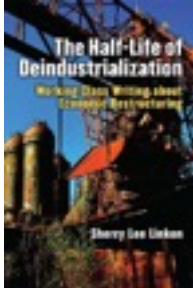


# BOOK NOTES



***The Half-Life of Deindustrialization: Working-Class Writing about Economic Restructuring* (U. of Michigan Press), Sherry Lee Linkon**

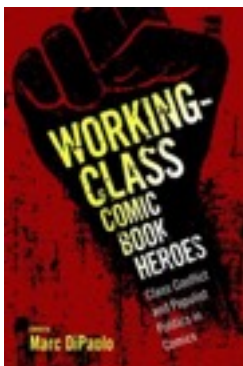
Many of us complain a lot about the lack of mainstream attention to working-class lives and cultures, but in this volume Sherry Linkon gathers together an amazing array of writers and other kinds of authors who portray working-class characters and stories in all their daunting complexity. If you think what Linkon calls “deindustrialization literature” is only about what happens to workers and families who lost manufacturing jobs, you’ll be surprised to see the variety of jobs in the texts Linkon chooses to highlight. Part of what Linkon reveals as a new genre of imaginative investigation is about autoworkers in Michigan and steelworkers in Pittsburgh, as you’d expect, but a larger part of it is about fast-food and retail workers, janitors and health care workers, and about families and communities struggling with both too little and too much work. As Linkon explains in her Introduction, “Most of this work was published after 2000 . . . and it focuses not on those who were displaced when plants closed but on those who are still living with the effects of . . . closings” that happened a decade or two ago. Exploring movies, popular music, video clips, and creative non-fiction as well as novels, stories and poetry, Linkon also draws on social science and journalism, but *The Half-Life of Deindustrialization* demonstrates that “deindustrialization literature provides insight that neither journalism nor social science can offer, because it tells stories not merely about but also from the perspective of working-class people.” Sherry Linkon is, of course, one of the founders of Working-Class Studies, and this book is likely to be a landmark in our field.

***Know Your Place: Essays on the Working Class by the Working Class* (Dead Ink), Nathan Connolly, editor.**



This collection asked 24 working-class writers to address the question: In 21<sup>st</sup> Century Britain, what does it mean to be working class? Editor Nathan Connolly says of the result: “It might be expected that . . . this book would be gloomy, pessimistic and angry. And some of it is . . . But it isn’t just that, it is also a celebration of working class life in all its guises. We tried to steer clear of flat caps and life down the pit as much as we could. Hopefully this is a record of the 21<sup>st</sup> century working class: one with smart phones, GCSEs, and 24-hour news. Though, if it is that, it is still one with a long memory and a sense of where it came from. The working class might have changed since *The Road to Wigan Pier*, *Love on the Dole* or *Kes*, but I think it is still recognizable and its challenges aren’t all that different. What we haven’t done with this book is to try and achieve an authoritative . . . text representative of ‘The Working-Class Experience’. What we *have* tried to do is dispel any notions that such a book

could ever exist.”



***Working-Class Comic Book Heroes: Class Conflict and Populist Politics in Comics* (U. Press of Mississippi), Mark DiPaolo, editor.**

Batman, Iron Man, and Wonder Woman come from elite backgrounds, but other comic-book heroes are from the working class, like Captain America, Jessica Jones, Luke Cage, and The Thing. This collection of scholarly essays, says editor Mark DiPaolo, is “the first to deal explicitly with issues of class, cultural capital, and economics” in a comic-book world that now dominates big and little screens across the globe. According to the publisher, the essays “weigh industry histories and marketing concerns as well as the fan community’s changing attitudes towards class signifiers in superhero adventures.” The volume finds that “superhero stories often depict working-class characters who struggle to make ends meet, lead fulfilling lives, and remain faithful to themselves and their own personal code of ethics.” DiPaolo’s introductory essay is subtitled “The Subversive Potential of Populist Comic Books,” and former WCSA president Michele Fazio contributes an essay, “Memory and the Meaning of Work in *The Walking Dead*”. One reviewer calls the book “a lively and engaging look at how comic book storytelling has commented on, confronted, and reproduced enduring patterns of social demarcation.”



