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REVIEW ESSAY

Class cultures

Allison L. Hurst[1]

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Despite sociology's long history with theorizing class and using it as a major category of social life, there remains much disagreement about how to incorporate it into our research. We are thankfully coming out of the "end of history" era in which class was argued to no longer exist or be a defining aspect of life (e.g., Pakulski and Waters 1996; Cannadine 2000; Kingston 2000). We know that class is part of any decent intersectional analysis. Fundamentally different understandings of what "class" is, and how best to define it methodologically, however, may have impeded advances in empirical research that includes class. Quantitative studies in particular often use level of education, income, or, more rarely, occupation, as a proxy for class. But do any of these factors actually capture the relational and cultural characteristics of class? Lareau and Conley point out that many purported studies of class "use the terms 'inequality,' 'stratification,' 'family background,' or specific indicators (such as education, wealth, income, or occupation)—sometimes interchangeably" leading to "considerable murkiness around the empirical study of social class" (Lareau and Conley 2010, pp. 3–4). This conceptual murkiness seems to have inhibited class research.

One exception to this general inhibition, however, has been in the thriving genre of class cultures studies. Class cultures studies take the relational and messy aspects of class as their starting point, and seek to describe and explain how people act, think, and interpret the world in class-differentiated ways based on classed experiences, both in terms of the communities in which they were raised and the kinds of work and worlds they now inhabit. The relational aspect is clear in a common focus on "opposing" class cultures, which specifically contrasts cultures of the working class and middle class. Three recent examples, *Privilege Lost* by Jessi Streib, *Bridging the Class Divide* by Jack Metzgar, and *We Are Still Here* by Jennifer Silva will be reviewed here, alongside two classic examples in the field, *Missing Class*, by Betsy Leondar-Wright, and *Reading Classes*, by Barbara Jensen.

Leondar-Wright is a sociologist and long-time Program Director at *Class Action,* a non-profit organization (https://classism.org) that, among other things, hosts

✉ Allison L. Hurst
hursta@oregonstate.edu

[1] Sociology Program, School of Public Policy, Oregon State University, 330 Bexell Hall, Corvallis, OR 97331, USA

workshops and panels that help people confront and work through the ways class and race impede social justice efforts. Motivated by her work in this and other activist organizations, Leondar-Wright observed class dynamics in twenty-five activist groups and social movement organizations in an effort to provide recommendations for organizers. In *Missing Class: Strengthening Social Movement Groups by Seeing Class Cultures*, she argues that ignorance of class dynamics can undercut a group's success. The book begins with five specific examples of how employing different lenses can lead to different levels of understanding of group dynamics. Adding a class lens, in addition to the traditional movement lens or even the "race and gender" lens that many movements already attempt, teaches something new—"usually something not articulated by the participants themselves because of the scarcity of class discourse among activists in the United States today" (p. 9). The rest of the book is a masterful lesson in how to employ a class lens, first by understanding what class is and how to think about it, then by carefully demonstrating how working-class and middle-class activists think, act, and speak differently, and finally explaining how understanding differential and sometimes opposing class cultures can help social movements both remain strong and grow. This last is especially important for middle-class-led social movements that seek to speak for the poor and working class and are often flummoxed by the fact that so few such persons join their movements.

Missing Class, as the subtitle suggests, is explicitly about class cultures. Leondar-Wright draws from Bourdieu to create a two-axis (volume and composition of capitals) model of class. She then places activists in that model, simplifying to four key groups: Professional Middle Class (PMC), Working Class (WC), Straddlers (educated persons who grew up working class), and Voluntarily-Downward Mobiles (VDMs, educated persons who grew up middle class but were positioning themselves in the working class). Adding Straddlers and VDMs allows her to capture the importance of class cultures, which are ways of being in the world deeply conditioned by one's upbringing and early experiences. Used in this sense, class cultures are very close to Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*. Like Bourdieu, Leondar-Wright warns us not to see these class predispositions as fixed or final; there is still a lot of room for agency:

> "Our attitudes toward our own class conditioning and other inherited behavioral expectations can vary from unawareness to enthusiastic justification to skepticism to fierce resistance. Greater awareness of how we've been socialized into a class culture can make us more flexible and can strengthen our resistance to the harmful parts of our childhood conditioning." (p. 228)

