

# Politics and the American Class Vernacular

Jack Metzgar

*The American working class has long been hidden within the concept of a sprawling “middle class” that claims to embrace almost everyone, but usually does not. Recent works of politically savvy social science have once again pointed to a “working-class majority” and its importance in twenty-first-century U.S. politics. But analytic rigor and factual accuracy by themselves are no match for the ridiculously false but culturally powerful American class vernacular.*

**D**URING THE SUMMER OF 2000, THE “WORKING CLASS” AS a demographic category made a brief but dramatic appearance at the heart of American politics. It transformed charter-member New Democrat Al Gore into a temporary populist, breathing new life into Democrats who at the time faced what seemed like a Bush juggernaut. Then the “working class,” as is its tendency, quietly disappeared into the mists of the American class vernacular.

The vernacular routinely forgets that there is a working class, and

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*JACK METZGAR teaches working adults at Roosevelt University in Chicago, where he is active in the Chicago Center for Working-Class Studies, a consortium of faculty from several area universities. This article was originally written for a volume of essays, The New Working-Class Studies, edited by Sherry Linkon and John Russo of Youngstown State University. <<WAS THIS VOLUME PUBLISHED? IS THIS ESSAY SUBSTANTIALLY THE SAME PAPER? WE WILL NEED RE-PRINT PERMISSION FROM ORIGINAL PUBLISHER IF IT IS SUBSTANTIALLY THE SAME>>*

this leads to all kinds of mistakes and illusions—in politics, policy, economics, and cultural understanding. Envisioning American society as made up of a sprawling “middle class” that includes almost everyone, all those who are neither “rich” nor “poor,” the vernacular cannot withstand the most superficial scrutiny, but as an everyday way of fitting oneself into a bigger picture, the vernacular is powerful. It is also cagey, and resists direct frontal attacks with richly shifting connotations that satisfy something deep and abiding in American culture. It can be momentarily startled by good social science, but its collective wisdom must be appreciated and respected if the working class (as concept and reality) is ever to be recognized as an essential part of American life.

Two works of politically savvy social science appeared in the spring of 2000 to point out (not for the first time) that the working class is a majority in the United States. One—*America’s Forgotten Majority*, by Ruy Teixeira and Joel Rogers—was a political science analysis of the 1990s American electorate by race, class, gender, and union household. This one influenced a Gore adviser, who talked Gore into trying to appeal to an actual majority rather than to a figment of the New Democrat imagination. The other book—*The Working Class Majority*, by economist Michael Zweig—developed a delicate analysis of occupations and economic power relations to articulate a comprehensive three-class model (working class, middle class, and capitalist class) as an alternative to the vernacular’s trinity of rich, poor, and middle.<sup>1</sup> Both books directly challenged the vernacular, showing its ridiculous imprecision and revealing the realities that imprecision obscures. Both, in different ways, realized the political significance (the “subversiveness,” in the language of English departments) of the words “working class” and the reality they denote. Both also realized that part of the power of the vernacular is its simplicity—only three classes, not long strings of occupational, income, or cultural categories, as sociologists, economists, and marketers are wont to do—and they kept the basic terms of their analyses clear and simple (though the analyses themselves are complex).

Neither, unfortunately, made much of a dent in the power of the

American class vernacular to obscure our shared social reality. But each, with its clear division of the vernacular's "middle class" into a working class and a professional middle class, has laid a foundation for Working-Class Studies <<please explain Working Class Studies, see query later in article>> to chart an agenda of research and debate that can provide a persistent, permanent challenge to the vernacular.

This article will try to build on that foundation by critically reviewing Teixeira and Rogers's and Zweig's work. I begin with the basic story of the 2000 election to illustrate both the potential of Working-Class Studies to redefine American politics and the power of the vernacular to frustrate that potential. Then I will assess the viability of Zweig's three-class model as an alternative to the vernacular and will find it politically inferior to a concerted effort to insert a more pliable (and shifting) concept of the working class into the rich-poor-and-middle vernacular, thereby transforming it.

I will then look at different ways of conceptualizing the difference between "working class" and "middle class"—by occupation (Zweig), by income (the core of the existing vernacular), by education (Teixeira and Rogers), by self-identification, and by culture. Though these different ways of defining social classes are not entirely compatible with each other, I will argue that none can be ignored and that we do not need a univocal definition that excludes various ways that people think of class in our society. Rather we need to ensure attention to a "working class" within each of these ways and to make it impossible to hide this social reality within a ubiquitous "middle class."

Part of the power of the American vernacular conception of "middle class" is the protean way it shifts meanings to suit different situations and contexts without appearing to contradict itself. To transform the vernacular, I argue, we need a similarly protean conception of "working class" as part of a four-class vernacular (rich, poor, working, and middle). Such an approach still obscures important realities, but it promises much in clarifying the popular dynamics of American politics and maybe even transforming that politics in a more democratic and inclusive direction.

## **Al Gore as Working-Class Hero**

There must be several thousand people who make their living as full-time “political analysts”—not only at universities and think tanks, but also at public opinion and political consulting firms. They pore over polling and voting data, using an incredibly sophisticated array of statistical tools, many of which are now embodied in relatively easy-to-use computer software. This kind of work can make your head spin because of the complexity of the American electorate and the larger population that may or may not be part of that electorate at any given time. And things—demographics and public attitudes—are constantly changing. What was indicates what might be, but not without plenty of surprises. To be useful, political analysts have to simplify, literally ignoring most of their data in order to present a picture that might be strategically useful to practitioners (politicians and their staffs, as well as marketers of other sorts).

In the mid- and late 1990s, most political analysts concluded that the “typical” or “swing” voters were something called “soccer moms” and their tag-along husbands, “wired workers.” These folks, as reported by the *New York Times* (<<name of author and article?>> May 4, 1999), are “affluent independent voters and high-technology employees who work miles from any city.” They are white, college-educated, and “solidly middle class,” usually professional or managerial workers. They are also uniformly married with children, and the “soccer mom” image is meant to capture the harried life of a working mother busy shuttling her children to sporting events and other after-school activities, characteristically in a minivan. This group, polled and focus-grouped with regularity, is thought to have a distinctive political outlook that reflects its relatively privileged position and optimism about the future. As Rogers and Teixeira put it: “No big [government] programs, please, because we really don’t need them, but little, cheap ones are okay, provided they target one of our few remaining problems.”<sup>2</sup>

Though widely embraced across parties and ideologies, this picture of the American electorate was particularly pushed by New Democrats, who emphasized the “mom” because she was more likely to

vote Democratic, but who were also wildly optimistic that executive and professional (white) dads could be talked out of their two-to-one century-long Republicanism. Traditional Democrats, the New Democrats argued, were hopelessly and increasingly out-of-date with their focus on the blue-collar working class (which is declining), union households (also declining), blacks and poor people (often seen as synonymous and neither of whom vote much). This old-fashioned focus, New Dems said, alienates the forward-looking middle class that is busy pulling itself and its children up by its bootstraps. (Hispanics, particularly in the mid-1990s, were subject to debate because everybody recognized them as a growing group with uncertain political proclivities.)