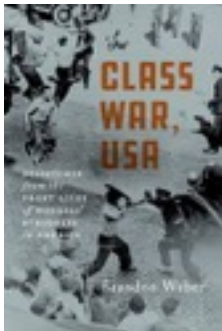
**Trailer Park/Parque de Remolques (Hardball Press), J.C. Dillard**

From the publisher: “All children feel alone and friendless at some time in their life. In *Trailer Park/Parque de remolques*, young Robert finds himself without a friend when his dad moves their family from their big suburban home to a trailer park. At first Robert looks down on the multi-racial blue-collar children in the park. But after a girl named Jessie persists in extending her hand in friendship, the boy learns he is living with the most generous and loving people in the world.”



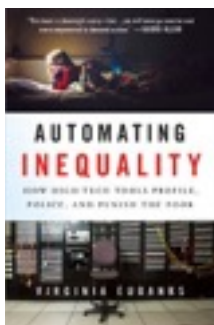
**My Open Heart: Stories & Essays by Members of SEIU Healthcare 1199NE (Hard Ball Press), Tim Sheard, editor.**

Editor Tim Sheard describes this new Hard Ball collection: “Caregivers are remarkable people, whether they give care in a nursing home or in someone’s home. The writers in this book work day after day, giving beautiful, compassionate care to those who need it most. Their work is hidden to much of the world, but their stories deserve to be told. Now the world can read about their dedication, their lives and their dreams.”



**Class War, USA: Dispatches from Workers’ Struggles in American History (Haymarket Books), Brandon Weber**

This slender volume gives provocatively brief, photographically illustrated accounts of “crucial moments of struggle when working-class people built movements of hope and defiance.” It covers labor history hall-of-fame events you’d expect – Lowell, Haymarket and Pullman, Cripple Creek, the Triangle Fire, Blair Mountain, the Minneapolis General Strike, the Flint Sitdown, the Farmworkers grape boycott, and many others. But it also includes many you might not usually see – the Atlanta Washerwomen Strike of 1881, the Stonewall Rebellion of 1969, the 1970 Postal Workers wildcat, Attica, and Watsonville, for example, right up to the present with the Fight for \$15. The volume opens with an evocative profile of Joe Hill and ends with all the lyrics of Wood Guthrie’s *This Land Is Your Land*, including the ones you almost never hear. The publisher promises it will be “an invaluable tool” for labor and other grassroots activists, as it “dispels the myth that change comes only from the top.”



**Automating Inequality: How High-Tech Tools Profile, Police, and Punish the Poor (St. Martin’s Press), Virginia Eubanks**

All of us have been “profiled” by class, race, ethnicity, gender, and numerous other characteristics for centuries, but as Virginia Eubanks points out, the way data about us was formed into profiles then and the way those profiles were used by companies and government agencies depended on the judgments of individual human beings – some of whom had vicious prejudices, but others who did not. In our big-data digital world, our class and racial prejudices have been coded into computer programs that use algorithms to make decisions that may be statistically probabilistic, but can never accurately apply to complicated individual situations. *Automating Inequality* argues that the main frontier of digital profiling today is directed at the poor and working classes: “Automated decision-making shatters the social safety net, criminalizes the poor, intensifies discrimination, and compromises our deepest national values.

It reframes shared social decisions about who we are and who we want to be as systems engineering problems. . . [T]he most sweeping digital decision-making tools are tested in . . . ‘low rights environments’ where there are few expectations of political accountability and transparency.” Naomi Klein says: “This book is downright scary – but you will emerge smarter and more empowered to demand justice.”