Every social movement has its own style, its own orientation, its own way of being and working together. Leondar-Wright acknowledges this in the fourth chapter, where she explores some of the key differences between, say, anarchist groups and labor outreach groups. This is all very interesting and worth reading, but it is in the following chapters that comprise Part Two, specifically focused on Class Cultures, that we start to learn how ignoring class cultures can really undercut the success of a group. For example, in Chapter Five, we learn the importance of person-to-person relationship building and humor for attracting working-class

people to the movement. Too often, PMC activists try to build membership by stressing the importance of the campaign, downplaying the kind of personal relationship building that brings people in. They also neglect the importance of sharing food as a communal enterprise that builds trust and cohesion. PMC activists can also be dismissive of humor and laughter, thereby turning off some people by being too wordy and too serious. Ritual mockery, which is common in working-class culture and important for building solidarity, tends to be discouraged by PMC persons, who see it as unprofessional or even abusive.

In Chapter Six, we learn how creative, ultra-egalitarian consensus-building processes of the kind espoused by the *Occupy* movement (think twinkling, howling, and endless talk) can backfire when involving working-class persons. Leondar-Wright, PMC, tells a personal story here, of how she came to understand that "the movement culture that had charmed me did not charm others" when working with a PMC-dominated group that opposed nuclear energy. Her taste for egalitarian process was rooted in her own particular class background,

> "We had thought of ourselves as prefiguring emancipatory participatory democracy, but in ways that are invisible to us, we were also performing class-exclusionary PMC counterculture." (p. 134)

Knowing what she now knows, she would include in any checklist of what a movement leader needs, "the skill of participating in a brisk, leader-run, majority-rule, action-oriented … meeting without whining about the process" (p. 134). These are the characteristics that mesh with and thereby attract and retain busy working-class people.

There are other lessons here, important for anyone wishing to understand people across the class divide, not only for working to build progressive social movements. For those who *are* attempting to build a mass progressive movement, this book is essential reading. In our political climate, where class cultures have been effectively weaponized by the least progressive party, there is no time to waste.

Leondar-Wright's book is also a particularly helpful introduction to the class cultures literature because it captures two key aspects of this approach. The first of these is conceptual clarity naming specific classes (e.g., PMC, straddlers), inspired from Bourdieu's notion of class as a combination of volume of capitals, composition of capitals, and social trajectory (where one begins in life can have as much or more to say about a person's orientation to the world than where they end up, through education or occupational advancement). The second is how this conceptual clarity and naming of classes is put in service to advance social justice, or, at a minimum, a general orientation of *praxis*. Both of these key aspects sharply distinguish the class cultures approach from previous problematic attempts at delineating a "culture of poverty" à la Oscar Lewis (1966). In those renderings, there was something wrong about the ways that [insert social group here] went about living their lives; either inherently so (the reading embraced by social conservatives) or as a result of structural and historical forces that had "deformed" the group (the reading embraced by liberals). The obvious problem with both approaches is that it leaves the group from which the commentator

unidentified and unremarked, so that any and all descriptions of the culture of the "other" named group is bound to read as deviant from some unexamined norm. Leondar-Wright and other class cultures theorists both name and scrutinize this unremarked group, the PMC, the group that includes academic researchers who have the power to name the classes and parse their cultures. The PMC has a class culture as well, and it is not always perfect. Indeed, the idea of a perfect or correct or non-deviant class culture does not make a lot of sense. As will become even more clear throughout this review, specific class cultures exist both as responses to specific material and historical circumstances, and as reactions to other class cultures, often as moral foils. The work of Leondar-Wright and many other class cultures researchers is to break through these obfuscating moral postures so that communities of persons across classes can be established; to root out these more pernicious and divisive aspects of opposed class cultures.

As with many a moral reform, identification of the problem is the first step to recovery. The academic community has to be made aware of its classist problem, of its tendency to read subaltern cultures as deviant, before proceeding. This is the goal of the next book reviewed. In *Reading Classes,* Jensen, a Licensed Counselor and independent scholar, successfully weaves together personal biography, observations from many years of counseling mixed-class couples and professionals from working-class backgrounds, and astute analyses of relevant academic literature, to produce a book that captures the essence of the experience of class mobility. Her goal is "to highlight how culture plays into class," and especially classism, "the set of myths and beliefs" that keep class divisions intact (p. 11).