Though contested, particularly by union and black leaders who (correctly) thought they could increase the turnout or the Democratic proclivity of their constituencies, the “soccer mom-wired worker” image of the American electorate held sway until Rogers and Teixeira blew it up with a summary version of their analysis in the June 2000 *Atlantic*.

Using data similar to that presented below on occupation, income, and education, Teixeira and Rogers easily showed that a majority of all voters (55 percent) and three-fifths of suburbanites were properly categorized as the “white working class,” which they dubbed “the forgotten majority.” It gets more complicated from there, but to me the really valuable part of Teixeira and Rogers’s analysis is the way they calculate the intersections of race, gender, and class to reveal an electorate that is very different from what most of us carry around in our heads. Professional political analysts rarely do these kinds of cross-group tabulations because it requires a lot of work. Different voting demographics are reported one by one so that black male suburbanites and white female city-dwellers will each get counted three times, but we cannot determine how either of these three-category demographic groups actually voted. We can, of course, guess, but there’s the rub. The science part of social science (basically, probability and statistics) is not about guessing, and when social scientists guess, they inevitably bring their own lived observation and experience into the guessing.

I do not want to get much further into the electoral statistics, but

the error made by professional political analysts that was revealed by Teixeira and Rogers is colossal—something like the statistical equivalent of buying the Brooklyn Bridge! And it shows the power of the “middle class” vernacular to confuse and befuddle even the most sophisticated and scientific among us. Here is how Teixeira and Rogers sum up their findings:

The conventional view of the suburban electorate—affluent soccer moms, executive dads—is drawn from a few relatively wealthy towns like Bethesda, Maryland, and Fair Lawn, New Jersey, and it doesn’t come close to reflecting reality. The suburban electorate is in fact composed mostly of . . . two-earner families of low to moderate education and income, generally working in low-level white-collar, service, and skilled blue-collar jobs . . . they are members of a white working class whose economic interests and experience diverge fundamentally—in terms of culture, class, and history—from those of soccer moms in Bethesda, suburban independents in Fair Lawn, and wired cyberprofessionals in Silicon Valley.<sup>3</sup>

How could sophisticated professionals make such a huge mistake, not once but persistently from 1996 through June of 2000? I am a humanities professor, so guessing is a part of my job. Here is my guess: Political analysts almost uniformly come from or live in the Bethesdas and Fair Lawns, or the Oak Parks (where I live) and Evanstons of Illinois, or in-town enclaves like DuPont Circle or Lincoln Park. Their everyday experience, at work, at home, traveling on business, eating out in the evening, is almost uniformly among middle-class professionals. When they guess, they rely on that observation and experience. And though they pore over the most complex and sophisticated demographic data ever assembled, they carry the vernacular conception of class in their heads, and, when forced to guess, they fall into a crude syllogism that goes something like this:

Almost everybody in America is “middle class,” neither “rich” nor “poor.”

I’m “middle-class” myself.

Therefore, almost everybody in America must be like me.

The crudeness of this reasoning would be hard to believe if similar mistakes based on forgetting the working class had not consistently been made across the past four decades or so. But they have been and continue to be.

Teixeira and Rogers had an impact, however, when they convinced Stanley Greenberg that there was a working class. A Gore adviser, Greenberg was President Bill Clinton's favorite pollster and had once famously and erroneously claimed that 90 percent of Americans think of themselves as "middle class."<sup>4</sup> Al Gore at the time was looking for a strategy that could both energize the Democrats' traditional bases and appeal to suburban swing voters (at a point when Ralph Nader threatened an important slice of both those electorates). Teixeira and Rogers advocated a nonracial, nongendered economic social safety net strategy that would appeal to both the white nonunion working class (who reside mostly in the suburbs and are the true swing voters) and to the Dems' black, Latino (by 2000), and union household core. Gore was convinced. Using the AFL-CIO's "working families" rhetoric, in August Gore came out swinging with a program he claimed represented "the people" (versus "the powerful"), and he articulated a string of modest but potentially path-breaking social democratic programs that Clinton had used to dress up his last two State of the Union speeches—creeping universal health insurance for children, prescription drug benefits for elders, and USA Accounts in addition to rather than instead of social security.

Those who think there is little difference between Democrats and Republicans usually refer to candidates' personal instincts and backgrounds, not to specific programs and policies. Gore and Bush, for example, are peas of a pod in their prep school, wealthy, political-class backgrounds. But, though both inevitably crowded the middle as November approached, Gore and Bush promised to take the country in dramatically opposite directions. Bush promised a huge tax cut mostly for the rich and a systematic program of public school and social security privatization. Gore promised to resist those antigovernment approaches and to extend what in any other political universe would be proudly referred to as "the welfare state."

So far as I know, the words “working class” never passed Gore’s lips. In fact, the word “class” never passed except when preceded by “middle,” but the recognition of the existence of a working-class majority was at the core of the Democrats’ 2000 campaign strategy. When Republicans cried “class warfare,” many Democrats were easily intimidated, pushing a none-too-steadfast Gore to make already fuzzy language even fuzzier. But the Teixeira and Rogers class approach passed the test of political pragmatism by, first, changing the dynamics of the election in August (helping Gore close a huge gap with Bush, while also undermining Nader) and, then, because Gore had continually to return to it, in one form or another, to revive his campaign.

If Gore had had a consistent personality to go with his program, he would have won handily. But given the closeness of the outcome, there are dozens of such “if” statements that could be equally true. More importantly, the mystifying power of the “middle-class” vernacular would have undermined even a much stronger, more consistent, less synthetic candidate. If, on the other hand, we had a vernacular conception of class that routinely distinguished between “working class” and “professional middle class” (as both Teixeira and Rogers and Zweig do), even an all-too-human traditional Democrat could win office and move America in a much better direction than it is going now. But the vernacular is, as I have said, both cagey and powerful.

Nothing illustrates this better than the way class issues were center stage in the 2000 election in the form of Bush’s and Gore’s competing tax-cut proposals. Both sought to appeal to the ubiquitous “middle class.” This was bound to doom Gore in the long run because his entire package of proposals (including his tax cuts) benefited the working-class majority of all colors and genders (about two-thirds of all voters), but did not do much for the professional middle class. Not being able to say so undoubtedly hurt his chances.

During the campaign’s home stretch in October, for example, PBS economics reporter Paul Solman undertook the task of analyzing the Bush and Gore tax cut proposals in a fifteen-minute TV segment on *The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*. Solman is an economist with a puck-

ish sense of humor and an inventive streak, and he is generally delighted to tackle complicated (math-related) subjects for a television audience. To illustrate the proposed tax cuts, he visited three Michigan families at different (1999) income levels:

Family 1: A twenty-four-year-old black single mother of three who works in a factory and makes \$18,440, a family income that puts her family right at the 10th percentile. Gore's tax cut was worth \$1,200 to this family, while Bush's was insignificant.

