

## The New Populisms and the White Working Class: University of Michigan Press

Posted on February 10, 2019 by Carol Quirke

This volume seeks papers that take the concept of white working class seriously, as both category and thing-in-itself, while focusing a critical gaze on its deployment, use, and misuse.

While a majority of the United States working class did not support the Trump bid for the presidency, research indicates that in key states (Ohio, Michigan, Pennsylvania), white voters identified as working class formed a key part of the electoral victory for Trump. White working class voters who had voted for Obama in 2008 had, by 2016, crossed party lines in just enough numbers to affect the outcome. This has brought the use of the term white working class into the public eye, though in a blurred focus. This volume seeks to bring together scholars and activists from a wide variety of disciplines to examine and assess the terms used to describe the white working class, explore the contours of the new populism, and debate their relationship.

The concept of a white working class, as both an identifiable sub-class, and as an analytic concept, is, and should continue to be, troubling. For many scholars and researchers studying class formation, and questions of class and culture, there is an identifiable working class, understood by their position within the complex relationship of production, distribution, and consumption. Though the working class is bounded by and intertwined with race, ethnicity, and gender, class analysis in itself identifies a distinct group of people bearing similar relationships to capital. Yet the persistence of racism, inequalities of gender, sex, and race, and the magnification of xenophobia and ethnocentrism in public debate demand further reckoning with how class functions, how class identities are formed (or deformed,) and how class is represented.—

This volume seeks papers that take the concept of white working class seriously, as both category and thing-in-itself, while focusing a critical gaze on its deployment, use, and misuse. We want to take the term apart, unpack its implication, understand its history, and if we are bold and creative enough, perhaps even come to a different, altered conception of

this troubling and contentious phrase. The volume welcomes contributions from across the disciplines, and from a variety of ideological and analytic approaches. While the volume was inspired by events in the United States, we also welcome contributions from across the globe, particularly from non-majority white labor markets.

The questions we seek to address include:

- What are the implications of the phrase “white working class”? Does such a thing exist, or is there only a singular working class under the capitalist mode of production? If it exists, are there distinctive aspects of white working class life that can be delineated? What value is there in studying the white working class?
- How is the white working class represented, in media accounts, photography, mass culture including film and advertising, scholarship? How and where does the white working class represent itself, its needs, its political aspirations, its vision of the good life?
- Has whiteness studies complicated our view of white workers’ racism? Has it amplified our understanding of class relations, of populism? To what degree has the white working class been constituted by its insistence on difference from black and brown workers? On racism?
- Why is masculinity, and certain forms of labor “seen,” in public discussions of U.S. class relations?
- What is the appeal of the Trump brand of populism for white workers? How does this appeal cross regional and cultural lines?
- What is the new populism, and what is new about it?
- How have nationalism, violence, racism, colonialism, and masculinity become enmeshed in ideologies and political formations of populism.
- Is the new populism exemplified by the Trump presidency an isolated phenomenon? How is it connected (or not) to the rise of populist governments in Russia, Poland, Hungary, the Philippines and other countries?
- What are the connections between workers and unions, the alt-right, right-wing media, and the political parties? What roles do unions play in the New Populism? How do other forms of working-class organization relate to working-class discontent, to working-class political realignments?
- What organizations, projects, initiatives, counter-currents bring workers together across racial or ethnic lines that have successfully responded to a populism based in

racial identity?

- What is the relationship between the neoliberal economy of precarity and the rise of the new populism?

Please send abstracts of no more than 500 words to [jjvarga@indiana.edu](mailto:jjvarga@indiana.edu) by March 1, 2019.

Final essays of approximately 8,000 words will be due in September of 2019.

## Author



• [Carol Quirke](#)