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Cornel West (1953– ) was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma. It is said that the two important influences on West in his youth were the Baptist church and the Black Panthers. He studied at Harvard (where he earned magna cum laude honors), then at Princeton, where he encountered Richard Rorty during his doctoral studies. West taught at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, then at Yale. He now teaches at Princeton, where he continues to be a leader in making its African-American studies program one of the best in the country. West's books include *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (1982), *Prophetic Fragments* (1988), *The American Invasion of Philosophy* (1989), and *Race Matters* (1993). The selection is from his contribution to *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures* (1990), which he edited with Trinh T. Minh-ha and others.

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### *The New Cultural Politics of Difference*

Cornel West (1990)

In these last few years of the 20th century, there is emerging a significant shift in the sensibilities and outlooks of critics and artists. In fact, I would go so far as to claim that a new kind of cultural worker is in the making, associated with a new politics of difference. These new forms of intellectual consciousness advance reconceptions of the vocation of critic and artist, attempting to undermine the prevailing disciplinary divisions of labor in the academy, museum, mass media and gallery networks, while preserving modes of critique within the ubiquitous commodification of culture in the global village. Distinctive features of the new cultural politics of difference are to trash the monolithic and homogeneous in the name of diversity, multiplicity and heterogeneity; to reject the abstract, general and universal in light of the concrete, specific and particular; and to historicize, contextualize and pluralize by highlighting the contingent, provisional, variable, tentative, shifting and changing. Needless to say, these gestures are not new in the history of criticism or art, yet what makes them novel—along with the cultural politics they produce—is how and what constitutes difference, the weight and gravity it is given in representation and the way in which highlighting issues like exterminism, empire, class, race, gender, sexual orientation, age, nation, nature, and region at this historical moment acknowledges some discontinuity and disruption from previous forms of cultural critique. To put it

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Excerpt from Russell Ferguson, Martha Gever, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Cornel West, eds., *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), pp. 19–32.

bluntly, the new cultural politics of difference consists of creative responses to the precise circumstances of our present moment—especially those of marginalized First World agents who shun degraded self-representations, articulating instead their sense of the flow of history in light of the contemporary terrors, anxieties and fears of highly commercialized North Atlantic capitalist cultures (with their escalating xenophobias against people of color, Jews, women, gays, lesbians and the elderly). The thawing, yet still rigid, Second World ex-communist cultures (with increasing nationalist revolts against the legacy of hegemonic party henchmen), and the diverse cultures of the majority of inhabitants on the globe smothered by international communication cartels and repressive postcolonial elites (sometimes in the name of communism, as in Ethiopia) or starved by austere World Bank and IMF policies that subordinate them to the North (as in free-market capitalism in Chile) also locate vital areas of analysis in this new cultural terrain.

The new cultural politics of difference are neither simply oppositional in contesting the mainstream (or *malestream*) for inclusion, nor transgressive in the avant-gardist sense of shocking conventional bourgeois audiences. Rather, they are distinct articulations of talented (and usually privileged) contributors to culture who desire to align themselves with demoralized, demobilized, depoliticized and disorganized people in order to empower and enable social action and, if possible, to enlist collective insurgency for the expansion of freedom, democracy and individuality. This perspective impels these cultural critics and artists to reveal, as an integral component of their production, the very operations of power within their immediate work contexts (i.e., academy, museum, gallery, mass media). This strategy, however, also puts them in an inescapable double bind—while linking their activities to the fundamental, structural overhaul of these institutions, they often remain financially dependent on them (so much for “independent” creation). For these critics of culture, theirs is a gesture that is simultaneously progressive *and* co-opted. Yet without social movement or political pressure from outside these institutions (extra-parliamentary and extra-curricular actions like the social movements of the recent past), transformation degenerates into mere accommodation or sheer stagnation, and the role of the “co-opted progressive”—no matter how fervent one’s subversive rhetoric—is rendered more difficult. There can be no artistic breakthrough or social progress without some form of crisis in civilization—a crisis usually generated by organizations or collectivities that convince ordinary people to put their bodies and lives on the line. There is, of course, no guarantee that such pressure will yield the result one wants, but there is a guarantee that the status quo will remain or regress if no pressure is applied at all.

The new cultural politics of difference faces three basic challenges—intellectual, existential and political. The intellectual challenge—usually cast as methodological debate in these days in which academicist forms of expression have a monopoly on intellectual life—is how to think about representational practices in terms of history, culture and society. How does one understand, analyze and enact such practices today? An adequate answer to this question can be attempted only after one comes to terms with the insights and blindnesses of earlier attempts to grapple with the question in light of the evolving crisis in different histories, cultures and societies. I shall sketch a brief genealogy—a history that highlights the contingent origins and often ignoble outcomes—of exemplary critical responses to the question. This genealogy sets forth a historical framework that characterizes the rich yet deeply flawed Eurocentric traditions which the new cultural politics of difference build upon yet go beyond.

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An appropriate starting point is the ambiguous legacy of the Age of Europe. Between 1492 and 1945, European breakthroughs in oceanic transportation, agricultural production, state-consolidation, bureaucratization, industrialization, urbanization and imperial dominion shaped the makings of the modern world. Precious ideals like the dignity of persons (individuality) or the popular accountability of institutions (democracy) were unleashed around the world. Powerful critiques of illegitimate authorities—of the Protestant Reformation against the Roman Catholic Church, the Enlightenment against state churches, liberal movements against absolutist states and feudal guild constraints, workers against managerial subordination, people of color and Jews against white and gentile supremacist decrees, gays and lesbians against homophobic sanctions—were fanned and fuelled by these precious ideals refined within the crucible of the Age of Europe. Yet the discrepancy between sterling rhetoric and lived reality, glowing principles and actual practices loomed large.

By the last European century—the last epoch in which European domination of most of the globe was uncontested and unchallenged in a substantive way—a new world seemed to be stirring. At the height of England's reign as the major imperial European power, its exemplary cultural critic, Matthew Arnold, painfully observed in his "Stanzas From the Grand Chartreuse" that he felt some sense of "wandering between two worlds, one dead / the other powerless to be born." Following his Burkean sensibilities of cautious reform and fear of anarchy, Arnold acknowledged that the old glue—religion—that had tenuously and often unsuccessfully held together the ailing European regimes could not do so in the mid-19th century. Like Alexis de Tocqueville in France, Arnold saw that the democratic temper was the wave of the future. So he proposed a new conception of culture—a secular, humanistic one—that could play an integrative role in cementing and stabilizing an emerging bourgeois civil society and imperial state. His famous castigation of the immobilizing materialism of the declining aristocracy, the vulgar philistinism of the emerging middle classes and the latent explosiveness of the working-class majority was motivated by a desire to create new forms of cultural legitimacy, authority and order in a rapidly changing moment in 19th century Europe.

For Arnold, (in *Culture and Anarchy*, [1869]) this new conception of culture

... seeks to do away with classes; to make the best that has been thought and known in the world current everywhere; to make all men live in an atmosphere of sweetness and light. . . .

This is the *social idea* and the men of culture are the true apostles of equality. The great men of culture are those who have had a passion for diffusing, for making prevail, for carrying from one end of society to the other, the best knowledge, the best ideas of their time, who have laboured to divest knowledge of all that was harsh, uncouth, difficult, abstract, professional, exclusive; to humanize it, to make it efficient outside the clique of the cultivated and learned, yet still remaining the best knowledge and thought of the time, and a true source, therefore, of sweetness and light.

As an organic intellectual of an emergent middle class—as the inspector of schools in an expanding educational bureaucracy, Professor of Poetry at Oxford (the first non-cleric and the first to lecture in English rather than Latin) and an active participant in a thriving magazine network—Arnold defined and defended a new secular culture



of critical discourse. For him, this discursive strategy would be lodged in the educational and periodical apparatuses of modern societies as they contained and incorporated the frightening threats of an arrogant aristocracy and especially of an "anarchic" working-class majority. His ideals of disinterested, dispassionate and objective inquiry would regulate this new secular cultural production, and his justifications for the use of state power to quell any threats to the survival and security of this culture were widely accepted. He aptly noted, "Through culture seems to lie our way, not only to perfection, but even to safety."