Family 2: A thirty-something white manager at United Parcel Service and his stay-at-home wife and four kids, with a family income of \$69,000. This family would get nothing from Gore (until their kids went to college), but \$3,100 from Bush.

Family 3: A fifty-something white auto industry executive and his stay-at-home wife, with a family income of \$113,000. Gore gave them nothing, Bush \$3,500.

It was also mentioned that a family with an annual income of \$1 million would get a \$50,000 cut from Bush and nothing from Gore. The point of this analysis was that Gore was right when he claimed that the main beneficiaries of Bush's tax cut were the top 10 percent since, according to Solman, a family income of \$113,000 was right at the 90th percentile. Bush was right, however, in claiming that the "middle class" would also benefit if you count the UPS manager and his family as "middle class." And you should have seen these folks—a good-looking white couple with four darling kids jumping on a trampoline in their suburban Detroit back yard, complete with the breadwinner dad doing the talking and a minivan in the background!<sup>5</sup>

You could devote a whole course in American studies to analyzing the iconography of Solman's choice of these three families to represent American taxpayers. Why is the factory worker black, and, being so, why is she a single mother? How long did it take Solman to find two stay-at-home moms in the year 2000? But the question that interests me is why Solman chose a family with an annual income of \$69,000 to represent the middle class? Why not choose a family near the median family income in 1999, \$49,940?<sup>6</sup>

This may seem like a trivial difference, but it is not. A family income of \$69,000 puts the UPS manager and his family somewhere near the top 30 percent of families. Thus, two of the three families presented are in the top one-third, not the middle. The third family, the black single mother making \$18,440, is not in the middle either. As a factory worker, she might reasonably be called “working class,” but with a family income at the 10th percentile, Solman is using her to illustrate what he calls a “lower-income” family. What is missing, then, are the majority of families whose incomes in 1999 were between \$18,440 and \$69,000. Given the choices Solman has made, what is missing is *the majority of families in the middle* of the income distribution, all those from the tenth to the sixty-seventh percentiles. How did this group of families fare under the Bush and Gore tax-cut proposals? Solman does not tell us, and, so far as I know, nobody made a stink about it. Why not? After all, Solman starts off his report by explaining that the issue is that both candidates claim their proposal benefits “the middle class” better than the other guy’s, but ends up ignoring the majority of families actually in the middle! How could he make that mistake, and how could he not be called on it?

By not starting at the median and going up and down from there, Solman’s presentation made Bush’s tax cut look better and Gore’s worse (in fact, it showed Gore’s as applying only to the “poor” and “black”). So maybe Solman is a Republican? Maybe—particularly since, unlike so many other journalists, he knew where the median was and chose not to use it. But here is the problem he faced. If you start at the median and take the 20 percent or 30 percent above and below it, you will end up with lots and lots of families who will not qualify as what most of your audience thinks of as “middle class.” The middle 50 percent of families in 1999, for example, included those making as little as \$25,000. Even those at the \$50,000 median generally do not fulfill the strong connotation of “middle class” that includes “comfortable standard of living” with substantial discretionary income.

What you consider “middle class” depends on where you are in the income scale. People with family incomes of \$25,000 usually think \$50,000 would be “comfortable.” But political analysts, professional

journalists, university professors, and the PBS audience (often described as “upscale”) are unlikely to think so. I discuss the vagaries of income classes below, but the main point here is that at the heart of the rich-poor-and-middle vernacular is a double meaning that is contradictory. The “middle class” that includes “almost everybody” is not the same group as the “middle class” that enjoys a “comfortable standard of living.” Indeed, that second “middle class” has very specific connotative characteristics beyond income—they are “college-educated” and are in “professional” (including managerial) occupations. In all cases—by income, education, and occupation—this “middle class” is about 30 percent of the population, a large minority but a minority nonetheless, not even close to being “almost everybody” and, no matter how you configure it, not in the middle.

The American vernacular constantly shifts back and forth between these two meanings. And in doing so, it makes the professional middle class seem like almost everybody, all those who are neither rich nor poor. With only fifteen minutes of airtime, Paul Solman could not violate the vernacular by actually looking at a family in or near the middle. Solman, unlike similar TV tax-cut analysts I heard, reported the numbers and the population proportions accurately. But the visuals presented an American population in which two-thirds is either comfortable or well off, while the other third, though not officially poor, is getting by on what most of his audience (including me) could not imagine living on for four months, let alone an entire year. The UPS manager and family fulfill all the stereotypes of middle-classness, right down to their Leave-It-to-Beaver manners and mores, but so do the auto executive and family. And though the factory worker is clearly not a welfare mom, she has an income and skin color that associate better with “poor” than with “working class.” The millionaire family is referred to, but not seen, to round out the iconography of classes—rich, poor, and middle, with the “middle” represented by two of the three families we actually see.

It is not uncommon in news reporting to present these kinds of families as representative. What is extraordinary and revealing about

Solman's reporting is that he knows the numbers, and even reports some of them. As a result, with his words and his pictures, he literally says that the "middle class" is a decided minority but almost everybody is like them!

The vernacular conception of classes in America can easily be shown to be ridiculous when exposed to the counting and classifying of demographic social science—as Teixeira and Rogers did in 2000. Working-class studies needs to do this over and over again because it works. There is no better evidence than the populist conversion of Al Gore, all of whose instincts and New Democrat ideology went against it. But by October, after Teixeira and Rogers had thoroughly educated the political and communications elite about the composition of the American electorate, the vernacular was still standing strong. Or, more accurately, it was cagily bobbing and weaving, working its magic to conceal the working class and to confuse us about the realities of class in America.

Imagine if our vernacular routinely made the distinction between "middle class" and "working class" that Michael Zweig does, capped by a third class that Zweig dubs "the capitalist class." How would the Bush and Gore tax-cut proposals look then? What if PBS had chosen to show us one family from each of *these* three classes, while giving their proportions of the population as whole? Gore would have won the election, for one thing, but more importantly, the character of American politics and the discourse around it would be completely different. This, and nothing less, is what is at stake for Working-Class Studies.

## **Zweig's Challenge to the Vernacular**

Zweig's conception defines the American class structure by occupation and the amount and kind of power people have in and around the workplace. In his schema, a "capitalist class" is defined by its ownership and control of giant profit-making enterprises. A very small group (Zweig says they could all fit in Yankee Stadium), this class has the overwhelming bulk of decision-making power in our society. Then, there is a "working class" defined by a lack of power at work and in

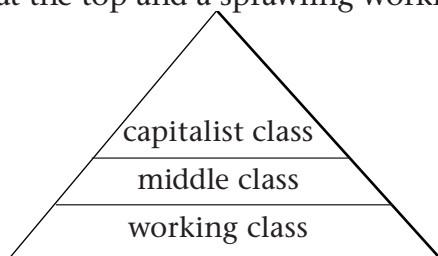
society at large, despite the fact that they do the principal work in producing and reproducing the goods and services that make up our daily lives. Finally, there is a “middle class” of managers, professionals, and small-business owners who have a degree of autonomy and influence at work (and in the larger society) that makes them different from the working class but nowhere near as powerful as the capitalists.<sup>7</sup>