**Miss Jane: The Lost Years (Livingston Press/University of West Alabama), Kat Meads**



Publisher synopsis: “A spirited dive into power and sexual politics narrated by a fierce (and funny) female chorus, *Miss Jane: The Lost Years* chronicles farm girl Jane’s entanglement with Prof P, serial bedder of undergrads, and education in all things: books, partners, economics and selfhood. Supporting cast: therapists, stepchildren, rescue dogs, B.F. Skinner, formidable women poets and mad-making Southern heat.” WCSA’s Jeanetta Calhoun Mish, Oklahoma State Poet Laureate, writes of *Miss Jane*, “Meads’ singular narrative voice, her delightful sentences, and her unwavering belief in female strength combine to create essential reading. If we can believe Muriel Rukeyser, that a woman telling the truth of her life would split the worlds open, then this story is the wedge.”



***Class Matters: The Strange Career of an American Delusion* (Yale U. Press), Steve Fraser**

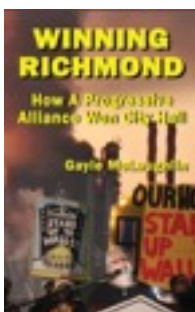
Steve Fraser is a “new labor history” historian, author of the definitive biography of the CIO Clothing Workers’ Sidney Hillman, who has recently expanded his range into American social and political history as a whole. *Class Matters* is a collection of essays that demonstrates the forgotten and/or actively erased role of social class (including slavery) in a string of iconic American events and symbols – the original colonies in Plymouth and Jamestown, the Constitutional Convention, the Statue of Liberty, the cowboy (especially in movies), the Khrushchev-Nixon Kitchen Debate in 1959, and Martin Luther King Jr.’s ‘I Have a Dream Speech’ in 1963. Each essay places these icons in a wider historical sweep, as Fraser uses events in his own life to explore the continuities within the dramatic changes of the past several centuries – reflecting on being at the March on Washington as a 17-year-old and part of Freedom Summer in Mississippi a year later, as well being arrested for having bomb-making

materials in his apartment while a graduate student at Penn. Barbara Ehrenreich calls it “a bold and brilliant account of how the subject of class was expunged from American consciousness and culture.”



***Until We Are Level Again* (Mongrel Empire Press), Jose Angel Araguz**

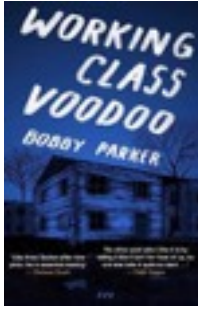
Describing Jose Araguz’ third collection of poetry, the publisher writes that his poems “gropes the walls of a dark room, looking for answers from a father who has been absent. The writing amplifies the ache of empty spaces, and delves into themes of culture, home, growth, reflections, and change.” Author Octavio Quintanilla writes of *Until We Are Level Again*: “Enter this house of poems and unbar its windows. Unlock its doors. See how the light of these delicate elegies cut deep into the marrow of memory.”



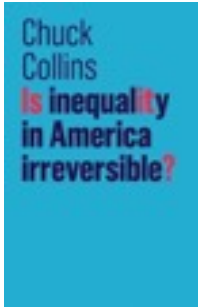
***Winning Richmond: How a Progressive Alliance Won City Hall* (Hard Ball Press), Gayle McLaughlin**

Richmond, California, is a Bay Area city long controlled by Chevron, with its huge oil refineries driving the local economy and fouling its air and water. Gayle McLaughlin is one of the grassroots organizers who helped create a cross-class, cross-racial-ethnic progressive alliance that seized political power from that oil giant and transformed Richmond into a laboratory of 21<sup>st</sup> century democracy. After years of struggle, the alliance won a majority of the City Council with McLaughlin as mayor. Since then Richmond has very improbably won national recognition as a Clean & Green Community. This book is McLaughlin’s account of how they did it and how other towns and cities might learn from their experience. According to her, the struggle was inspired and informed by a Native American proverb: “We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children.”