This sentence is revealing in two ways. First, it refers to "our way" without explicitly acknowledging who constitutes the "we." This move is symptomatic among many bourgeois, male Eurocentric critics whose universalizing gestures exclude (by guarding a silence around) or explicitly degrade women and peoples of color. Second, the sentence links culture to safety—presumably the safety of the "we" against the barbaric threats of the "them," i.e., those viewed as different in some debased manner. Needless to say, Arnold's negative attitudes toward British working-class people, women and especially Indians and Jamaicans in the Empire clarify why he conceives of culture as, in part, a weapon for bourgeois male European "safety."

For Arnold the best of the Age of Europe—modeled on a mythological melange of Periclean Athens, late Republican/early Imperial Rome and Elizabethan England—could be promoted only if there was an interlocking affiliation among the emerging middle classes, a homogenizing of cultural discourse in the educational and university networks, and a state advanced enough in its policing techniques to safeguard it. The candidates for participation and legitimation in this grand endeavor of cultural renewal and revision would be detached intellectuals willing to shed their parochialism, provincialism and class-bound identities for Arnold's middle-class-skewed project: "... Aliens, if we may so call them—persons who are mainly led, not by their class spirit, but by a general *humane* spirit, by the love of human perfection." Needless to say, this Arnoldian perspective still informs much of the academic practices and secular cultural attitudes today—dominant views about the canon, admission procedures and collective self-definitions of intellectuals. Yet Arnold's project was disrupted by the collapse of 19th century Europe—World War I. This unprecedented war brought to the surface the crucial role and violent potential not of the masses Arnold feared but of the state he heralded. Upon the ashes of this wasteland of human carnage—some of it the civilian European population—T.S. Eliot emerged as the grand cultural spokesman. . . .

Eliot's image of Europe as a wasteland, a culture of fragments with no cementing center, predominated in postwar Europe. And though his early poetic practices were more radical, open and international than his Eurocentric criticism, Eliot posed a return to and revision of tradition as the only way of regaining European cultural order and political stability. . . .

Eliot found this tradition in the Church of England, to which he converted in 1927. Here was a tradition that left room for his Catholic cast of mind, Calvinistic heritage, puritanical temperament and ebullient patriotism for the old American South (the place of his upbringing). Like Arnold, Eliot was obsessed with the idea of civilization and the horror of barbarism (echoes of Joseph Conrad's Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*) or more pointedly, the notion of the decline and decay of European civilization. With the advent of World War II, Eliot's obsession became a reality. Again unprecedented human carnage (50 million dead)—including an indescribable genocidal attack on Jewish people—throughout Europe as well as around the globe, put the last nail in the coffin of the Age of Europe. After 1945, Europe consisted of a



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devastated and divided continent, crippled by a humiliating dependency on and def-  
erence to the USA and USSR.

The second historical coordinate of my genealogy is the emergence of the USA as  
the world power. The USA was unprepared for world power status. However, with the  
recovery of Stalin's Russia (after losing 20 million dead), the USA felt compelled to  
make its presence felt around the globe. Then with the Marshall plan to strengthen Eu-  
rope against Russian influence (and provide new markets for U.S. products), the 1948  
Russian takeover of Czechoslovakia, the 1948 Berlin blockade, the 1950 beginning of  
the Korean War and the 1952 establishment of NATO forces in Europe, it seemed clear  
that there was no escape from world power obligations.

The post-World War II era in the USA, or the first decades of what Henry Luce en-  
visioned as "The American Century," was not only a period of incredible economic ex-  
pansion but of active cultural ferment. In the classical Fordist formula, mass produc-  
tion required mass consumption. With unchallenged hegemony in the capitalist  
world, the USA took economic growth for granted. Next to exercising its crude, anti-  
communist, McCarthyist obsessions, buying commodities became the primary act of  
civic virtue for many American citizens at this time. The creation of a mass middle  
class—a prosperous working class with a bourgeois identity—was countered by the  
first major emergence of subcultures of American non-WASP intellectuals: the so-  
called New York intellectuals in criticism, the Abstract Expressionists in painting and  
the BeBop artists in jazz music. This emergence signaled a vital challenge to an Ameri-  
can male WASP elite loyal to an older and eroding European culture.

The first significant blow was dealt when assimilated Jewish Americans entered  
the higher echelons of the cultural apparatuses (academy, museums, galleries, mass  
media). Lionel Trilling is an emblematic figure. This Jewish entree into the anti-  
Semitic and patriarchal critical discourse of the exclusivistic institutions of Ameri-  
can culture initiated the slow but sure undoing of the male WASP cultural hegem-  
ony and homogeneity. Lionel Trilling's project was to appropriate Matthew Arnold  
for his own political and cultural purposes—thereby unraveling the old male WASP  
consensus, while erecting a new post-World War II liberal academic consensus  
around cold war, anti-communist renditions of the values of complexity, difficulty,  
variousness and modulation. In addition, the post-war boom laid the basis for in-  
tense professionalization and specialization in expanding institutions of higher edu-  
cation—especially in the natural sciences that were compelled to somehow respond  
to Russia's successful ventures in space. Humanistic scholars found themselves  
searching for new methodologies that could buttress self-images of rigor and scien-  
tific seriousness. For example, the close reading techniques of New Criticism (sev-  
ered from their conservative, organicist, anti-industrialist ideological roots), the log-  
ical precision of reasoning in analytic philosophy and the jargon of Parsonian  
structural-functionalism in sociology helped create such self-images. Yet towering  
cultural critics like C. Wright Mills, W.E.B. Du Bois, Richard Hofstadter, Margaret  
Mead and Dwight MacDonal bucked the tide. . . .

This threat is partly associated with the third historical coordinate of my geneal-  
ogy—the decolonization of the Third World. It is crucial to recognize the impor-  
tance of this world-historical process if one wants to grasp the significance of the  
end of the Age of Europe and the emergence of the USA as a world power. With the  
first defeat of a western nation by a non-western nation—in Japan's victory over  
Russia (1905), revolutions in Persia (1905), Turkey (1908), China (1912), Mexico

(1911–12) and much later the independence of India (1947) and China (1948) and the triumph of Ghana (1957)—the actuality of a decolonized globe loomed large. Born of violent struggle, consciousness-raising and the reconstruction of identities, decolonization simultaneously brings with it new perspectives on that long festering underside of the Age of Europe (of which colonial domination represents the *costs* of “progress,” “order” and “culture”), as well as requiring new readings of the economic boom in the USA (wherein the Black, Brown, Yellow, Red, female, elderly, gay, lesbian and White working class live the same *costs* as cheap labor at home as well as in US-dominated Latin American and Pacific rim markets).

The impetuous ferocity and moral outrage that motors the decolonization process is best captured by Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961).

Decolonization, which sets out to change the order of the world, is obviously, a program of complete disorder . . . Decolonization is the meeting of two forces, opposed to each other by their very nature, which in fact owe their originality to that sort of substantification which results from and is nourished by the situation in the colonies. Their first encounter was marked by violence and their existence together—that is to say the exploitation of the native by the settler—was carried on by dint of a great array of bayonets and cannons . . .

In decolonization, there is therefore the need of a complete calling in question of the colonial situation. If we wish to describe it precisely, we might find it in the well-known words: “The last shall be first and the first last.” Decolonization is the putting into practice of this sentence.

The naked truth of decolonization evokes for us the searing bullets and bloodstained knives which emanate from it. For if the last shall be first, this will only come to pass after a murderous and decisive struggle between the two protagonists.