A restatement and updating of the classical Marxist view, Zweig’s conception captures a core part of the original meaning of “middle class” as being *in the middle* between capital and labor—a meaning that still lingers within the American class vernacular. Outside America, this lineup of classes is familiar worldwide and, as such, competes with the American vernacular. In a sense, all modern politics is defined by the differences between these competing vernaculars. Marx thought the middle (petty bourgeoisie) would shrivel as the working class grew larger and more pervasive and progressively “immiserated.” The American view—at home and abroad—is that democratic capitalism produces an ever-expanding middle class, not only requiring armies of professional workers but also redefining traditional workers as consumers with substantial discretionary income. Though Marx clearly failed to anticipate the rise of *managerial workers* and the role they would play in modern capitalism, there is still plenty of evidence to support his basic sense of the dynamics of capitalism—some at home, more abroad. Likewise, the view of an inevitably expanding and increasingly prosperous “middle class” is not without current and historical evidence—more at home, less abroad. Both views, however, are burdened by their ideological roots and purposes, and thus rarely look at, let alone carefully assess, this evidence. This assessment is, in fact, part of Zweig’s contribution. He looks carefully at the evidence in the homeland of the American vernacular, and though he finds a large and growing professional middle class, he can confidently report that the death of the working class has been greatly exaggerated. Zweig is interested in proportions, and, far from being “reductive,” he uses his concepts of power in the workplace to carefully delineate the relative class sizes of occupational groups as defined by the U.S. Department of Labor’s Bureau of

Labor Statistics. With the capitalist class representing less than 1 percent, he finds a large middle class of 37 percent and a working class majority of 62 percent. Only the “executive, administrative, and managerial” category is 100 percent middle class, and only “operators, fabricators, and laborers” are 100 percent working class. The other general occupational categories contain varying degrees of complexity and ambiguity within them, and Zweig carefully teases out the differences between middle-class and working-class occupations strictly on the basis of power in the workplace—power over their own and others’ work.<sup>8</sup>

This kind of rigor is both admirable and entirely necessary to combat the power of the vernacular’s ubiquitous “middle class,” which can be shown to be ridiculous with much less rigor than Zweig brings to the task. Zweig’s rigor opens up a whole field of occupation-by-occupation analysis that should be invaluable to both labor and political organizers because it reads *class* interests out of basic power relations at work. There is much else to admire in Zweig’s analysis—not least of which is the absence of “revolutionary romanticism,” his clearheaded political goal of severely limiting the power of the capitalist class rather than effecting its wholesale elimination, and his subtle sketching of the possibilities for a grand cross-class alliance between the working and (segments of the) middle classes. But his very rigor in focusing only on occupations, eschewing any roles for education, income, or what he calls “lifestyle” in shaping social class in America, limits his ability to stay with the bobbing and weaving of the vernacular. What is more, his hierarchy of power relations misses some of the egalitarian attractiveness of the “middle class” vernacular as it is spoken and lived in twenty-first-century America.

Zweig’s conception of the class structure is a classic pyramid, with a tiny ruling class at the top and a sprawling working class at the base:



If this were the vernacular conception of classes, it would be clear for all to see that public policies should focus on improving (or, at least, not harming) the lives and prospects of the working-class majority, while maintaining a healthy middle class as well. While giving capitalists their due, government would necessarily be seen as a principal democratic counterforce (along with labor unions) against the inherent economic power of this class. As Zweig points out, this approach gives shape to an entirely different kind of politics than the current vernacular's pitting of "the poor" against a "middle class" that is envisioned as not only ubiquitous, but prosperously comfortable. For this reason alone, a Zweigian vernacular would be preferable to the current one, even if it were not also a much more accurate, rigorous, and fruitful depiction of our society, with all kinds of potential for organizing our research and thinking about class and class relations in America and elsewhere.

But it is still not cagey enough to go head-to-head with the vernacular, which combines a seeming focus on income with various shifting connotations concerning education, culture, and even morality. If we were to diagram the American vernacular, it would be flat and nonhierarchical, and it is relatively generous in its moral and status inclusiveness:

rich/middle/poor

The "middle class" that includes "almost everybody" stigmatizes both "the poor" and "the rich" while honoring everybody who is not particularly distinguished, but who works hard, looks out for others (particularly their families), pulls their own weight, and does not hold themselves out to be any better than anybody else. Though, as I point out below, the professional middle class is generally much more status-conscious and achievement-oriented than the working class, my sense is that huge majorities of each embrace the term "middle class" when it refers to "just ordinary people living ordinary lives," just "regular," "normal" folks doing the best they can. While the rich, the celebrated, the powerful, and the gifted (all of whom are captured in the vernacular's sense of the deserved "rich") are "looked up

to," they are also viewed as peculiarly subject to moral and happiness failings either because of excessive adulation or due to the lack of limits on their freedom from "playing by the rules." "The poor" are stigmatized for lacking classic "middle-class" values of hard work and self-discipline, but they are thought to be a very small group (like "the rich") who deserve some measure of compassion and at least "one more chance." "Middleness" itself is valued, including moderation in political views and moral judgments. The egalitarian ethos inherent in this notion of middleness has been seen as both peculiarly "American" and essential to democracy by political sociologists from Alexis de Tocqueville to Alan Wolfe.<sup>9</sup> I think there is something to that, and there is surely some element of it worth preserving even as we seek to eliminate the equally inherent illusion of (roughly) equal power and life prospects that this conception fosters.

The principal problem with the vernacular is the way it first hides the working class (by including it within the ubiquitous middle) and then forgets it is there by assuming that almost everybody is college-educated, professional, and has a reasonably comfortable standard of living—mistaking the part for the whole, substituting the small "middle class" for the big, inclusive one. The immediate task of Working-Class Studies should be to challenge this middle-class two-step every time it is performed, to constantly probe what users mean when *they* say "middle class," and to use "working class" consistently and rigorously to refer to all those who are not middle-class professionals.

When we do so, we need to clearly and emphatically avoid hierarchical uses that remove the "working class" from the vernacular's moral and status inclusiveness. The working class to which we refer is different from, not less than, the professional middle class. It refers to people, in Teixeira and Rogers's words, "whose economic interests and experience diverge fundamentally—in terms of culture, class, and history—from those of soccer moms in Bethesda." It is a complicated class with lots of differences within itself, but it is there in the middle with the rest of us, neither rich nor poor, but above all "working."

Such a conception can be diagrammed by simply dividing the vernacular's big "middle" in two, leaving everything else intact:

rich /professional middle/working class/poor

This is neither as politically desirable (to me) nor as ambitious as Zweig's alternative vernacular. "The rich" are not, as Zweig points out, a proper "target" in a democratic society the way "the powerful" (capitalists) are. And "poor" is not really a social class but more often a temporary condition, one that over a ten-year period "more than half of the working class experiences." Poverty, as Zweig says, is "something that happens to the working class," and it is a serious political mistake to divide "the poor from workers," as the vernacular routinely does.<sup>10</sup> But Zweig's conception is too ambitious and too political. For now, it will be quite enough to use and enrich his distinction between middle class and working class, building both on the vernacular's inclusiveness and on the actual practice of Working-Class Studies as it has thus far developed, while incidentally allowing a wider range of political persuasions to participate in grappling with class in America.