Reading Classes is explicitly about class cultures, "the medium through which inequality manifests itself" (p. 11). Early in the book, Jensen provides an example of working-class and middle-class culture by telling a personal story about two Lutheran confirmation celebrations she attended in the late 1990s—"same day, same town, same white clapboard country church." At the working-class celebration, voices were loud, bodies were welcoming, the young girl being confirmed was mostly ignored, and the gathering broke up into zones separated by both gender and age. At the middle-class celebration, voices were muted, mixed-gender groups and pairs proliferated, and the young girl being confirmed was the center of attention, seriously questioned by the adults on what the day meant to her. Anyone who has grown up working class and taken a job in the academy will recognize this story, as the ability to move across class cultures is a basic requirement for our success and mental health. Explaining this to those who have not lived two cultures is the point of Jensen's book, helping middle-class people in particular understand that the ways they live and organize their home lives, workspaces, and confirmation parties are not the only ways things can be properly arranged.

Two axes differentiate the class cultures, according to Jensen: belonging versus becoming, and behaving vs. blooming. Working-class people value group belonging and working *in solidarity* with co-workers and one's local community. This is why those attending the one confirmation did not center the young girl being confirmed. In contrast, middle class people value individual achievement. Working-class children are taught to behave, while middle-class children are rewarded for their precocity, even if this means negotiating with their teachers (e.g., asking for an A instead

of a B+). Neither culture is perfect, and there are stresses and strains on each. The point is that they are different, and the problem is that only one is valued in the institutions that offer power and access to prosperity. Jensen, herself a person who moved from the working class into the middle class, spends a great deal of time discussing "crossovers," and the strain of social mobility.

Reading Jensen is an excellent entry point into the burgeoning literature on the "working-class academic" experience, as she both references many of the key writers in this genre and is able to capture the essential issues through personal stories and observations. For example, she describes the various coping strategies crossovers employ to deal with the strain of moving between class classes: distancing, resisting, and building bridges (pp. 167 *ff*). Coming to very similar conclusions at around the same time as Jensen, I have written about how working-class college students adopt one of three coping strategies: becoming Loyalists (resisting assimilation into the middle class), becoming Renegades (rejecting home cultures), and becoming Double Agents (building bridges between the working and middle classes) (Hurst 2010). These coping strategies are also well in evidence in the various collections of working-class academic biography, a genre in itself (see, e.g., Dews and Law 1995; Grimes and Morris 1997; Muzzatti and Samarco 2005; Oldfield and Johnson 2008; Ryan and Sackrey 1984; and Tokarczyk and Fay 1993).

If Jensen's book has a core message, it is that those who straddle classes, who stand at the borders, have a unique vantage point to explain how class works, and how classism prevents middle-class people from understanding the system that enmeshes us all. As inequality deepens the class divide, we need more understanding of our common humanity and a recognition of values other than those of individual achievement. There is an urgency to Jensen's conclusion, commanding us to take note of working-class people and the culture that has sustained them. Working-class communities are being crushed, and with them, too, the cultures of belonging and mutual support. For those of us who grew up working class, the prospect of nothing but a culture of individual achievement, a culture that inevitably generates inequality and alienation, is a bleak one.

In *Bridging the Divide,* Metzgar, a labor scholar and emeritus humanities professor, takes on the challenge laid down by Jensen. He brings an historical perspective on class cultures and how they came to be so divided and with what consequences. This is a beautifully written book, full of insightful observations, generous critiques, and a rousing optimism and hope that is sorely needed today. It reads as a very deep reflection on many decades of life experience and observation at the intersection of the working and middle classes, from a "straddler" who made the move into the PMC ("professional middle class") during the "Glorious Thirty" years of postwar prosperity that ran roughly from the end of WWII to the mid-1970s. Who better to give us insight into class cultures?

During the Glorious Thirty, it was relatively easy for white men like Metzgar to move between classes, to choose a different path than one's brothers, uncles, cousins. This move into the middle class was made easier during this period by the fact that one was able to move ahead by either increasing one's wages or by going to college. While there were two cultures at the time, there were not two widely-bifurcated life chances attendant on those cultures. It might surprise junior scholars to know

that full professors were then not necessarily materially better off than blue-collar workers. Metzgar in fact begins *Bridging the Divide* with a personal story comparing his situation with his more affluent blue-collar brother-in-law. In other words, the divide between the classes was cultural but not *that* material. The shared prosperity of the era meant that both cultures could co-exist and even sometimes learn from each other or support each other.