Fanon’s strong words, though excessively Manichean, still describe the feelings and thoughts between the occupying British Army and colonized Irish in Northern Ireland, the occupying Israeli Army and subjugated Palestinians on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the South African Army and oppressed Black South Africans in the townships, the Japanese Police and Koreans living in Japan, the Russian Army and subordinated Armenians and others in the Southern and Eastern USSR. His words also partly invoke the sense many Black Americans have toward police departments in urban centers. In other words, Fanon is articulating century-long heartfelt human responses to being degraded and despised, hated and hunted, oppressed and exploited, marginalized and dehumanized at the hands of powerful xenophobic European, American, Russian and Japanese imperial countries.

During the late ‘50s, ‘60s and early ‘70s in the USA, these decolonized sensibilities fanned and fueled the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, as well as the student anti-war, feminist, gay, brown, gay, and lesbian movements. In this period we witnessed the shattering of male WASP cultural homogeneity and the collapse of the short-lived liberal consensus. The inclusion of African Americans, Latino/a Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans and American women into the culture of critical discourse yielded intense intellectual polemics and inescapable ideological polarization that focused principally on the exclusions, silences and blindnesses of male WASP cultural homogeneity and its concomitant Arnoldian notions of the canon.

In addition, these critiques promoted three crucial processes that affected intellectual life in the country. First is the appropriation of the theories of post-war Eu-



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rope—especially the work of the Frankfurt school (Marcuse, Adorno, Horkheimer), French/Italian Marxisms (Sartre, Althusser, Lefebvre, Gramsci), structuralisms (Lévi-Strauss, Todorov) and post-structuralisms (Deleuze, Derrida, Foucault). These diverse and disparate theories—all preoccupied with keeping alive radical projects after the end of the Age of Europe—tend to fuse versions of transgressive European modernisms with Marxist or post-Marxist left politics and unanimously shun the term “post-modernism.” Second, there is the recovery and revisioning of American history in light of the struggles of white male workers, women, African Americans, Native Americans, Latino/a Americans, gays and lesbians. Third is the impact of forms of popular culture such as television, film, music videos and even sports, on highbrow literate culture. The Black-based hip-hop culture of youth around the world is one grand example.

After 1973, with the crisis in the international world economy, America’s slump in productivity, the challenge of OPEC nations to the North Atlantic monopoly of oil production, the increasing competition in hi-tech sectors of the economy from Japan and West Germany and the growing fragility of the international debt structure, the USA entered a period of waning self-confidence (compounded by Watergate) and a nearly contracting economy. As the standards of living for the middle classes declined, owing to runaway inflation, and the quality of living fell for most, due to escalating unemployment, underemployment and crime, religious and secular neo-conservatism emerged with power and potency. This fusion of fervent neo-nationalism, traditional cultural values and “free market” policies served as the ground work for the Reagan-Bush era.

The ambiguous legacies of the European Age, American preeminence and decolonization continue to haunt our postmodern movement as we come to terms with both the European, American, Japanese, Soviet, and Third World *crimes against* and *contributions to* humanity. The plight of Africans in the New World can be instructive in this regard.

By 1914 European maritime empires had dominion over more than half of the land and a third of the peoples in the world—almost 72 million square kilometers of territory and more than 560 million people under colonial rule. Needless to say, this European control included brutal enslavement, institutional terrorism and cultural degradation of Black diaspora people. The death of roughly seventy-five million Africans during the centuries-long transatlantic slave trade is but one reminder, among others, of the assault on Black humanity. The Black diaspora condition of New World servitude—in which they were viewed as mere commodities with production value, who had no proper legal status, social standing or public worth—can be characterized as, following Orlando Patterson, natal alienation. This state of perpetual and inheritable domination that diaspora Africans had at birth produced the *modern Black diaspora problematic of invisibility and namelessness*. White supremacist practices—enacted under the auspices of the prestigious cultural authorities of the churches, printed media and scientific academics—promoted Black inferiority and constituted the European background against which Black diaspora struggles for identity, dignity (self-confidence, self-respect, self-esteem) and material resources took place.

An inescapable aspect of this struggle was that the Black diaspora peoples’ quest for validation and recognition occurred on the ideological, social and cultural terrains of other non-Black peoples. White supremacist assaults on Black intelligence, ability, beauty and character required persistent Black efforts to hold self-doubt, self-



contempt and even self-hatred at bay. Selective appropriation, incorporation and re-articulation of European ideologies, cultures and institutions alongside an African heritage—a heritage more or less confined to linguistic innovation in rhetorical practices, stylizations of the body in forms of occupying an alien social space (hair styles, ways of walking, standing, hand expressions, talking) and means of constituting and sustaining comradeship and community (e.g. antiphonal, call-and-response styles, rhythmic repetition, risk-ridden syncopation in spectacular modes in musical and rhetorical expressions)—were some of the strategies employed.

The modern Black diaspora problematic of invisibility and namelessness can be understood as the condition of *relative lack of Black power to represent themselves to themselves and others as complex human beings, and thereby to contest the bombardment of negative, degrading stereotypes put forward by White supremacist ideologies*. The initial Black response to being caught in this whirlwind of Europeanization was to resist the misrepresentation and caricature of the terms set by uncontested non-Black norms and models and fight for self-representation and recognition. Every modern Black person, especially cultural disseminators, encounters this problematic of invisibility and namelessness. The initial Black diaspora response was a mode of resistance that was *moralistic in content and communal in character*. That is, the fight for representation and recognition highlighted moral judgments regarding Black “positive” images over and against White supremacist stereotypes. These images “represented” monolithic and homogeneous Black communities, in a way that could displace past misrepresentations of these communities. Stuart Hall has talked about these responses as attempts to change “the relations of representation.”

These courageous yet limited Black efforts to combat racist cultural practices uncritically accepted non-Black conventions and standards in two ways. First, they proceeded in an *assimilationist manner* that set out to show that Black people were really like White people—thereby eliding differences (in history, culture) between Whites and Blacks. Black specificity and particularity was thus banished in order to gain White acceptance and approval. Second, these Black responses rested upon a *homogenizing impulse* that assumed that all Black people were really alike—hence obliterating differences (class, gender, region, sexual orientation) between Black peoples. I submit that there are elements of truth in both claims, yet the conclusions are unwarranted owing to the basic fact that non-Black paradigms set the terms of the replies.

The insight in the first claim is that Blacks and Whites are in some important sense alike—i.e., in their positive capacities for human sympathy, moral sacrifice, service to others, intelligence and beauty, or negatively, in their capacity for cruelty. Yet the common humanity they share is jettisoned when the claim is cast in an assimilationist manner that subordinates Black particularity to a false universalism, i.e., non-Black rubrics or prototypes. Similarly, the insight in the second claim is that all Blacks are in some significant sense “in the same boat”—that is, subject to White supremacist abuse. Yet this common condition is stretched too far when viewed in a *homogenizing* way that overlooks how racist treatment vastly differs owing to class, gender, sexual orientation, nation, region, hue and age.

The moralistic and communal aspects of the initial Black diaspora responses to social and psychic erasure were not simply cast into simplistic binary oppositions of positive/negative, good/bad images that privileged the first term in light of a White norm so that Black efforts remained inscribed within the very logic that dehumanized them. They were further complicated by the fact that these responses were also

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advanced principally by anxiety-ridden, middle-class Black intellectuals, (predominantly male and heterosexual) grappling with their sense of double-consciousness—namely their own crisis of identity, agency and audience—caught between a quest for White approval and acceptance and an endeavor to overcome the internalized association of Blackness with inferiority. . . .

One crucial lesson of this decolonization process remains the manner in which most Third World authoritarian bureaucratic elites deploy essentialist rhetorics about "homogeneous national communities" and "positive images" in order to repress and regiment their diverse and heterogeneous populations. Yet in the diaspora, especially among First World countries, this critique has emerged not so much from the Black male component of the left but rather from the Black women's movement. The decisive push of postmodern Black intellectuals toward a new cultural politics of difference has been made by the powerful critiques and constructive explorations of Black diaspora women (e.g. Toni Morrison). The coffin used to bury the innocent notion of the essential Black subject was nailed shut with the termination of the Black male monopoly on the construction of the Black subject. In this regard, the Black diaspora womanist critique has had a greater impact than the critiques that highlight exclusively class, empire, age, sexual orientation or nature.