The existing vernacular, besides being relatively nonhierarchical, has one other advantage over Zweig's proposed alternative: It recognizes, as Zweig specifically and rigorously refuses to do, the sheer power of money, of wealth and income, in a capitalist society. Social classes are not all about power in the workplace. They are also about the distribution of status (of shame and honor), of freedom, of opportunities, of living standards and working conditions, and all these have to do with the distribution of money. The vernacular, with its crude stereotypes of "rich" and "poor," recognizes that. What it hides and confuses is the inequitable distribution of money—and of all the things it will buy, including freedom and opportunity. Focusing on money and on who is in the vernacular's big middle allows us to ask questions about who is contributing what to our society and what they are getting in return.

Sure, the capitalists are getting much more than they deserve or need. But so, in general, are we, the professional middle class—and as a class, we have a cultural power that even the capitalists envy. The working class, on the other hand, generally gets much less of everything as compared to what its work contributes. I could be wrong

about that. I am not saying it is clear and obvious. Nor do I think it is easy to remedy, since I am no longer willing to completely do away with the market's allocative role. But we cannot see that this might be an issue, nor can we debate it, within either the existing vernacular or Zweig's alternative, which insists on a singular focus on power, not money. We could, however, ask such questions and debate such issues if we keep our attention focused on a revised vernacular, as proposed above, and are not restricted only to issues of power.

Fortunately, there is no need to be so restrictive, since occupation, income, and education are intimately tied together. And though not without numerous complications, we have good numbers on all these things and how they relate to one another.

### **Working Class and Middle Class by Occupation, Education, and Income**

A vernacular, any vernacular, is based on grossly simplifying reality. That is its value in helping us organize our perceptions and thoughts. The current American vernacular consistently overlooks the working class, and the roots of that overlooking go back to the 1950s, when we declared ourselves "a middle-class society." But the vernacular has never been entirely consistent, and if you are referring to factory workers or other clearly recognizable "blue-collar" folks, you can use the forbidden term and everybody will know what you mean, and a host of associations and connotations will arise. Thus, the "working class" (seen as small and decreasing, whether in 1950 or 2000) sometimes slides into the vernacular for brief appearances, usually to be pitied or blamed. Labor and social historians also can easily use the term, even extending it on occasion beyond blue-collariness, because the vernacular grants that there once was a working class.

While this permitted usage gives Working-Class Studies something to build upon, the "blue collar" and "thing of the past" connotations of "working class" (sometimes accompanied by stereotypes of a white, male Joe Six-Pack) also restrict us, both from talking sensibly and from really challenging the existing vernacular. The clearly recogniz-

able “blue collar” group is actually still a fairly large part, probably 25 percent or more, of the workforce, and it includes men and women of all colors. But if that is what comes to mind when one says “working class,” you miss the larger part of the working class that is not blue collar, most importantly clerical, retail sales, and other kinds of “service” workers—all very large groups and growing mightily.<sup>11</sup> To win a place in the vernacular, we need a rough-and-ready concept of the “working class” that combines occupation, income, and education and that reflects the large majority of workers who are not now, never have been, and never will be “middle class.” I think this can be done by using the vernacular’s own principal contradiction and what social science statisticians call a “residual.”

The middle-class two-step I refer to above has two contradictory definitions of “middle class”—the big middle class that includes almost everybody and the smaller middle class that is college-educated, professional (including managerial), and “comfortable” (referring to income or standard of living). The “working class” residual, then, would be everybody who does not fully qualify for the smaller, more exclusive “middle class.”

Basically, this is everybody who is not in the BLS’s “managerial & professional workers” category, as illustrated in Table 1. Admission to this broad occupational group usually (not always) requires at least a bachelor’s degree and usually (not always) results in a substantially higher income than other workers earn.

This rough-and-ready concept also grossly simplifies reality, though not as much as the current middle-class vernacular does. But it also captures something “everybody knows.” Income, wealth, status, life prospects, the kinds of vacations you can take, and lots of other things are usually (not always) firmly and clearly related to being a manager or professional or having at least a bachelor’s degree. See, for example, Table 2 on the relation between education and income.

So, if you go simply by occupation (in a much more gross and simplistic way than Zweig does), the residual “working class” is 70 percent. If you go simply by education (as Teixeira and Rogers do),

Table 1

**Middle Class/Working Class by Occupation and Income, 2001**

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>% of workforce</b>	<b>Annualized median wage</b>	<b>B.A. req.?</b>	<b>Middle-class wage premium</b>
<b>Middle class</b>				
Managerial and professional workers	30%	\$44,668	Yes	—
<b>Working class</b>				
Precision production, craft, and repair workers	10%	\$32,708	No	36%
Technical, sales, and administrative support workers	30%	\$27,092	No	65%
Operators, fabricators, and laborers	14%	\$24,284	No	84%
Service workers	14%	\$19,604	No	128%
Farming, forestry, and fishing workers	1.5%	\$18,408	No	143%

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Union Members in 2001," available at [www.bls.gov/news.release/union2.t02.htm](http://www.bls.gov/news.release/union2.t02.htm).

Table 2

**The Working Class by Education**

<b>Highest level of education</b>	<b>% of persons 25 and older</b>	<b>Mean annual (2000)</b>	<b>Middle-class earnings (1999) wage premium</b>
<b>Middle class</b>			
Bachelor's and more	26%	\$45,678*	—
<b>Working class</b>			
Associate's degree	8%	\$32,152	42%
Some college, but no degree	18%	\$26,958	69%
High school graduate	33%	\$24,572	86%
Not high school graduate	16%	\$16,121	83%

Source: *Statistical Abstract of the U.S.: 2001*, Tables 217 and 218, p. 140. <<city, pub, date?>>

\*Mean annual earning is for bachelor's only; the means for master's, doctorate, and professional degrees range from \$55,641 to \$100,987.

Table 3

**Middle Class by “Middleness” in Income**

<b>Poor</b> (bottom 20% of households)	=	up to \$17,950
<b>Middle Class</b> (middle 60% of households)	=	\$17,951 to \$81,960
<b>Rich</b> (top 20% of households)	=	\$81,961 and up

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *Money Income in the United States: 2000*. <<city, pub, date?>>

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the residual “working class” is 74 percent. And in both cases, the relation between class and income is clear and consistent.