Even so, cultural differences loom large. Metzgar's definition of culture focuses on expectations, what a Bourdieusian scholar might gloss as *habitus*: "Culture is about what you expect of yourself, what you try to live up to, not your actual behavior" (p. 167). His rendition of the two cultures, of the working class from which he began and the PMC into which he moved, is clear and persuasive, and accords well with the sociological literature in this area. Working-class people, *people with jobs*, are focused on "being and belonging," in contrast to middle-class people, *people with careers*, who are focused on "doing and becoming." Perhaps as a result of the way working-class jobs are structured, or the ways that working-class people value staying with their communities, working-class culture tends towards parochialism, in contrast to the cosmopolitanism of the PMC. This cosmopolitanism is well described in the work of Elliott and Urry (2010), who draw on Bourdieu to theorize the rise of a new elite, "the Globals," premised on their ability and propensity to move. Similarly, I contrasted parochial orientations of working-class college students with a culture of cosmopolitanism embraced by elite students at liberal arts colleges (Hurst 2019). Metzgar notes here that working-class neighborhoods and places of work are also "unavoidably diverse" in a way that is not true of middle-class neighborhoods and workplaces, which are often homogenous, if unintentionally so.

Although Metzgar adopted the middle-class through his choice of work and the educational ladder he climbed to obtain that work, and clearly appreciates its achievement-oriented and cosmopolitan culture, the heart of the book is a plea to acknowledge that both cultures have their pluses and their minuses, and that *increasing polarization and dismissal* of the other has very negative consequences for both. Working-class culture encourages secure communities with some form of collective efficacy, and the ability to appreciate life even when it throws you curveballs. Indeed, Metzgar includes an entire chapter on the values of "taking it" and living in the moment. On the other hand, living in the moment might not get you very far. In contrast, individual achievement can open up new vistas for middle-class people, but it can also leave them feeling lonely and anxious.

The suggestion that both working-class and middle-class cultures have something to offer each other, and that they can co-exist, and that they *did* co-exist a bit more happily once upon a time, is attractive. Currently, the middle class is suffering from some intense levels of anxiety as downward mobility and their "defensive crouch" in the face of eroding possibilities makes them unable to recognize and value aspects of working-class culture. Metzgar clearly believes and argues that the meshing of cultures will lead to better activism. And he provides some exciting and convincing examples of how this works, particularly around labor organizing in academia and assisting working-class students to "bloom," to use Jensen's phrase. But most of these examples seem to require people like Metzgar and Leondar-Wright and Jensen

who really deeply want to understand working-class people and who truly value working-class culture.

Metzgar, Leondar-Wright, and Jensen all came of age in a time when, as Metzgar demonstrates, class mixing was much more possible than it is today. I do wonder how long this will be sustained. As sociologists, political scientists, journalists, and concerned citizens have documented, we are experiencing something of a "big sort" (Bishop 2009). Class tastes, if not exactly whole class cultures, have been weaponized in a battle for the hearts and minds of voters (Osnos 2021; Packer 2021). Political polarization increasingly rests on a foundation of mobilized class resentments, often imperfectly understood (Klein 2021). I am not surprised that so many of the observations about how class has been weaponized come from people who, at some point in their life, experienced different class cultures (see, e.g., George Packer's biography), or that the class cultures literature has been mostly written by those with passports in both countries. But if Straddlers and Crossovers have a unique vantage point from which to understand the fracturing of the American polity today, what happens when fewer people get to cross over?

I admit that I do not have an answer to that question, only a fear of the feedback loop of inequality induced by greater inequality. If class cultures are responses to specific material circumstances, as I believe they are, and material circumstances shift such that the possibilities of life are fundamentally different for those in the working class and those in whatever safe berths of PMC-ness remain, understandings across the divide will become more difficult than they presently are, and the work of *Class Action* all the harder. As institutions that have sustained working-class communities (e.g., labor unions, geographically bounded civics and extended families, workplaces themselves) wither or are otherwise degraded, so too may the best aspects of working-class culture wither and degrade. Many institutions that serve the PMC are also failing, of course, pushing more of them into the "defensive crouch" that Metzgar rues. I do not have as much hope as Metzgar does for cross-class collaboration under these circumstances. Scheidel (2017) explicitly argues and Piketty (2017) implicitly suggests that we need a catastrophe on the level of the Great Wars of the past century to level the playing ground, if only to make possible some egalitarian maneuvering. The most we might hope for is that new forms of solidarity arise among the economic wreckage wrought by late capitalism and/or climate change.

