

**Haltinner, K. and Hormel, L. (eds.) (2018)**  
*Teaching Economic Inequality and Capitalism in Contemporary America*, Springer, Cham, Switzerland.

**Carter, G.M. and Thelin, W.H. (eds.) (2017)**  
*Class in the Composition Classroom: Pedagogy and the Working Class*, Utah State University Press, Logan, Utah.

**Reviews by Lisa A. Kirby**

In many disciplines, the gap between theory and praxis is wide; luckily, in the field of working-class studies, that is typically not the case, and most scholars in the field see the necessity and value of real-world and pedagogical applications of theoretical concepts. Two recent books, *Teaching Economic Inequality and Capitalism in Contemporary America* and *Class in the Composition Classroom: Pedagogy and the Working Class*, are perfect examples of how theory and pedagogy can intersect in complementary and valuable ways.

Kristin Haltinner and Leontina Hormel are sociology professors at the University of Idaho and co-editors of *Teaching Economic Inequality and Capitalism in Contemporary America*. Their collection offers a variety of essays on both the theory and practice of teaching inequality in the contemporary economic environment. The book is divided into five parts: ‘Making the Personal Political: The Stories of Capitalism,’ ‘Making Marxist Theory Real,’ ‘Applied Pedagogical Strategies for Course Development,’ ‘Intersections: Global and Local,’ and ‘Capitalism and Higher Education: Constraints and Opportunities,’ and contains essays from a variety of scholars who share the editors’ passion for ‘liberatory pedagogy and transformative sociology’ (Haltinner and Hormel, 2018, 1). Published in 2018, just two years into the Trump presidency, the editors realize ‘we are living in profoundly dangerous and volatile times’ (Haltinner and Hormel, 2018, 1). As such, the book is meant as an opportunity to promote ‘understanding and teaching about economic inequality within capitalism,’ and the editors make clear the impetus to do so has perhaps never been more important (Haltinner and Hormel, 2018, 1).

The chapters that follow are all organized in a way that demonstrates the intersection of the public and private spheres. Each chapter begins with an ‘Author’s Reflexive Statement,’ written in personal narrative style, that explains the writers’ backgrounds, research, and sometimes their own

complex experiences with social class. These statements provide context for the chapters, and it is clear how personal experience directly impacts these scholars' pedagogical practices. The editors make clear that they sought to represent a diversity of voices: they 'worked hard to be inclusive and to cast as broad a net as possible when seeking contributors so that the themes and angles of inquiry regarding economic inequalities and American capitalism would be represented' (Hormel, 2018, 324). The contributors focus on issues as varied as the high cost of textbooks, using Marxist theory in first-year courses, problem-based learning, and inequalities in capital punishment. However, what unites them all is a consideration of how important it is that students 'be able to personally connect to the subject of class inequality, no matter their particular social class membership' (Hormel, 2018, 324). The juncture of personal and professional is a recurring theme throughout the collection, whether in narrating the experiences of faculty or students.

The chapters in Haltinner and Hormel's collection provide a variety of approaches to teaching inequality and capitalism. At the end of the volume, there are appendices that contain additional learning activities, model assignments, and sample syllabi. This sourcebook provides ready-to-use resources for those teaching sociology or working-class studies. The practical approach of this book, coupled with the useful activities and examples, provide scholars and teachers a compelling resource to use when teaching the complexity of economic inequality.

Genesea M. Carter and William H. Thelin's *Class in the Composition Classroom: Pedagogy and the Working Class* does for composition studies what Haltinner and Hormel's book does for sociology in that it seeks to provide practical advice and pedagogical strategies. Carter and Thelin teach at Colorado State University and the University of Akron respectively, and both have extensive experience teaching and writing about composition studies. *Class in the Composition Classroom* focuses on the specific issues working-class students encounter in writing courses. Recognizing that 'composition studies' current scholarship regarding social class has not focused enough on the application of class understanding to first-year writing instruction,' editors Thelin and Carter seek to remedy that situation (Carter and Thelin, 2017, 9). As they suggest, their collection 'gives concrete evidence for what a working-class ethos can produce in terms of practice and scholarship' (9). It is also important to note that this ethos can enrich the fields of both working-class studies and composition studies. They continue, 'we look at this collection of essays as a start of a broader conversation about the importance of valuing the class component of marginalized student populations' (Carter and Thelin, 2017, 14). Very much a call for change in English studies, this collection makes clear that working-class students are often being left behind, but also emphasizes how essential it is 'to respond to our students' identities and our students' needs' (Carter and Thelin, 2017, 14). The chapters included seek to do this in ways that will empower both faculty and students.

