

New Working Class Studies

Edited by John Russo and Sherry Lee Linkon
(Cornell University Press, 2005)

This book is a wonderful collection that embodies the breadth and multiple flavors of the new working class studies.

What's *new* is that working class studies is defining itself beyond labor studies, which focused more on the study of unionized workers with its overrepresentation of white men. This book reflects a much broader look at working class culture and the intersection of race and gender with class. It also demonstrates that working class studies is truly a multidisciplinary approach to social science and humanities. As the editors write, "New Working-Class Studies places working-class people, their voices, experiences, and perspectives, at the center of its research, teaching and activism. Stories, images, songs, oral histories, and poems created and used by working-class people provide access to this working-class perspective."

The editors, John Russo and Sherry Lee Linkon, are co-directors of the Center for Working-Class Studies at Youngstown State University. They've pulled together a collection that includes essays on labor history, African-American workers, and class and higher education –along with essays on humanities themes such working class autobiography, oral history, poetry, music and writing.

While this book is positioned for academic audiences, many of these fourteen essays will appeal to broader audiences. Film buffs, for example, will enjoy Tom Zaniello's essay, "Filming Class," with its working class lens on Hollywood and independent film.

This book will probably change how you watch a movie, read poetry, listen to music, or watch a presidential debate.

People interested in the language of class in the political landscape will enjoy Jack Metzgar's essay, "Politics and the American Class Venacular." Metzgar argues that our politics could be transformed if we had a different popular conceptualization of class that went beyond the simplistic "one big middle class" framing that most media bring to political discussions.

In another interesting essay, "Class as a Question in Economics," Michael Zweig argues that most economic theory does not include the role of class, thus failing to incorporate the role of class interests and power differences in



economic outcomes. As Zweig writes, “the operations of power in economic relationships are often indicators of class dynamics and often go a long way toward determining market outcomes.”

For trainers on class and diversity issues, Robert Bruno and Lisa Jordan’s essay, “Building Class Identity: Lessons from Labor Education,” includes some useful reflections on attitude change.