Two recent books, written by scholars who came of age after the postwar bloom had well faded (our generation being the first less well off than our parents) write about working-class and middle-class culture a bit more obliquely, but nevertheless exemplify some of the strengths of the class cultures literature. They also incidentally support some of my fears about the impact of rising inequality and the impact of failing institutions.

While I read Silva's beautifully written and frankly horrifying account of working-class lives and political beliefs in a coal mining community in Pennsylvania, I wondered about the absence of a discussion of class cultures. To be honest, I don't think Silva was attempting to write about working-class culture, so this is not any kind of failure on her part. What she set out to do was understand the "puzzle of working-class politics," the fact that working-class people, who comprise the majority of potential voters, so often fail to vote, let alone meaningfully engage in the

political system Americans like to call a democracy. Her answer to this puzzle is interesting, well supported by the data she collect, and provocative. Before getting to that, however, I think it is important to say a few words about how this book *does* fit into a discussion of class cultures, even if this is not really what Silva is writing about.

Ever since Trump received enough votes to put him in the White House in 2016, both pundits and scholars have been falling over themselves trying to explain why working-class white people would do this to the country. A lot of this is nonsense, of course—we now know that Trump received support from across the class spectrum, that his policies were a mashup of gifts to certain elites (as against others who voted the other side), and that race was a bigger factor overall than class in predicting votes. We also know that a lot of working-class[1] people simply didn't vote, so it seems a bit unfair to blame them all for this event. Many books, of varying quality, were published to try to explain working-class people to the reading audience (Hochschild 2016; Packer 2021; Osnos 2021; Kristof and WuDunn 2020; Vance 2016; Wuthnow 2018; Williams 2019). Six years later, some of the rabidness over the working class (as dupes, as fascists, as racists, as just plain stupid) has melted away, but a residue remains. This is where Silva's book enters.

Silva adopts E.P. Thompson's notion of class as something that happens/is created, rather than something statically linked to income or occupation (p. 12). Like Jensen and Leondar-Wright she explicitly works from a Bourdieusian perspective, positing that our understandings of the world reflect the world we experience, and, conversely, that our actions help build (reinforce) that world. This is the way structures get inside of us and then are sustained by us as we reflect back those structures. There is a sort of karmic justice to things, where those who are abandoned end up abandoning the system. Although she never quite says that, and remains hopeful in the conclusion, the sheer amount of loss, pain, and abandonment expressed by the sixty-seven people she interviews led me to connect the dots and become truly terrified for our future. We are so far away from the time where middle-class people and working-class people shared a common destiny that the juxtaposition between reading Silva and reading Metzgar actually hurts.

Silva argues that the working-class people she interviewed experience such high degrees of physical pain (through dangerous and difficult work; physical abuse; and trauma) that they have made managing pain a way of establishing a moral self (p. 15). This is mostly by turning inward, away from institutions that have failed them, and electing to do things on their own with no help form anyone else, thank you very much. They "create imaginative bridges between personal suffering and politics" (p. 19), or, in the words of Metzgar, they "take it." Indeed, one way of reading Metzgar and Silva together is to see the culture of "taking it" become pathological.

[1] I hesitate to limit this discussion to "white" working-class people, because the general discourse at the time sometimes meant this specific subgroup of the working class, as if there was an actual distinct "white" working class from the rest of the working class, and other times was so confused as to think that working class simply meant white without a racial qualifier at all. I leave the general term here purposefully leaving that confusion in place.