This decisive push toward the end of Black innocence—though prefigured in various degrees in the best moments of W.E.B. DuBois, Anna Cooper, C.L.R. James, James Baldwin, Claudia Jones, the later Malcolm X, Frantz Fanon, Amiri Baraka and others—forces Black diaspora cultural workers to encounter what Hall has called the "politics of representation." The main aim now is not simply access to representation in order to produce positive images of homogeneous communities—though broader access remains a practical and political problem. Nor is the primary goal here that of contesting stereotypes—though contestation remains a significant though limited venture. Following the model of the Black diaspora traditions of music, athletics and rhetoric, Black cultural workers must constitute and sustain discursive and institutional networks that deconstruct earlier modern Black strategies for identity-formation, demystify power relations that incorporate class, patriarchal and homophobic biases, and construct more multi-valent and multi-dimensional responses that articulate the complexity and diversity of Black practices in the modern and postmodern world.

Furthermore, Black cultural workers must investigate and interrogate the other of Blackness-Whiteness. One cannot deconstruct the binary oppositional logic of images of Blackness without extending it to the contrary condition of Blackness/Whiteness itself. However, a mere dismantling will not do—for the very notion of a deconstructive social theory is oxymoronic. Yet social theory is what is needed to examine and *explain* the historically specific ways in which "Whiteness" is a politically constructed category parasitic on "Blackness," and thereby to conceive of the profoundly hybrid character of what we mean by "race," "ethnicity," and "nationality." For instance, European immigrants arrived on American shores perceiving themselves as "Irish," "Sicilian," "Lithuanian," etc. They had to learn that they were "White" principally by adopting an American discourse of positively-valued Whiteness and negatively-charged Blackness. This process by which people define themselves physically, socially, sexually and even politically in terms of Whiteness or Blackness has much bearing not only on constructed notions of race and ethnicity but also on how we understand the changing character of U.S. nationalities. And given the Americanization of the world, especially in the sphere of mass culture,



such inquiries—encouraged by the new cultural politics of difference—raise critical issues of “hybridity,” “exilic status” and “identity” on an international scale. Needless to say, these inquiries must traverse those of “male/female,” “colonizer/colonized,” “heterosexual/homosexual,” et al., as well.

In light of this brief sketch of the emergence of our present crisis—and the turn toward history and difference in cultural work—four major historicist forms of theoretical activity provide resources for how we understand, analyze and enact our representational practices: Heideggerian *destruction* of the western metaphysical tradition, Derridean *deconstruction* of the western philosophical tradition, Rortian *demythologization* of the western intellectual tradition and Marxist, Foucaultian, feminist, anti-racist or anti-homophobic *demythification* of western cultural and artistic conventions.

Despite his abominable association with the Nazis, Martin Heidegger’s project is useful in that it discloses the suppression of temporality and historicity in the dominant metaphysical systems of the West from Plato to Rudolph Carnap. This is noteworthy in that it forces one to understand philosophy’s representational discourses as thoroughly historical phenomena. Hence, they should be viewed with skepticism as they are often flights from the specific, concrete, practical and particular. The major problem with Heidegger’s project—as noted by his neo-Marxist student, Herbert Marcuse—is that he views history in terms of fate, heritage and destiny. He dramatizes the past and present as if it were a Greek tragedy with no tools of social analyses to relate cultural work to institutions and structures or antecedent forms and styles.

Jacques Derrida’s version of deconstruction is one of the most influential schools of thought among young academic critics. It is salutary in that it focuses on the political power of rhetorical operations—of tropes and metaphors in binary oppositions like white/black, good/bad, male/female, machine/nature, ruler/ruled, reality/appearance—showing how these operations sustain hierarchal world views by devaluing the second terms as something subsumed under the first. Most of the controversy about Derrida’s project revolves around this austere epistemic doubt that unsettles binary oppositions while undermining any determinate meaning of a text, i.e., book, art-object, performance, building. Yet, his views about skepticism are no more alarming than those of David Hume, Ludwig Wittgenstein or Stanley Cavell. He simply revels in it for transgressive purposes, whereas others provide us with ways to dissolve, sidestep or cope with skepticism. None, however, slide down the slippery, crypto-Nietzschean slope of sophomoric relativism as alleged by old-style humanists, be they Platonists, Kantians or Arnoldians.

The major shortcoming of Derrida’s deconstructive project is that it puts a premium on a sophisticated ironic consciousness that tends to preclude and foreclose analyses that guide action with purpose. And given Derrida’s own status as an Algerian-born, Jewish leftist marginalized by a hostile French academic establishment (quite different from his reception by the youth in the American academic establishment), the sense of political impotence and hesitation regarding the efficacy of moral action is understandable—but not justifiable. His works and those of his followers too often become rather monotonous, Johnny-one-note rhetorical readings that disassemble texts with little attention to the effects and consequences these dismantlings have in relation to the operations of military, economic and social powers.

Richard Rorty’s neo-pragmatic project of demythologization is insightful in that it provides descriptive mappings of the transient metaphors—especially the ocular and specular ones—that regulate some of the fundamental dynamics in the con-

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struction of self-descriptions dominant in highbrow European and American philosophy. His perspective is instructive because it discloses the crucial role of narrative as the background for rational exchange and critical conversation. To put it crudely, Rorty shows why we should speak not of History, but histories, not of Reason, but historically constituted forms of rationality, not of Criticism or Art, but of socially constructed notions of criticism and art—all linked but not reducible to political purposes, material interests and cultural prejudices.

Rorty's project nonetheless leaves one wanting owing to its distrust of social analytical explanation. Similar to the dazzling new historicism of Stephen Greenblatt, Louis Montrose and Catherine Gallagher—inspired by the subtle symbolic-cum-textual anthropology of Clifford Geertz and the powerful discursive materialism of Michel Foucault—Rorty gives us mappings and descriptions with no explanatory accounts for change and conflict. In this way, it gives us an aestheticized version of historicism in which the provisional and variable are celebrated at the expense of highlighting who gains, loses or bears what costs.

Demystification is the most illuminating mode of theoretical inquiry for those who promote the new cultural politics of difference. Social structural analyses of empire, exterminism, class, race, gender, nature, age, sexual orientation, nation and region are the springboards—though not landing grounds—for the most desirable forms of critical practice that take history (and herstory) seriously. Demystification tries to keep track of the complex dynamics of institutional and other related power structures in order to disclose options and alternatives for transformative praxis; it also attempts to grasp the way in which representational strategies are creative responses to novel circumstances and conditions. In this way, the central role of human agency (always enacted under circumstances not of one's choosing)—be it in the critic, artist or constituency and audience—is accented.

I call demystificatory criticism "prophetic criticism"—the approach appropriate for the new cultural politics of difference—because while it begins with social structural analyses it also makes explicit its moral and political aims. It is partisan, partial, engaged and crisis-centered, yet always keeps open a skeptical eye to avoid dogmatic traps, premature closures, formulaic formulations or rigid conclusions. In addition to social structural analyses, moral and political judgments, and sheer critical consciousness, there indeed is evaluation. Yet the aim of this evaluation is neither to pit art-objects against one another like racehorses nor to create eternal canons that dull, discourage or even dwarf contemporary achievements. We listen to Ludwig Beethoven, Charlie Parker, Luciano Pavarotti, Laurie Anderson, Sarah Vaughan, Stevie Wonder or Kathleen Battle, read William Shakespeare, Anton Chekhov, Ralph Ellison, Doris Lessing, Thomas Pynchon, Toni Morrison or Gabriel García Márquez, see works of Pablo Picasso, Ingmar Bergman, Le Corbusier, Martin Puryear, Barbara Kruger, Spike Lee, Frank Gehry or Howardena Pindell—not in order to undergird bureaucratic assents or enliven cocktail party conversations, but rather to be summoned by the styles they deploy for their profound insight, pleasures and challenges. Yet all evaluation—including a delight in Eliot's poetry despite his reactionary politics, or a love of Zora Neale Hurston's novels despite her Republican party affiliations—is inseparable from, though not identical or reducible to, social structural analyses, moral and political judgments and the workings of a curious critical consciousness.