The collection begins with a definition of the working-class student, being careful not to cast the student as one-dimensional or stereotypical. Gathering ideas from a variety of scholars, including Michael Zweig, Ira Shor, Michael Parenti, and others, the editors make clear that defining the working-class student is complicated. Rather than settling on just one idea, they instead mention multiple characteristics of this student, such as they 'believe[e] education is done to them [ . . . ] not something they actively do,' 'are first-generation college students,' and 'don't see their parents reading as much' (Carter and Thelin, 2017, 7-8). This is just a sampling of the traits that many working-class students share, and the collection explores practical ways to help this student

population succeed. Whether considering the role of working-class literacy narratives on academic identities, the importance of classroom community in first-year students' experience, or the literacy development of working-class women, to mention just a few chapters, the collection suggests important ways to encourage working-class students to find their voices. While they make clear there are 'no easy answers,' the editors also stress that it is important 'to complicate Lynn Z. Bloom's claim [ . . . ] that freshman composition is a middle-class enterprise'; instead, as James T. Zebroski suggests, 'freshman composition is a social class enterprise where ruling class meets working class, where discourse contests discourse' (Zebroski, 2017, 322). The first-year composition course offers a unique space to interrogate, complicate, and empower social class identities.

The volume is organized into three different sections: 'Part 1: The Working-Class Student's Region, Education, and Culture'; 'Part 2: Pedagogy in the Composition Classroom'; and 'Part 3: 'What Our Students Say' 'to allow for variations in our understanding of 'working class' while highlighting real students in real situations concerning the teaching and learning of writing' (Carter and Thelin, 2017, 9). In each, there are a diversity of voices—faculty from state institutions, community colleges, private universities—that demonstrate how working-class students really do inhabit a variety of spheres. The collection also focuses on students from a range of demographics: adult learners, trade unionists, and women, among others. Regardless of these differences, though, it is clear that working-class pedagogy is at the center of these essays.

Both *Teaching Economic Inequality in Contemporary America* and *Class in the Composition Classroom* offer practical strategies, advice, and resources when considering both teaching to and about the working class. Working-class studies has always put great emphasis on not just research but pedagogy, and these two collections add to that important conversation. Though they focus on specific disciplines, the strategies and perspectives in both are also very applicable to any who teach social class, writing, or wish to place working-class students at the center of the academic narrative. Notably, both books also issue a call to action. For Haltinner and Hormel's collection, they argue, 'understanding and teaching about economic inequality within capitalism [ . . . ] is one of the burning pedagogical imperatives of this age' (Carter and Thelin, 2017, 1). In Thelin and Carter's book, they make clear faculty 'can make a difference' in the way our students perceive the working class and how working-class students themselves see their place in the academy (Carter and Thelin, 2017, 9). By demonstrating the important intersections of praxis and theory, these two collections provide vital ways that our pedagogy and conversations about social class can be enriched for the benefit of both our students and institutions.

### Reviewer Bio

**Lisa A. Kirby** is Professor of English and Director of The Texas Center for Working-Class Studies at Collin College, where she teaches writing and American literature. Along with Dr. Laura Hapke, she is co-editor of *A Class of Its Own: Re-envisioning American Labor Fiction* (2008). Her work has also appeared in *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, *Philip Roth Studies*, *The Journal of Popular Culture*, and *Academic Exchange Quarterly*. Dr. Kirby was recently awarded the 2020 Two-Year College Teaching and Mentoring Excellence Award from the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues for her work with The Texas Center for Working-Class Studies.