Silva quotes generously from each person she interviews, allowing the reader to see how people make these connections, as in the case of Daniela, a thirty-one-year-old Puerto Rican who moved to the coal region for a chance of upward mobility, "I believe in God. But I also believe we're on our own." Like almost every other person interviewed, she does not vote,

> "If the world's going to end, it's going to end. We can't do nothing about it. If this world's going to end, if there's a war and people's out there, we can't do nothing but stay to our self." As long as "nobody's messing with us, and nobody comes to my door and nobody's threatening me, putting a gun to my face, I don't have to worry about nothing." (p. 126)

Apparent from Daniela's inclusion here, Silva has not confined herself to only White working-class persons. She sampled both oldtimers and newcomers in the area, with the former being more likely White and the newcomers less likely so, dividing the book into gendered chapters of each group (four in total). What unites them all is "an utter lack of faith in democracy" (p. 41). Conducting one interview on election day, she is mocked for having an "I Voted" sticker on her car's bumper. No one speaks up for either Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump here (although the alternative title to the book might easily have been, "How Bernie Sanders Could Have Won").

In the end, Silva suggests that this shared experience of pain could be used to mobilize working-class persons to come together and mobilize for relief. And she lists a set of strengths shared by the people she interviewed that read a lot like a shared class culture: they "draw dignity from hard work. They do not like bullies, and they want to be people who can be counted on" (p. 173). Although I do not share her optimism about the mobilization around shared pain, her book is a reminder that we cannot understand political apathy (or polarization) without understanding the effects inequality's costs have had on working-class people. It is also an excellent example of how the particular values of class cultures, like the value of "taking it," can become pathologized under changed circumstances. Being deferential to one's boss to get through the day is one thing, but acquiescing to a fascist state (so long as "nobody's putting a gun to my face") is something else entirely.

Unlike Streib's previous work, *The Power of the Past* (2015), which highlighted the many ways in which those raised working class and those raised middle class bring different sets of expectations and ways of being into their (cross-class) marriages, *Privilege Lost* is less an examination of class cultures and more an exploration of the varieties within middle class culture. In this way, it can be read as a companion to Silva. Where Silva takes a close look at the ways working-class culture has been constrained and beaten down during recent years, Streib's focus on downward mobility does the same for middle-class culture. Unlike the Glorious Thirty Postwar years, life chances are pretty unequal between the two most numerous classes. The fact that some young people who are raised middle class *do* "fall" downward is thus a puzzle to be teased apart. As an aside, however, I would like to point out the mathematical inevitability of downward mobility for some PMC children so long as the "room at the top" is not expanding and PMC families have more than one child. Perhaps, the puzzle can be better

restated as explaining which PMC children fail to reproduce the class position of their parents.

Streib's general argument is that middle-class reproduction, the passing on of class position from one generation to the next, is not nearly as easy or assured as researchers have assumed. By her accounting, downward mobility is "routine," with about half of youth born in the 1980s so far failing to have achieved the middle-class position of their parents. Of the youth she interviews for this study, 53% are on "class reproductive" trajectories, while the other 47% are on the path towards downward mobility. Streib argues that not all middle-class born persons have similar resources and so end up failing to achieve the class position of their parents. These youth then "reject identities that they lack the resources to enact and adopt identities that define the most important accomplishments as the ones their inherited resources equip them to achieve" (p. 9). In other words, class reproduction is achieved when parents share their resources (economic, human, and cultural) with their children. We cannot assume that they always do, or they always have them to share. This explains why some "fall" downward.

Although this is not a book about class cultures, there are insights into middle-class culture that parallel the insights into working-class culture provided by Silva. The constant drumbeat of achievement plays under all the chapters, suggesting that those raised middle class must either work very hard to live up to academic expectations, or outright reject the project. For example, Streib profiles "rebels" in Chapter Eight, those whose lack of resources relative to their peers "poised them for a fall," and whose consequently developed identities "pushed them over the cliff" (p. 58). Not doing well in school from an early age, they respond by "opting out," rebelling against school and any other institution poised to help them advance. And yet, as with other downwardly mobiles, they were surprised they did not find good middle-class jobs, even after earning a college degree.