The deadly traps of demystification—and any form of prophetic criticism—are those of reductionism, be it of the sociological, psychological, or historical sort. By reductionism I mean either one factor analyses (i.e., crude Marxisms, feminisms,

racialisms, etc.) that yield a one-dimensional functionalism, or a hyper-subtle analytical perspective that loses touch with the specificity of an art work's form and the context of its reception. Few cultural workers of whatever stripe can walk the tightrope between the Scylla of reductionism and the Charybdis of aestheticism—yet demystificatory (or prophetic) critics must. ♦

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**Henry Louis Gates, Jr.** (1950– ) was born in Keyser, West Virginia. After completing undergraduate studies at Yale in 1973, Gates studied at Cambridge University, where he received his Ph.D. in 1979. He has taught at Cornell (1985–1990), Duke (1990–1991), and Harvard, where he is director of the W.E.B. Du Bois Institute and professor of humanities. Gates moved to Harvard with the clear intent that he would revive its African-American studies program. He is the author and editor of numerous books, series, and collections, including *Our Nig: Sketches in the Life of a Free Black* (1983), *Signifying Monkey* (1988), *Loose Canons* (1991), *Colored People* (1994), and the multivolume *Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers*.

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### *"Race" as the Trope of the World*

Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (1986)

Race, as a meaningful criterion within the biological sciences, has long been recognized to be a fiction. When we speak of "the white race" or "the black race," "the Jewish race" or "the Aryan race," we speak in biological misnomers and, more generally, in metaphors. Nevertheless, our conversations are replete with usages of race which have their sources in the dubious pseudoscience of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. One need only flip through the pages of the *New York Times* to find headlines such as "Brown University President Sees School Racial Problems" or "Sensing Racism, Thousands March in Paris." In "The Lost White Tribe," a lead editorial in the 29 March 1985 issue, the *New York Times* notes that while "racism is not unique to South Africa," we must condemn that society because in "betraying the religious tenets underlying Western culture, it has made race the touchstone of political rights." The *Times* editorial echoes Eliot's "dissociation of sensibility," which he felt had been caused in large part by the fraternal atrocities of the First World War. (For many people with non-European origins, however, dissociation of sensibility resulted from colonialism and human slavery.) Race, in these usages, pretends to be an objective term of classification, when in fact it is a dangerous trope.

The sense of difference defined in popular usages of the term "race" has both described and *inscribed* differences of language, belief system, artistic tradition, and gene pool, as well as all sorts of supposedly natural attributes such as rhythm, athletic ability, cerebration, usury, fidelity, and so forth. The relation between "racial character" and these sorts of characteristics has been inscribed through tropes of race, lending the sanction of God, biology, or the natural order to even presumably unbiased descriptions of cultural tendencies and differences. "Race consciousness," Zora Neale Hurston wrote, "is a deadly explosive on the tongues of men." In 1973 I

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Excerpt from Henry Louis Gates, Jr., ed., *"Race," Writing, and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 4–13. Copyright 1985, 1986 by The University of Chicago. Reprinted by permission.

## ❖ The New Social Formations ❖

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**Stanley Aronowitz** (1933– ) is professor of sociology at the Graduate Center, City University of New York. His many books include *False Promises: The Shaping of American Working-Class Consciousness* (1974), *Historical Materialism* (1981), *Roll Over Beethoven* (1993), *Post-Work* (1998, with Jonathan Cutler), and *From the Ashes of the Old: American Labor and America's Future* (1998). **Dawn Esposito** (1949– ) teaches sociology at St. John's University in New York. She works in feminist and film studies. **William DiFazio** (1947– ) is professor of sociology at St. John's University. His books include *The Jobless Future: Sci-Tech and the Dogma of Work* (1995, with Stanley Aronowitz). **Margaret Yard** (1943– ) has taught sociology and nursing at several medical centers in New York City, in addition to having served as associate director of the Center for Cultural Studies at the CUNY Graduate Center.

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### *The Post-Work Manifesto*

Stanley Aronowitz, Dawn Esposito,  
William DiFazio, Margaret Yard (1998)

The bottom is falling out and with it our sense of well-being. For two centuries, despite depressions and wars, America was the "golden door" behind which beckoned the call of the Good Life. Yet, as the twenty-first century approaches, the United States is more accurately characterized as the home of downsizing jobs and lost security, of disappointed hopes and expectations. For many, recent economic and political developments point to the withering away of comfortable full-time jobs "with a future." With jobless futures have also come deteriorating and lost benefits, from quality health care to assurances like social security that were once guaranteed—if only minimally in the United States—by the employment contract.

If the current situation is allowed to continue on its present course, only the few will be able to enjoy life without the constant stress of economic worries. The rest of us will be so buried in work without end, anxious about procuring or simply sustaining our livelihoods, that even the freedom to imagine a different kind of life will seem more and more like a luxury. It has become increasingly difficult to find the time just to reflect, to write, to feel—to change. Ours is a moment when private and public employers regularly demand "give-backs," from health benefits to pensions

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Excerpt from Stanley Aronowitz and Jonathan Cutler, eds., *Post-Work: The Wages of Cybernation* (New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 31-34, 69-71, 75-79. Copyright © 1998. Reprinted by permission of Stanley Aronowitz.



and holidays. It is anxiety—certainly not the economy—which becomes democratized as the quest for secure paid labor consumes more and more of our time, uniting people in divergent job and class strata from blue-collar to middle and upper managements as perhaps not for centuries before. For no one is immune as these distinctions themselves commence to collapse, and are rendered increasingly meaningless by the immensity of socioeconomic transformations emblematic of our age.

Most people are likely to understand that industrial workers suffer an ever-present threat of runaway shops and technological change. Thirty years ago many working people fought against employers' efforts to get more work out of them for the same or less money and less free time. But at the end of the twentieth century, fearful of losing jobs, this group of working people now silently suffers more speedup, compulsory overtime and work accidents (lest the boss pull up stakes and leave). Even as statistics show economic growth, legal factory jobs continue to shrink while illegal factory labor has grown. Moreover, in the past decade, we have seen the return of what we thought had been banished forever: the sweatshop. Many people are working "off the books" in the underground economy, translating into ten- and twelve-hour days at wages below legal minimums. In these sweatshops, which make more of our clothing and toys than ever, child labor has reappeared. Children work next to their parents or alone and are often beaten by the bosses, chained to machines and locked in poorly ventilated rooms.

It is not just industrial or blue-collar workers who have been profoundly affected. Doctors are working for salaries in health maintenance organizations (HMOs) and in the relentless drive for cost-cutting are losing control over their own work. In the new world of the HMOs the manager, not the doctor, decides who is sick and who is not, who deserves treatment and who doesn't. And many other professionals are being subordinated to the steady drumbeat of downsizing. For example, as a group, academics are freer than most people in the sense of having time to do one's own work and to speak one's mind in a classroom. Yet tenure itself is no longer secure: as a form of guaranteed income, a kind of entitlement, it is not surprising to find this—like any little security offered most of us is—beginning to be threatened. And just at the moment when a college education seems to be a ticket to a better chance for steady work, tuition at public and private colleges has skyrocketed. Many students can no longer afford to go to school, for pleasure or to pursue careers more instrumentally oriented, because student aid is also rapidly disappearing. Tuition costs in public institutions have increased so rapidly that working-class students, many of whom are minorities, need to work at one or more part-time or full-time jobs while having little time to study. Colleges are once more becoming the province of the privileged.

