research, arts projects, and teaching with, for, and about working-class people, we help their voices be heard and their views be appreciated. By making the working class more visible, we help working-class people gain respect. We also advocate for public policies that protect workers' rights and create a more just society.