Streib used interviews taken from the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR), a longitudinal study that began when the respondents were in their teens. Streib employed all four waves of interviews for her sample, the last of which was conducted at the average age of 26. Given this relative young age, I wonder how much "fall" we are really talking about here, even given the inevitability of some downward mobility in mathematical terms. In general, those who hadn't achieved a professional career at the time of the last interview (her definition of class reproduction) were working in service-sector jobs, like baristas, or living at the parental home and enjoying a middle-class lifestyle. Many were still expecting things to turn around, which Streib includes as an example of their fecklessness or cluelessness, but I am not so sure. In contrast to Silva, there was little pain on display. Streib herself suggests parents ask themselves "if the costs of downward mobility are as high as they believe, if the costs of class reproduction are as low as they assume, and if their children's goals—even ones that lead away from class reproduction—might be worth pursuing" (p. 124). She then makes direct suggestions about the kinds of jobs—working for a non-profit, becoming an entrepreneur—that students who fail to become professionals could be directed towards, pathways that I am pretty sure are not viable options for those raised working class. The very idea that careers should

accord with interests, that they can and should be rewarding both emotionally and materially—well, that is a pretty good reflection of middle-class culture.

These five books all bear on, explicitly or implicitly, differential class cultures. Reading them together one comes away with a definite sense that US culture is not monolithic. We are all sensitized to the fact that the US is riven with race and gender inflections, and we generally do not expect broad similarity in speech, behavior, beliefs, and expectations among different ethnic and regional groups. And yet, as Metzgar argued, scholars have for too long assumed a general "middle class," at least for White people. Sometimes this is even referred to as "American" culture (e.g, Bellah 2007). Even a decade ago when Jensen (2012) was published, the idea that there were "two class cultures" in the US was difficult for many scholars raised middle class to grasp. With the resurrection of fascism and the culture wars, it is increasingly obvious that we need to pay more attention to the ways that working-class and middle-class culture work, mostly in opposition to each other, as foils and sites of moral identity-making. Class, in other words, has a "moral significance" (Sayer 2005). What is the "right" way to live, to act, to parent, to go to work? And how much is one's answer to those questions built up by disparaging the way others answer those questions?

With those questions in mind, it is a good time for scholars to begin to clarify what is meant by class cultures. I would argue that class cultures are more than "lifestyles," a word which to me seems too shallow and elective. I would agree with Jensen that they are least partially "the medium through which class inequality manifests itself" (Jensen 2012, p. 31). The "class" part here is at least as important as the "culture" part. In Bourdieusian terms, they are much more closely related to the notion of *habitus* than simply different sets of *cultural capital*. Habitus, as "a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a *matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions*" (Bourdieu 1977, pp. 82–83) captures the deeper sense of expectations, aspirations, and understandings that accrete from many years of experience.

Class cultures are not chosen, but they can alter as circumstances change. If class cultures are something that one can adopt as one likes, as Metzgar sometimes seems to suggest, then they are not very structurally anchored; and, if they are something that stays with us well beyond our childhood material circumstances and socialization, then some of the possibilities of meshing cultures or working together becomes a bit more problematic, especially as the circumstances of our childhoods diverge even more. This is why "Crossovers" or "Straddlers" (whether assimilated or not) make such good informants—their class-differentiated experiences generate different cultural responses, laying bare the opposed class cultures. Although our lives are heavily structured by the material and social worlds in which we are embedded, there is always an element of agency left to us, however small. A good Bourdieusian sociology allows us to access this element of agency, by showing us how our expectations, beliefs, and aspirations (our *habitus*, we could say) have been structured so we can consciously reject or retain what we will to the extent possible.

The shared prosperity of the postwar years meant that working-class and middle-class culture could co-exist and even sometimes mix. The sheer number of upwardly mobile people like Metzgar made sure of this mixing. Metzgar, as a straddler, was

then free to pull from two class cultures, to retain some of the power of "taking it" culture while still allowing himself to "achieve" and grow in a new direction, away from parochialism. To be the kind of person he wanted to be, in other words, rather than the person he was brought up to be.

In those years of relative class fluidity, the space for agency was greater than it is today. The straddlers we have now are more likely falling out of the middle class than moving into it. So, to my mind, the ongoing political question is how to get back to a more fluid mingling of the class cultures? I do not think it is enough, as suggested by Williams (2019) and others, that we just tell middle-class people to not be so class clueless and to recognize that their way is not the only way. I have spent years of my career foregrounding research and taking practical steps in my institution to open up more spaces for working-class people to enter, as have so very many of us who focus on access to higher education (e.g., Rondini et al. 2018; Stitch and Freie 2016). This hasn't seemed to stem the tide at all, although I know we will continue to work to diversify academia as much as we can. Should we perhaps be thankful so many young middle-class people are falling down the class ladder (Streib 2020), creating new opportunities for class mingling? If we had universal healthcare, a much higher minimum wage, and a shorter workweek, the distinction between working-class job and middle-class career might be lessened sufficiently that we could safely allow individuals to elect the type of work (and, hence, culture) they valued, as Metzgar did many years ago. If the pay wasn't so different, and the work so differentially valued, the world would be a much better place. But that, frankly, is a different economic system entirely. I admit this is a bit like the chicken and the egg—if middle-class people understood not everyone wanted a career maybe they'd help advance decent wages for working-class people instead of telling them to all go to college; but if there wasn't such a large gap in pay and life chances, would we need middle-class people to tell working-class people what they should do?