But an alternative direction to the one in which we are now headed is also possible. This other road would lead to shorter working hours, higher wages, and best of all, our ability to control much more of our own time. In such a different and improved world, we would still produce the goods and services that society needs but we would spend less time doing it. There's plenty to produce: we need millions of homes at rents people can afford. Our environment needs to be cleaned, improved and maintained; depleted drinking water supplies need to be restored and pollution levels reduced. There's also plenty to do: kids need child-care and recreation activities. Ordinary people might run television channels and, together with independent film and video makers, become more genuinely involved with contemporary media. Neighborhoods would have their theaters, concert halls, sports facilities, and collective meeting spaces. Libraries would become full-time again. And people would have

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time to use them. And, as in much of Europe, many of these services would be free or offered at small prices. The seemingly impossible dream of shorter hours may lead to a life where we are relatively freed from the oppressiveness of time as we now commonly experience it.

Are we headed for freedom or hell? Are current trends towards corporate, government and educational "downsizing" a natural event or are they produced by real people for specific purposes? Can we afford the "free" market which puts two million people on the street without shelter, produces poverty for more than a quarter of Americans, and puts a million more children under the poverty line each year? Do we want an economy which depresses wages for about 80 percent of the working population and continues to ship jobs to low-wage countries? Whose market is it anyway? The middle class does not really benefit when the poor lose with the ending of "welfare as we know it" and the looming privatization of Medicare and Social Security. Those employees shed by the welfare state simply flood the labor market, undermining the bargaining leverage of middle-class workers in the private sector. Only the multimillion dollar salaries and stock options of corporate executives remain in place—and then, not even for these men all that securely—as the rest of our jobs are cut or cut back. . . .

The new world of post-work is a rupture with both the economic and cultural assumptions of work without end. What has been called utopian in the past is now a practical necessity. The world of post-work doesn't have to mean a world of massive poverty, drudgery and want but it can be a world of limitless individual and social potential where everyone is guaranteed "the good life." Work that is personally absorbing and satisfying and expressing creativity and freedom is now possible if a movement is formed and a struggle conducted.

We argue here that the moment of post-work is entirely justified. It is time for a movement that struggles for increased wages with less work. We argue here that everyone must be guaranteed a decent standard of living as a minimum. Our proposals assume the goal of assuring the possibility of the full development of individual and social capacities.

We dare to imagine a world beyond scarcity and thus a world where the jobless future is not about misery and desperation but a future in which time would be liberated and freedom made possible. To imagine is to entertain not only the possibility of a future, but to acknowledge that indeed the present has the potential to be shaped as we dream. To imagine means to dream, to move beyond the boundaries of what is routine and practical. Imagination is lodged not only in the individual creative dream, but in cultural movements that create new ways, new dreams enacted in social solidarity, hope and trust.

Too often this benign act of reflection, this spark of daring imagination, floods an individual with tension ranging from vague uneasiness to high anxiety. To imagine a different way is always a risk. But in the world where work is destroyed by global capital and computer-aided technologies, *not* to imagine an alternative is to take the greater risk. Not to imagine alternatives makes individuals and collectivities dependent on those in power without any possibility of escape. In this situation the Right endorses capital's hegemony while the Left only wants room to maneuver, to make little changes to maintain some social justice and a semblance of equality.

We disagree with both sides and propose a world where work is not without end. We propose a world of self-managed time where radical participatory democracy is



possible. Our new technologies managed differently can lead not to more surveillance and less freedom but to a world of less required labor. Under these conditions we now have the time to shape our own lives: family, community and polity. For this to be achieved a different control system is needed for both production and distribution. The basic necessities of life would be determined by participatory democratic means, for we can no longer have individual and social requirements decided by corporate interests and the profit motive. Not just profitable housing but good housing for all. We would emphasize environmental considerations like clean air and water before the profit considerations of the marketplace. Education must be made available for all, not just for those who can afford to pay for it. In this newly imagined world we consider these as human rights. Rights are not the end of a struggle but the beginning demands, as the very minimum. Ruptures created by the new technologies and global capitalism's hegemony demand that we imagine a world where what was once utopian is now practical. Our very survival requires that our demands are more than the reforms of the system. We demand a world where ordinary people are at the very center. We demand a world where radical, participatory democracy and thus universal freedom is at the heart of any new social movement. . . .

For a world beyond compulsory labor and where human freedom is the measure of social life we propose the following program:

1. **Guaranteed Income:** Everyone would be guaranteed a minimum annual income sufficient for a decent standard of living. This would include nutrition, housing, clothing, transportation and recreational requirements. Everyone would assume the responsibilities of producing and maintaining the community. Able-bodied women and men would share the tasks associated with a clean and healthy environment and one that affords its members amenities such as education, recreation and cultural development. If adequate income were guaranteed for all, the private sector would have to pay wages above the income guarantee to motivate workers in this sector. (After all, this was the original idea of minimum wage legislation: to raise the general living standard by raising the bottom. Even if most people earned more, the floor on the incomes was measured by a basic, adequate income level.) In order to reduce their costs corporations would be induced to further develop labor-saving technologies. Savings would be shared in the form of more public services and shorter hours.

There would be no welfare sector—with its cycle of dependency and degradation—because of the income guarantee. Services such as health care, education and social work would expand and be paid for through the progressive income tax. As a result there would be a new perspective on jobs and the emphasis would shift from work done for the purchase of consumer goods to work done for problem solving, exploring possibilities and for finding new ethical, social and individual ways of life.

2. **Radical Participatory Democracy:** With the end of endless work, which binds our time to the demands of profit, we will finally have time to truly participate in the governance of our social world. We will finally have the time to imagine alternatives to the present and the possibility of a better future. With the progressive reduction of work time will come the possibility of all of the people to participate in democratic decision-making. One example: using e-mail and the Net for providing information in order to expand decision-making to wider constituencies. This is contingent on the availability of computers and training for all people. With this form of enhanced face-to-face communication we can bring to birth a truly democratic civil society in which all members could participate in the discourse on political, eco-



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conomic, cultural, environmental and recreational issues. Decisions would be made by a free association of individuals in popular assemblies. This would amount to the creation of a popular politics.

The liberation of time from endless work and the new power of ordinary people to participate daily in politics and community affairs is the precondition for the emancipation of the individual, who would gain the freedom of a self-managed life. But there is more than participation in civic affairs. The slogan for the eight-hour movement was "eight hours labor, eight hours rest and eight hours for what we will." "What we will" remains a goal for most of us. Our time seems crowded with imposed obligations. While some of these are both necessary and pleasurable, many are not. Cutting working hours would increase time to develop our capacities or simply to do what most pleases us, including things which provide private enjoyment without the impositions of external authority.

3. A New Labor Policy: We need to consider the pace of technological change and the effects of corporate reorganization that have shed tens of thousands of employees. We have to gauge these developments in terms of the impact that they have on individuals and communities. Though we aren't against the development of technological innovations or forms of work reorganization which lighten our burdens, these should be open to public scrutiny, and planning should be open to public participation. Democratic decision-making in the workplace can have important outcomes for human survival at the individual, social and environmental levels. The costs of these new technological developments must be paid for by the corporations who have a responsibility to the public. These costs are measured by job and wage loss but also their effects on neighborhood and regional institutions and services and by potential environmental hazards associated with conducting business and abandoning production sites. A sustainable biosphere with stable ecosystems is as important to human survival as is a sustainable economy. In order to achieve a sustainable economy we foresee the need to reregulate many aspects of production, commerce and technological innovation by subjecting them to ecological and democratic criteria. In this respect, the bureaucratic regulatory agencies would not remain the court of last resort. As in AIDS policy—where those affected by the disease have played an active role in negotiating the size of the research budget, its priorities and policies affecting the introduction of new drugs—workers and their unions, community groups and individuals would have a substantial voice in various aspects of economic policy at both the enterprise level and regulatory agencies.

