

# Editorial: Welcome to the Journal of Working-Class Studies

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The *Journal of Working-Class Studies* brings together the work of scholars, writers, artists and activists who are committed to the study and representation of working-class life. We aim to publish writing about the global working class – a diverse group of people whose commonality is their position in classed societies.

The *Journal of Working-Class Studies* is also the journal of the Working-Class Studies Association, an international interdisciplinary organisation dedicated to the study of working-class people and their culture. The work of the organisation, and this journal, is underpinned by a key question – who are the working class? Many scholars have offered possible, often contested answers to this question, from fields including sociology, political economy, history, literary studies, and cultural studies, among others. For members of the Working-Class Studies Association, the working class are call centre workers in the UK, factory workers in China, miners in Australia, farmers in India, steel workers and Uber drivers in the US, garment workers in Bangladesh, retail workers in South Korea and so on. Working-class experience includes struggle, oppression and exclusion, but also collectivism, solidarity, and a will to fight the exploitation of labour.

Working-class history and culture has long been explored by academics, commentators, activists and interested citizens. We seek to add to the scope and depth of those ongoing conversations. In addition to the excellent work that already exists, this journal aims to provide a unified space and a dedicated outlet to magnify working-class voices.

Working-Class Studies writers always aim for accessibility. The work we publish should be general-audience friendly, and not overly reliant on academic jargon. This is not to say that such work won't be academically rigorous – clear, lively prose does not mean simplistic ideas. To understand the complexities of working-class experience, it is also important to acknowledge how class intersects with other sites of experience and identity such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion and ability. Our aim is to provide a platform to explore the depth and diversity of the working class, and we warmly invite academics, writers, activists and engaged citizens interested in working-class issues to submit work for consideration. New readers and contributors to the field are especially welcome.

We have chosen to publish this journal independently, using an open access format. Although we do not print in hard copy, all articles are downloadable as small PDF files that should be readable on most devices. Unless otherwise indicated, the articles in each issue will have been through academic or industry peer review, a process that differentiates the content in our publication from opinion or journalistic commentaries

in the popular press. Having said this, at times articles in the journal may present opposing arguments or discuss recent events that may still be unfolding – and we encourage submissions that challenge dominant power relationships or assumptions.

Working-Class Studies scholars produce work with a commitment to demonstrating how our ideas and arguments apply to the lives of working-class people. Often authors will share their own class experiences as a way of grounding and further complicating their analysis. Personal stories provide access points for readers as well as platforms to explore broader patterns of power relations.

The essays featured in our first issue offer a mix of contemporary commentary as well as histories of Working-Class Studies as it has developed, giving readers an opportunity to get to know the field and to think about what Working-Class Studies can do. Working-Class Studies Association founders Sherry Linkon and John Russo reflect on some of the major questions and tensions that have shaped the discipline of Working Class Studies. This article provides important touchstones in the development of the field, and is an excellent place to start if you're new to Working Class Studies.

Michael Zweig, director of the Center for the Study of Working Class Life at the State University of New York-Stony Brook, looks at the changing structure of the working classes in the United States as people move from full-time permanent work to casual and part-time labour. Zweig considers how these changes have weakened working class power, affecting labour organising and trade union membership, among other modes of resistance. Crucially, Zweig emphasizes the importance of power and culture as the primary social forces through which Working Class Studies has taken shape.

Jack Metzgar presents an extract of a full-length work in progress that demonstrates how autobiography can animate questions at the heart of Working-Class Studies. Metzgar, like many scholars in the field, comes from a working-class background. Generous in its personal detail, his account serves a larger purpose: to explore how the author's nostalgia for the 'century of the common man', or the period of unprecedented working and middle-class US prosperity between 1945-1975, is driven at least in part by the steady erosion of such standards witnessed since. The essay serves as an exciting preview of the larger work to come.

Reflecting on her 'discovery of self' through reading personal narratives by other scholars from the working-class, Deborah Warnock discusses how the many collections of autobiographical writing she's engaged with reveal patterns of experience unique to working-class academics. The existence of such collections, she argues, proves that social class needs to be taken more seriously as a form of diversity in higher education – especially considering how student loan debt and an increasing reliance on adjunct labour, among other factors, have made upward class mobility more elusive than ever for academics from working-class backgrounds.

In her essay, Editor Sarah Attfield considers what happens when working-class people decide to reject respectability. She demonstrates that this often subtle, coercive type of oppression has profoundly influenced how working-class people are valued by others and by themselves. She provides a detailed account of the existing work on the

subject, drawing from her personal experience as a working-class youth growing up on a council estate in London and now as a working-class academic in Sydney, Australia.

This first journal issue also includes reviews of three recent books of relevance to Working Class Studies—a novel, a poetry collection, and an economic history. Such texts demonstrate the range of artistic and academic approaches one can take to the representation and study of working class life and politics.

The *Journal of Working-Class Studies* has launched at a time when the working class is under threat in many parts of the world. Political unrest and distrust of traditional information outlets has left many feeling unclear and uncertain about their futures. Now, more than ever, is a time to unite and focus. We hope that the articles here, and those to follow in future issues, will be read widely and make a difference. We strongly believe that acknowledgement of how class works is vital if we want to move towards more just and equitable societies. We warmly welcome you to the first issue of the *Journal of Working-Class Studies* and invite your readership and participation.