The “comfortable” income or standard-of-living connotation is much more difficult because it is subjective, just as “rich” and “poor” are. Also because whether a level of income is “comfortable” or not depends on how many people are living off that income. A clerical worker making \$27,000 married to a “repair worker” making \$32,00—both working class by occupation—would have a family income of \$59,000, and if they have no children, they could be living “comfortably” by most people’s lights. Add even one child, however, and they are likely “struggling,” though definitely not “poor.” The same clerical worker as a single-mother with one child, on the other hand, is definitely “struggling,” and many people (depending on their own circumstances) would see her as “poor.” But, though it can quickly turn tedious or confusing, this discussion is well worth having. Whether you use family income, household income, or taxpayers’ adjusted gross income (all of which are readily available in summary versions in *The Statistical Abstract of the United States*), even a cursory look will show an American population that is not nearly as “comfortable” as the vernacular assumes. It will also show the absurdity of the vernacular conception of “middleness,” because the statistical middle, no matter how you define it, includes incomes that denote very different “lifestyles” across the middle, making it meaningless:

Such a division (and all other attempts to define rich, poor, and middle by income) makes it apparent how confused and confusing the vernacular is. People with household incomes of \$90,000 will deny being “rich,” and many people will insist that anybody making

less than \$30,000 (or \$40,000) is “poor.” And everybody will notice that it makes absolutely no sense to put households with \$25,000 in the same income class as households with \$70,000.

Discussions of class by income are best preceded by asking people how *they* would define a “middle class” income. In my experience teaching working adults, they almost uniformly begin the lower tier of the middle class above (usually well above) the median household income. After that, you can pretty much present any of the standard data on income to show that the “middle class” that is “comfortable” is not the same as the one “in the middle.” Thus, though this is infinitely variable depending on whom you are talking with, you can derive a “working class” residual something like the following.

**Poor** (\$25,000 and below) = 29 percent of all households

**Struggling Working Class residual** (\$25,000–\$75,000) = 47 percent of all households

**Comfortable Middle Class** (\$75,000 and up) = 24 percent of all households\*

The “working class” by income is thus much smaller and much more variable than the “working class” by occupation or education. This reality reflects the fact that a couple with two working-class incomes (above the medians) and not too many children can live comfortably on that combined income. It also reflects the fact that lots more people are “poor” based on what most people think it takes to be not-poor than on the official definition of “poverty.” But note that the “comfortable middle class” (at 24 percent in the illustration above) is about the same proportion as the “college-educated” (at 26 percent) and “managerial and professional workers” (at 30 percent). These are all smaller than the vernacular routinely assumes, and getting people to look at actual numbers and proportions blocks the middle-class two-step, at least temporarily.

But blocking the two-step—making it difficult to confuse the big

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\*Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *Money Income in the United States: 2000*. <<city, publisher, year published?>>

inclusive “middle class” with the small exclusive one—can easily be dissipated (or sidestepped) if you then insist on a univocal definition of “working class.” If your definition is based strictly on education, for example, guardians of the middle-class vernacular will mention Bill Gates, who does not have a bachelor’s degree but is a managerial worker and unarguably “rich.” They will mention the social worker with a master’s degree who makes only \$32,000 a year, and the UPS truck driver, an overtime hog, who makes \$100,000 a year. Guardians insist on a precise definition, and then delight in pointing out the exceptions to the rule, attempting to make any discussion of class in America seem ridiculous or tedious.

Working-Class Studies has developed a number of maneuvers to combat the guardians’ moves, including (more recently) referring to Zweig’s precise social scientific analysis of occupations. But my experience is that challenging Zweig (or any other serious analysis of class in America) necessitates showing both the pervasiveness and the falsity of the “middle-class” vernacular and the fruitfulness of looking at and not forgetting the large group (not necessarily a majority) of Americans who are neither officially “poor” nor “middle class.” <<edit ok?>> This is not social science. This is a vernacular. It is not known for its precision, and its value is in bringing things down to simple, everyday terms. Adding a “working class” to the vernacular leaves it simple, but more complex and accurate than before. It is simply a matter of recognizing the difference between the vernacular’s smaller professional middle class and the rest of the “middle class,” without necessarily challenging the notion that we are a “middle-class society.” It is similar to recognizing the difference between “snow” and “rain” without denying that they are both “precipitation” and without insisting that there are no imprecise phenomena like “sleet.”

Ask the guardians how *they* define “middle class.” Make them be precise, and then bob and weave your definitions of “working class” among all the various ways that people think about class in America. If they want complexity and precision, welcome them to Working-Class Studies, where they can learn how to stop doing the middle-

class two-step that hides and ignores and overlooks the American working class.

## **Working Class/Middle Class by Self-Identification and Culture**

Working-Class Studies has still other moves that undermine the vernacular—one more social science move involving how people identify themselves by class and one based on the observation and experience of people with roots in both classes or at the borders where the working class and middle class interact.

Clinton pollster and Gore adviser Stanley Greenberg probably knew there was a working class before Teixeira and Rogers reminded him of it in the spring of 2000. In the mid-1990s Greenberg claimed his polling had discovered that about 90 percent of Americans “think of themselves as middle class.” S.M. Miller effectively debunked this claim in an article in *The American Prospect* (in whose orbit Greenberg travels) by pointing out that pollsters usually do not offer “working class” as a choice when asking people to identify their social class.<sup>12</sup> When offered this choice, Miller pointed out, about equal numbers self-identify as “working class” and as “middle class.” Miller reviewed various studies, but she relied primarily on one of the most reputable, respected, and reliable of surveys, the General Social Survey (GSS) of the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago. The GSS offers the four class choices below, and very, very few respondents refuse to answer (either by checking “Don’t know,” “No class,” or “Not applicable” or by leaving the answer blank). Table 4 shows the results of the most recent survey (1998) and a cumulative score for all GSS surveys that have asked the question since 1972.

The low percentages of people who self-identify as “upper class” or “lower class” reflect the egalitarian stigma the vernacular attaches to “rich” and “poor.” People generally do not want to identify themselves as “lower class” because of obvious moral and status connotations having nothing to do with income or life circumstances,

Table 4

**Class by Self-Identification**

<b>Class</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>Cumulative, 1972–1998</b>
Lower class	5%	5%
Working class	45%	46%
Middle class	46%	46%
Upper class	4%	3%

Source: National Opinion Research Center, available at [www.norc.uchicago.edu](http://www.norc.uchicago.edu); also available directly at [www.icpsr.umich.edu/GSS/rnd1998/merged/cdbk/class.htm](http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/GSS/rnd1998/merged/cdbk/class.htm).

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but an even smaller group is willing to identify themselves as “upper class.” In the Great Middle, those who identify themselves as “working class” may accurately assess their circumstances as not those of the “comfortable middle class,” but there is also likely some pride in being part of the group that actually does the work. There is a long-standing working-class tradition of seeing middle-class professionals as “all talk, no action,” “afraid to get their hands dirty,” and as lacking common sense because they never actually do the work they think they are overseeing. This is probably more of a blue-collar trait, but in my observation it is not uncommon among clerical and frontline sales workers, among others. In any case, “working class” does not have strong pejorative connotations and often has some honorific ones.

Checking a box among those offered by pollsters may not indicate much about class-consciousness but, as Thurston Domina argues, this whole self-identification phenomenon deserves much more study—and experimentation by survey researchers.<sup>13</sup> Given the strength of the middle-class vernacular and the often militant prohibition against using the term (particularly during the cold war), the fact that such a large group consistently identifies itself as “working class” may indicate that there is a vital working-class culture that does not define the world in quite the same way as the professional middle class does—and that the vernacular is not equally recognized and spoken in all parts of American society.