4. The Reduction of Working Hours: There has been no significant legal reduction in working hours in the United States since 1938. On the contrary, working hours have lengthened as many employers require overtime hours on penalty of discharge or inadequate income. The distribution of benefits of the new technologies has been one-sided. Only corporations and some professionals and entrepreneurs have benefitted. For most workers the new technologies have only created job insecurity and tens of thousands of workers have suffered job loss, wage loss and part-time or temporary work. It is time that the population at large benefit from the progressive reduction of working hours. Thus we call for a six-hour day without a reduction in pay and for the abolition of overtime except under special conditions that, in any case, would not be compulsory. This will cause anxiety for many who have depended on overtime for their survival. The income guarantee and the de-commodification of costs such as health care and education may alleviate problems associated with income losses for some. Equally important, we believe there can be

no genuine improvement in general living standards until the standards enjoyed by the minority are shared by the vast majority. Unless the scourge of unemployment and underemployment is removed for all, the relative privileges which some have achieved will remain at risk.

5. Higher Education as a Form of Life: The new technologies require an increase in knowledge work. The education required to perform this work should be continuously available to all. At the same time the thrust towards multiculturalism and the emergence of new identities means that we must be educated for a global world. This requires a global curriculum that isn't only Eurocentric. This doesn't mean that we no longer read *Hamlet* and Greek philosophy but that we read Shakespeare as well as African folktales and Indian and Chinese philosophy. A global curriculum requires more time for education as it does for new developments in science and philosophy. For the first time in human history everyone may be able to pursue their own educational ends at any age and for the goal of individual development. When we have freed ourselves from work without end, education isn't required to be only vocationland. In the post-work world intellectual and aesthetic interests of students are primary. Students will enter and leave education according to their needs and not just the requirements of jobs.

6. There is Still Work to be Done: Despite labor-saving technologies, our roads, bridges, water systems, schools and parks need rebuilding and repair. We need to create an effective mass transit system in every urban community and nationally which can gradually reduce the use of automobiles. We need to maintain and refurbish the environment and public spaces. We need to care medically and emotionally for our population. Cancer, heart disease, AIDS, and other diseases require both research and massive care facilities.

7. People do not live on bread alone: There have been periods in the twentieth century when an effort was made to publicly finance the arts in a fairly substantial way: the Depression and the 1960s. The New Deal's arts program was killed when some reactionary politicians discovered radicals among the program's employees. In the 1990s another generation of reactionaries have all but killed a much more modestly funded National Endowment for the Arts because it gave grants to dissenting artists, especially those who broke puritanical sexual codes. Creating visual, written and musical arts are an important part of the new public responsibility because, typically, the market does not support most people who produce culture, especially those who challenge us to think differently. We need a well-funded national program for artists and intellectuals who recognize their duty to speak to us freely and which opposes all forms of censorship masked as morality.

8. We favor a universal public service in which all tasks are shared including those tasks that are most unpleasant: In fact we suggest public service jobs be paid on the principle of reverse remuneration. This means paying more for jobs that are more unpleasant but enhance public goods, such as garbage collection, street cleaning, heavy industrial tasks, repetitive bureaucratic work, caring for children and the disabled. As the values of shared work are enhanced and new technologies are developed the amount of time required for these jobs will diminish. These are the requirements of public service in a world of participatory democracy and in which the individual has been liberated from work in a post-work world. ♦

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**William Julius Wilson** (1935– ) was professor of sociology at the University of Chicago until 1996, when he became the Malcolm Wiener Professor of Social Policy at Harvard University. In the Chicago years he did much of the empirical work for his three controversial books—*The Declining Significance of Race* (1980), *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy* (1987), and *When Work Disappears: The World of the Urban Poor* (1996). By focusing attention on the urban underclass, Wilson has forcibly altered both the academic and public debates over the respective roles of race and class in urban poverty. He has been widely honored for his work, including election as president of the American Sociological Association, as member of the National Academy of Science, and as recipient of a MacArthur Foundation fellowship.

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### *What to Do When Work Disappears*

*William Julius Wilson (1996)*

The problems of joblessness and social dislocation in the inner city are, in part, related to the processes in the global economy that have contributed to greater inequality and insecurity among American workers in general, and to the failure of U.S. social policies to adjust to these processes. It is therefore myopic to view the problems of jobless ghettos as if they were separate from those that plague the larger society.

In using this cross-cultural perspective I am not suggesting that we can or even should simply import the social policies of the Japanese, Germans, or other West Europeans. As Ray Marshall has appropriately pointed out, the approaches in these other countries are embedded in their own cultures and have their "own flaws and deficiencies, as well as strengths." We should instead "learn from the approaches used in other countries and adapt the best aspects into our own home-grown solutions."

The strengths of some of the approaches in other countries are apparent. For example, in Japan and Germany most high school and college graduates leave school with skills in keeping with the demands of the highly technological marketplace in the global economy. In the United States, by contrast, only college graduates and those few with extra-specialized post-high school training acquire such skills. Those with only high school diplomas or less do not.

The flaws and deficiencies of some of the approaches in the other countries are also apparent. Except for Germany, European countries have the same gap in worker skills. Because of the generous unemployment benefits, however, the low-skilled European workers tend to be less willing to accept the lower-paying jobs that their counterparts in the United States are often forced to take. Therefore, the problems of unskilled European workers are not only restricted to low wages, they also include high levels of unemployment. . . . The growing problems of unemployment among low-skilled European workers is placing a strain on the welfare state. Immigrant minorities are disproportionately represented among the jobless population, and therefore tend to be publicly identified with the problem of maintaining welfare costs. These perceptions contribute to growing intergroup tensions. Accordingly, the problems of race, unemployment, and concentration of urban poverty that have tra-

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Excerpt from *When Work Disappears* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1996). Copyright © 1996 by William Julius Wilson. Reprinted by permission of Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.



ditionally plagued the United States are now surfacing in various countries in Europe.

Just as the United States can learn from some of the approaches in the other countries, the Europeans could learn from the United States how to make their workforces more flexible instead of paying them to stay unemployed indefinitely. In particular, they could learn how to get unskilled workers into low-wage jobs that would be buttressed by maintaining certain desirable aspects of the safety net, such as universal health insurance, that prevent workers from slipping into the depths of poverty, as so often happens to their American counterparts. . . .

The mismatch between residence and the location of jobs is a special problem for some workers in America because, unlike in Europe, the public transportation system is weak and expensive. This presents a special problem for inner-city blacks because they have less access to private automobiles and, unlike Mexicans, do not have a network system that supports organized car pools. Accordingly, they depend heavily on public transportation and therefore have difficulty getting to the suburbs, where jobs are more plentiful and employment growth is greater. Until public transit systems are improved in metropolitan areas, the creation of privately subsidized car-pool and van-pool networks to carry inner-city residents to the areas of employment, particularly suburban areas, would be a relatively inexpensive way to increase work opportunities.

In the inner-city ghettos, the problems of spatial mismatch have been aggravated by the breakdown in the informal job information network. In neighborhoods in which a substantial number of adults are working, people are more likely to learn about job openings or be recommended for jobs by working kin, relatives, friends, and acquaintances. Job referrals from current employees are important in the American labor market, as our discussion of employer interviews so clearly revealed. Individuals in jobless ghettos are less likely to gain employment through this process. But the creation of for-profit or not-for-profit job information and placement centers in various parts of the inner city not only could significantly improve awareness of the availability of employment in the metropolitan area but could also serve to refer workers to employers.

These centers would recruit or accept inner-city workers and try to place them in jobs. One of their main purposes would be to make persons who have been persistently unemployed or out of the labor force "job-ready" so that a prospective employer would be assured that a worker understands and appreciates employer expectations such as showing up for work on time and on a regular basis, accepting the orders of supervisors, and so on. When an information and placement center is satisfied that a worker is job-ready, then and only then would the worker be referred to an employer who has a job vacancy. Moreover, information and placement centers could coordinate efforts with the car-pool and van-pool networks to get those job applicants who lack private transportation to the employment sites. . . .