***Working Class Voodoo* (Offord Road Books), Bobby Parker**



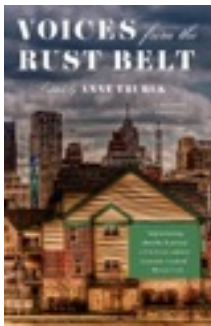
The publisher writes that “Parker employs a vibrato narrative deeply concerned with the cost of both journey and arrival, with the irresistible darkness of both humor and tragedy in contrast and counter to one another. In poems which push at questions of contemporary masculinity, of the domestic and of the bonds of family, our unreliability, our desires, our addictions and our weaknesses are both indulged and confronted.”



***Is Inequality in America Irreversible?* (Polity), Chuck Collins and *The Case for a Maximum Wage* (Polity), Sam Pizzigati**

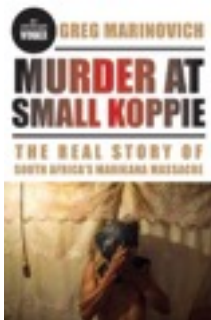
Growing weary of watching academics and politicians wring their hands about the dreadful and growing inequalities of wealth and income in America without ever suggesting ways we can reverse it? If so, these two slender books from Polity Press should provide some hope that we might be getting past the hand-wringing stage. Chuck Collins provides a broad overview of the ideological and political obstacles we face; a survey of remedies that could reverse our current distributions of income and wealth; and an argument for four “transformative campaigns to change the future.” Collins’ four campaigns involve government provision of affordable housing, free higher education, a massively green infrastructure and jobs program, and a universal basic income – and in each case, he provides clear and compelling ways to pay for them. Sam Pizzigati’s *Case for a Maximum Wage* drills down into the idea of capping top incomes the way

we have speed limits and restrictions on how much polluters can pollute. Exploring various ways governments can use their tax systems “to enforce fair income ratios,” Pizzagati argues we should create “a world without a super rich.” Barbara Ehrenreich endorses the book by asking: “How long can we endure the burden of the super rich, who suppress the wages of the majority, drive up the costs of everything, and concentrate political power in their own hands?”



***Voices From the Rust Belt* (Picador), Anne Trubek**

The publisher describes the Rust Belt as the country’s declining manufacturing center that has become a political talking point since the 2016 election, but contends that “the region is neither monolithic nor easily understood. The truth is much more nuanced. *Voices from the Rust Belt* pulls together a distinct variety of voices from people who call the region home. Voices that emerge from familiar Rust Belt cities—Detroit, Cleveland, Flint, and Buffalo, among other places—and observe, with grace and sensitivity, the changing economic and cultural realities for generations of Americans.”



***Murder at Small Koppie: The Real Story of South Africa’s Marikana Massacre* (Michigan State U. Press), Greg Marinovich**

In 2012 the Marikana Massacre at a South African platinum mine caused global outrage with news footage of the deaths of a dozen miners at the hands of government troops, but that was less than half the story. In all 78 were wounded and 34 were killed, most of them “off-camera and in cold blood.” Pulitzer-winning photojournalist Greg Marinovich tells the whole story based on eyewitness accounts, an official Commission of Inquiry, and his own research into events leading up to the massacre. According to the publisher: “By taking readers into the mines, the shacks where the miners live, and the boardroom, Marinovich puts names, faces, and stories to Marikana’s victims and perpetrators. He addresses the big questions that any nation must ask when justice and equality are subverted by conflicts around class, race, money, and power, as well as the subsequent denial and finger-pointing that characterized the response of the mine owner, police, and government.”



***Out Past the Wires* (Mezcalita Press), Rod Picott**

The author is a former construction worker turned singer-songwriter. Born in New Hampshire and raised in Maine, he has released nine albums since his debut *Tiger Tom Dixon's Blues* in 2000. His poetry debut, *God in His Slippers*, was published by Mezcalita Press in 2017; *Out Past the Wires* is Picott's first work of fiction. Stephen Pulsford, Director of English at Berea College, says of the collection that these are "12 great stories: gut-punchingly painful; sadly, honestly beautiful; all with characters who will haunt you long after you have read from one story, to the next."