This perception of and respect for a separate and distinct working-class culture is, in fact, at the core of the Working-Class Studies movement that has emerged out of a series of conferences beginning in 1995 at Youngstown State University. <<move this information to beginning of article, to clarify "Working-Class Studies">> is Janet Zandy, one of the pioneers, describes the initial purpose as "carrying the best of working-class values, ethos, and knowledge into the academy and . . . using that rich, complex, even discordant heritage to expand what constitutes knowledge."<sup>14</sup> Among the pioneers, there were two kinds of academics for whom working-class culture was a palpable presence in their lives, something they could not ignore, not something they had to remind themselves not to forget. One kind, like Zandy, were from working-class backgrounds they did not want to give up or to dishonor in becoming middle-class professors—something the academy, and middle-class life more generally, tends to require. The other kind, like Sherry Linkon, were from solidly middle-class backgrounds and found themselves teaching students whose culture was palpably different from their own.<sup>15</sup> The initial impetus for Working-Class Studies came out of this "lived experience" of a clash of cultures and of the need to talk about it and think about it—what the cultures are, what the clash is all about, and which side you are on. For conscientious teachers in the higher education industry, these are both practical and moral issues that cannot be ignored. And they open onto similar issues faced by labor and community organizers in working-class settings.

This part of Working-Class Studies is not about counting and classifying people. It is about how to relate to your father and your sister or to a roomful of students who bring a whole lot more to your classroom than the absence of professional middle-class values and skills. A lot of the work here is about gathering, creating, and analyzing working-class stories based on direct observation and experience.<sup>16</sup> But a healthy and growing literature consists of memoirs of middle-class academics reflecting on their working-class roots and the clash of cultures they have experienced or continue to experience. Some of this literature is on the self-absorbed side, and some of it is overly

concerned with the special world of academia (and its particular pecking orders). But, as Carolyn Leste Law points out in introducing one of these collections, “ambivalence” is one of their consistent themes—uneasiness with (or sometimes outright hatred of) middle-class ways, and a nostalgia and sense of loss in leaving the working-class world. As Law quotes her mother as saying, “Education destroys something.”<sup>17</sup> Law explains:

In their heart of hearts, these [working-class] parents wanted their children to return home to them virtually unchanged by their sojourn in the academy, so mysterious and impenetrable a place they might as well have sent their kids up the Amazon. . . . Working-class families . . . know that a college degree has everything to do with class, unlike professional or managerial-class families, who believe it has to do with merit and entitlement. They know that somehow the very existence of a college degree undermines and actually threatens their children and, consequently, their own working-class identity. In the end, they do not want what they would wish for.<sup>18</sup>

Some of the memoirs reflect the middle-class view that working-class culture is an obstacle to overcome and occurs in a place to escape from.<sup>19</sup> Others are aggressively hostile to middle-class culture, and most value and honor working-class ways.<sup>20</sup> But the main theme is, as Law says, ambivalence—recognizing value in both working-class and middle-class cultures and trying to reconcile the irreconcilable.

Barbara Jensen, a counseling psychologist from a working-class background whose practice and teaching are heavily with working-class young people and adults, has attempted to describe and “theorize” the differences between what she sees as *competing cultures*. According to Jensen, middle-class culture, with its achievement orientation, emphasizes “doing and becoming,” while working-class culture gives primary value to “being and belonging.” As such, each culture has strengths and weaknesses, advantages and disadvantages, and many people who are crossing classes experience various kinds of “cognitive dissonance” that can be both disabling and enriching.<sup>21</sup> Jensen and I have attempted to illustrate these basic differences.<sup>22</sup>

Table 5

**Class Cultures**

<b>Professional Middle Class</b>	<b>Working Class</b>
<p><b>Doing and becoming</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• achievement-oriented</li> <li>• future-oriented</li> <li>• life as transformative</li> <li>• status concerns</li> <li>• individualistic</li> </ul>	<p><b>Being and belonging</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• character-oriented</li> <li>• present-oriented</li> <li>• life as tangled web of relationships</li> <li>• anti-status</li> <li>• solidaristic</li> </ul>
<p><b>Unintended homogeneity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• more cosmopolitan</li> <li>• weaker loyalties to persons, places, groups, institutional affiliations</li> </ul>	<p><b>Unavoidable diversity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• more parochial</li> <li>• stronger loyalties to persons, places, groups, institutional affiliations</li> </ul>
<p><b>Best result:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual achievement has positive human impact.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Best result:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secure community, collective action</li> </ul>
<p><b>Worst result:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The lonely individual</li> </ul>	<p><b>Worse result:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unachieved potential</li> </ul>

Fred Rose, a working-class community organizer from a middle-class background, has also attempted to describe the two class cultures and to derive a series of lessons for labor and community organizers as well as for American politics.<sup>23</sup> Others have attempted to derive teaching strategies and culturally sensitive pedagogies from their teaching experience, which inevitably involves an evaluative reflection on the class cultures.<sup>24</sup>

All this work is tentative, and though there is much agreement, there are also huge differences between different descriptions and evaluations of the class cultures, all of which always reflect one's own class circumstances and background (which, refreshingly, everybody is consciously and comfortably aware of). As a result, this whole cultural discussion is unusually concrete, self-reflexive, and practical, with stories and anecdotes (and sometimes "case studies") disciplining and enriching the theorizing. As such, with all kinds of imprecision and contradictions, it practices and speaks something

like the four-class vernacular I advocate above, it shows the superiority of that vernacular over the middle-class one, and, while not directly political (in the pollsters' and politicians' sense), it speaks directly to people's varied experiences of class in America in a way that makes a whole different politics and political discourse not only possible, but urgently necessary.

## **Conclusion**

I teach working adults in a bachelor's degree program in downtown Chicago and suburban Schaumburg. All my students are working class by education, but they are in my classes in order to change that. Although they are sometimes factory and construction workers, cops and firefighters, most are technical or clerical workers. Many are already managerial workers who need a bachelor's degree to keep their jobs. Some, especially the techs, have family incomes in excess of \$100,000, while some of the managers make peanuts and bash their corporate employers in ways that make some of the clerical workers uncomfortable. Some (particularly downtown) are "poor" by my lights, but none would define themselves that way. Most, using Jensen's terms, are culturally working class, but not without a lot of middle-class gloss and sometimes roots. There are more women than men. Downtown is more black, more Hispanic and more Democrat. The suburbs are more conservative and Republican (particularly the white men), though every class has its liberal Democrats. But most are classic (and complicated) "swing voters," just as Teixeira and Rogers claim, adrift in a politics that for the most part does not speak to them.

I know that class and class identity are complicated in these United States. My father was a militant steelworker shop steward who, with an iron will and an aching heart, virtually herded my sister and me into the professional middle class, while my mother was a college graduate and a professional worker (a teacher) who steadfastly protected and nourished our working-class culture. I grew up thinking I was middle class because we were so much better off than kids from

nonunion families, and I was surprised in college when I found out I had to *become* middle class.