These are big questions for scholars of class cultures to grapple with in coming years. These five books give them a place to start, as all have documented various aspects and characteristics of working-class and middle-class culture. From Leondar-Wright (2014), we can distinguish a middle-class "culture of avoidance" from a working-class "culture of candor;" from Jensen (2012), we can distinguish working-class cultures of belonging and behaving from middle-class cultures of becoming and blooming; from Metzgar (2021) we learn about working-class realism and "taking it" culture, and how deference can be used strategically to gain control; from Silva (2021) we learn how working-class people draw dignity from hard work and how they admire people who can be counted on; and from Streib (2021) we learn how middle-class culture's aspirationalism is also tinged with a potentially delusive sense that "everything is going to be alright" because it always has been, placing those growing up in the culture at risk for failure.

What should be the future research agenda for class cultures? I see two immediate needs. First, although people of color are not missing from these accounts (see, in particular, Silva (2021) and Leondar-Wright (2014), it is true that most work on class cultures has foregrounded the experience of White people. It may have made sense, at first, to bracket out racial dynamics from explorations of class cultures,

given how easy it has been for readers to conflate and confuse race and class in the US, but this has become a potential weakness of the literature. If class cultures are the medium through which class inequality manifests itself, they are not bounded by the color line, nor should the research be. Given that most of the research in class cultures (all of it?) has been undertaken through qualitative research methods, the complexity of race and class (and gender and sexuality and other key dimensions imbricated in the class system) can be effectively handled, I would argue. This means more thoughtful and strategic research designs, like Silva (2021)'s comparison of male and female "oldtimers" (mostly White) and "newcomers" (mostly racial outsiders). How is "taking it" culture understood by working-class women? By working-class people of color? We don't yet know. Do Black and Brown youth born into middle-class families share the sense of entitlement White youth demonstrate in Streib (2021)? One would expect not, but we will have to wait for confirmation from future studies. Being much more explicit about the racialized practices and understandings of class, how racial identities are forged through and against class identities, and, most importantly, how greater attention to class cultures can improve antiracist practices and movements would all be very welcome avenues for exploration.

Secondly, I would like to see an engagement with class cultures beyond the dichotomy of working class and middle class (or PMC). I would argue that, historically speaking, the impetus for much class cultures work has come from trying to explain working-class people to highly-educated middle-class people who read journal articles and buy academic books. Certainly, the worlds of the working class and this middle class are moving even more apart today… and yet, our understanding of these cultures would benefit from adding the lens of the true "Globals," the increasingly populous "billionaire class" who may not at all share the anxious aspirationalism of the PMC, although they may have their own "anxieties of affluence" managing guilt and exceptionalism in a supposedly democratic society (Sherman 2017). They are certainly not in a defensive crouch. How do they position themselves vis-à-vis these other class cultures? What are the moral boundaries for the one percent? If we want to reduce the pain so well captured by Silva, we may well need to be able to answer these questions.

The emerging literature on class cultures is important for our understanding of so many aspects of life in late capitalism. There is a rich research agenda for anyone interested in grappling with the interface between structure and agency, how the worlds we inhabit inhabit us as well. How much understanding do we need to move forward? Both more than we have and enough already.

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Allison L. Hurst is an associate professor of sociology in the School of Public Policy at Oregon State University. Her publications include *The Burden of Academic Success: Loyalists, Renegades and Double Agents* (2010)*, College and the Working Class* (2012), *Amplified Advantage: Going to a "Good" School in an Era of Inequality* (2018), and the co-edited volume, *Working in Class: Recognizing How Social Class Shapes Our Academic Work* (2016). She is currently serving the last year of her three-year presidency of the Working-Class Studies Association, and proudly identifies herself as a working-class academic.