Class and class identity are complicated in America, but not so complicated as to be meaningless. Americans already think in class terms, but the mainstream vernacular will not let us recognize, let alone think clearly about, this complexity. Working-Class Studies will. We do not need long strings of class permutations. Neither do we need one definition for all occasions. We simply need to make it harder and harder to speak in the existing vernacular, to ridicule the middle-class two-step every time it is performed, and to insist on the inclusion of the working class wherever and whenever our insistence might make a difference. Working-Class Studies has already shown how this can help us understand ourselves and our society better than we do now. For most of us, it is personal. It is time now to make it political.

## Notes

1. Ruy Teixeira and Joel Rogers, *America's Forgotten Majority: Why the White Working Class Still Matters* (<<city?>>: Basic Books, 2000), and Michael Zweig, *The Working Class Majority: America's Best Kept Secret* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000). For more complicated analyses with many more classes, see Robert Perrucci and Earl Wyson, *The New Class Society* (<<city?>>: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), five classes; Erik Olin Wright, *Class Counts* (<<city?>>: Cambridge University Press, 1997), twelve classes; and Michael J. Weiss, *The Clustering of America* (<<city?>>: Tilden Press, 1988), forty classes.

2. See Joel Rogers and Ruy Teixeira, "America's Forgotten Majority," *Atlantic* (June 2000): part 1, p. 1, available at [www.theatlantic.com/issues/2000/06/rogers.htm](http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/2000/06/rogers.htm).

3. *Ibid.*, part 2, p. 2.

4. For the Greenberg connection, see Thomas Byrne Edsall, "Class Doesn't Trump Culture," *Dissent* (spring 2001): 105; and Ruy Teixeira, "Gore's Tenuous Bond with Workers," *American Prospect*, November 20, 2000, p. 15.

5. See "Competing Tax Plans," *Online NewsHour*, October 17, 2000, available at [www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/election/july-dec00/taxplans\\_10-17.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/election/july-dec00/taxplans_10-17.html).

6. U.S. Census Bureau, *Money Income in the United States: 1999*. <<city, pub, year?>>

7. Zweig, *The Working Class Majority*, pp. 1-4, 9-37.

8. For a summary of Zweig's full analysis, see *The Working Class Majority*, p. 29, Table 1, which uses 1996 labor force data.

9. Alan Wolfe, *One Nation, After All: What Middle-Class Americans Really Think About: God, Country, Family, Racism, Welfare, Immigration, Homosexuality, Work, the Right, the Left, and Each Other* (<<city?>>: Penguin Books, 1998).

10. Zweig, *The Working Class Majority*, pp. 86, 89.

11. See Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Occupations with the Largest Job Growth, 2000-2010," *Monthly Labor Review* (November 2001), available at [www.bls.gov/emp/emptab4.htm](http://www.bls.gov/emp/emptab4.htm). Of the top twenty-five occupations listed, only five require a bachelor's degree, and seventeen will pay less than \$25,761 a year. Some of the occupations with the largest projected growth are food service workers (#1), customer service representatives (#2), retail salespersons (#4), cashiers (#6), office clerks (#7), security guards (#8), and waiters and waitresses (#10). Most of these jobs will pay less than \$18,491 on a full-time yearly basis, according to the BLS.

12. S.M. Miller, "Class Dismissed?" *American Prospect* 6, no. 21 (March 21, 1995) <<PP?>>.

13. Thurston Domina, "Class and the American Consensus: Predictors of Working-Class Identity, 1972-2000" (paper presented at a conference on "How Class Works," State University of New York at Stony Brook, June 8, 2002).

14. Janet Zandy, ed., *What We Hold in Common: An Introduction to Working-Class Studies* (<<city?>>: Feminist Press, 2001), p. ix.

15. Sherry Lee Linkon, ed., *Teaching Working Class* (<<city?>>: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999).

16. See, for example, Janet Zandy, ed., *Liberating Memory: Our Work and Our Working-Class Consciousness* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995); *Women's Studies Quarterly* 23, nos. 1 and 2 (spring/summer 1995), special issue on "Working-Class Studies"; David Shevin et. al., *Writing Work: Writers on Working-Class Writing* (<<city?>>: Bottom Dog Press, 1999); and *The Heat: Steelworker Lives & Legends*, with introduction by Jimmy Santiago Baca (<<city?>>: Cedar Hill Publications, 2001).

17. C.L. Barney Dews and Carolyn Leste Law, eds., *This Fine Place So Far From Home: Voices of Academics from the Working Class* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), p. 1. Also see the earlier collection edited by Jake Ryan and Charles Sackrey, *Strangers in Paradise: Academics from the Working Class* (<<city?>>: South End Press, 1984).

18. Dews and Law, *This Fine Place*, p. 5.

19. See, for example, Marianna De Marco Torgovnick, *Crossing Ocean Parkway: Readings by an Italian American Daughter* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

20. See bell hooks, *where we stand: class matters* (<<city?>>: Routledge, 2000); Cheri Register, *Packinghouse Daughter: A Memoir* (<<city?>>: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2000); Richard Rodriguez, *Hunger for Memory* (<<city?>>: Bantam Books, 1983); and Mark Phillips, *My Father's Cabin* (<<city?>>: Lyons Press, 2001). For eloquent hostility to middle-class ways, see Renny Christopher, *A Carpenter's Daughter: A Working-Class Woman in Higher Education*, forthcoming <<publisher?>>. The offspring of steelworkers have contributed four volumes to the crossover literature: Robert Bruno, *Steelworker Alley: How Class Works in Youngstown* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999); Martina Durbin, *Lima Beans and City Chicken: A Memoir of the Open Hearth* (<<city?>>: E.P. Dutton, 1989); Deborah E. McDowell, *Leaving Pipe Shop: Memories of Kin* (<<city?>>: W.W. Norton, 1996); and my own *Striking Steel: Solidarity Remembered* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000).

21. Jensen has presented a series of papers at Working-Class Studies conferences that she is now developing into a book. The ones I have read are "The Silent Psy-

chology" (<<pls clarify all these citations>> Youngstown, 1995), "Becoming Versus Belonging: Psychology, Speech, and Social Class" (Youngstown, 1997), "Post-Traumatic Lives: Identity and Invisible Injury in the Working Class" (Youngstown, 1999), and "Across the Great Divide: Cultural and Psychological Dynamics from the Working Class to the Middle Class" (SUNY Stony Brook, 2002).

22. Joint presentation called "Working Class and Middle Class as Competing Cultures" at Youngstown State University Working-Class Studies Conference, May 2001. See also Metzgar, *Striking Steel*, pp. 202–6.

23. Fred Rose, *Coalitions Across the Class Divide: Lessons from the Labor, Peace, and Environmental Movements* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).

24. In addition to Linkon's collection cited above, see Sharon O'Dair, *Class, Critics, and Shakespeare: Bottom Lines on the Culture Wars* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000).

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