The central problem facing inner-city workers is not improving the flow of information about the availability of jobs, or getting to where the jobs are, or becoming job-ready. The central problem is that the demand for labor has shifted away from low-skilled workers because of structural changes in the economy. During certain periods, this problem can be offset to some extent by appropriate macroeconomic levers that can act to enhance economic growth and reduce unemployment, including fiscal policies that regulate government spending and taxation and monetary policies that influence interest rates and control the money supply. But given the

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fundamental structural decline in the demand for low-skilled workers, such policies will have their greatest impact in the higher-wage sectors of the economy. Many low-wage workers, especially those in high-jobless inner-city neighborhoods who are not in or have dropped out of the labor force and who also face the problem of negative employer attitudes, will not experience any improvement in their job prospects because of fiscal or monetary policies. Despite some claims that low-skilled workers fail to take advantage of labor-market opportunities, available evidence strongly suggests not only that the jobs for such workers carry lower real wages and fewer benefits than did comparable jobs in the early 1970s, but that it is harder for certain low-skilled workers, especially low-skilled males who are not being absorbed into the expanding service sector to find employment today. As the economists Sheldon Danziger and Peter Gottschalk put it:

In our view, the problem is not that more people have chosen not to work, but rather that demand by employers for less-skilled workers, even those who are willing to work at low wages, has declined. We find it paradoxical that so much attention has been focused on changing the labor-supply behavior of welfare recipients and so little has been given to changing the demand side of a labor market that has been increasingly unable to employ less-skilled and less-experienced workers.

If firms in the private sector cannot use or refuse to hire low-skilled adults who are willing to take minimum-wage or subminimum-wage jobs, then the jobs problem for inner-city workers cannot be adequately addressed without considering a policy of public-sector employment of last resort. . . .

Programs proposed to increase employment opportunities, such as the creation of WPA-style jobs, should be aimed at broad segments of the U.S. population, not just inner-city workers, in order to provide the needed solid political base of support. In the new, highly integrated global economy, an increasing number of Americans across racial, ethnic, and income groups are experiencing declining real incomes, increasing job displacement, and growing economic insecurity. The unprecedented level of inner-city joblessness represents one important aspect of the broader economic dislocations that cut across racial and ethnic groups in the United States. Accordingly, when promoting economic and social reforms, it hardly seems politically wise to focus mainly on the most disadvantaged groups while ignoring other segments of the population that have also been adversely affected by global economic changes.

Yet, just when bold new comprehensive initiatives are urgently needed to address these problems, the U.S. Congress has retreated from using public policy as an instrument with which to fight social inequality. Failure to deal with this growing social inequality, including the rise of joblessness in U.S. inner cities, could seriously worsen the economic life of urban families and neighborhoods.

Groups ranging from the inner-city poor to those working- and middle-class Americans who are struggling to make ends meet will have to be effectively mobilized in order to change the current course and direction taken by policymakers. Perhaps the best way to accomplish this is through coalition politics that promote race-neutral programs such as jobs creation, further expansion of the earned income tax credit, public school reform, child care programs, and universal health insurance. A broad-based political coalition is needed to successfully push such programs through the political process.



Because an effective political coalition in part depends upon how the issues to be addressed are defined, it is imperative that the political message underscore the need for economic and social reform that benefits all groups, not just America's minority poor. The framers of this message should be cognizant of the fact that changes in the global economy are creating growing social inequality and situations which intensify antagonisms between different racial and ethnic groups, and that these groups, although often seen as adversaries, are potential allies in a reform coalition because they suffer from a common problem—economic distress caused by forces outside their own control.

In the absence of an effective political coalition, priorities will be established that do not represent the interests of disadvantaged groups. For example, in the [U.S.] House of Representatives, 67 percent of proposed spending cuts from the federal budget for the year 2000 would come from low-income programs, even though these programs represent only 21 percent of the current federal budget. Without an effective political coalition it is unlikely that Congress would be willing to finance the kinds of reforms that are needed to combat the new social inequality. . . .

The solutions I have outlined were developed with the idea of providing a policy framework that would be suitable for and could be easily adopted by a reform coalition. The long-term solutions, which include the development of a system of national performance standards in public schools, family policies to reinforce the learning system in the schools, a national system of school-to-work transition, and ways to promote city-suburban integration and cooperation, would be beneficial to and could draw the support of a broad range of groups in America. The short-term solutions, which range from the development of job information and placement centers and subsidized car pools in the ghetto to the creation of WPA-style jobs, are more relevant to low-income Americans, but they are the kinds of opportunity-enhancing programs that Americans of all racial and class backgrounds tend to support.

Although my policy framework is designed to appeal to broad segments of the population, I firmly believe that if adopted, it would alleviate a good deal of the economic and social distress currently plaguing the inner cities. The immediate problem of the disappearance of work in many inner-city neighborhoods would be confronted. The employment base in these neighborhoods would be increased immediately by the creation of WPA-style jobs, and income levels would rise because of the expansion of the earned income tax credit. Programs such as universal health care and day care would increase the attractiveness of low-wage jobs and "make work pay."

Increasing the employment base would have an enormous positive impact on the social organization of ghetto neighborhoods. As more people become employed, crime, including violent crime, and drug use will subside; families will be strengthened and welfare receipt will decline significantly; ghetto-related culture and behavior, no longer sustained and nourished by persistent joblessness, will gradually fade. As more people become employed and gain work experience, they will have a better chance of finding jobs in the private sector when they become available. The attitudes of employers toward inner-city workers will undergo change, in part because they would be dealing with job applicants who have steady work experience and would furnish references from their previous supervisors.

This is not to suggest that all the jobless individuals from the inner-city ghetto would take advantage of these employment opportunities. Some have responded to persistent joblessness by abusing alcohol and drugs, and these handicaps will affect



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their overall job performance, including showing up for work on time or on a consistent basis. But they represent only a small segment of the worker population in the inner city. Most workers in the inner city are ready, willing, able, and anxious to hold a steady job.

The long-term solutions that I have advanced would reduce the likelihood that a new generation of jobless workers would be produced from the youngsters now in school and preschool. We must break the cycle of joblessness and improve the youngsters' preparation for the new labor market in the global economy.

My framework for long-term and immediate solutions is based on the notion that the problems of jobless ghettos cannot be separated from those of the rest of the nation. Although these solutions have wide-ranging application and would alleviate the economic distress of many Americans, their impact on jobless ghettos would be profound. Their most important contribution would be their effect on the children of the ghetto, who would be able to anticipate a future of economic mobility and share the hopes and aspirations that so many of their fellow citizens experience as part of the American way of life. ❖

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**Patricia Clough** (1945– ) was born in Corona in Queens, New York City, and educated at the University of Illinois, where in addition to studying sociology and cultural criticism, she studied cybernetics at the world-famous Biological Computer Lab. During the 1960s, Clough was a nun in the Roman Catholic Order of the Sisters of Mercy; yet, she broke the traditional silence of the convent to participate in political and social movements in Brooklyn. Her books include *The End(s) of Ethnography* (1992), *Feminist Thought* (1994), and *Auto-affection: The Unconscious in the Age of Teletechnology* (1999).

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### *Cultural Criticism and Telecommunications*

*Patricia Clough* (1997)

Since the 1980s, deregulation has led to intense competition in the development of telecommunications. Cable services, satellite systems, interactive CD and video games, VCR innovation, and camcorders all have moved the apparatus of television beyond a broadcast model. Zapping, time shifting, multiple forms of storage and replay, have become reference points of a vision to interface the so-called passivity of television watching with the Net in the production of what is referred to as push-pull programming. Push programming means making the activity of browsing the net a machine function, moving it further from the user's consciousness. It means cascades of information across various sites—phone, PC, wristwatch, miniature TV monitors. Without waiting for the user's prompt, these devices will provide the user with updated traffic reports, the stock market's ups and downs, shopping opportunities, and updates on personalized information needs. There still will be pull programming, which the user is invited to choose; pull programming is the option to turn to old movies, reruns of TV sitcoms, video games, and sources of various abstract knowledges. Part of this vi-

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**Arlie Hochschild** (1940– ) teaches sociology at the University of California at Berkeley. Her academic work has attracted respectful notice from media commentators because of her thoughtful attention to the emotional and domestic consequences of the changing economic world. Two of Hochschild's earlier books—*The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (1983) and *The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home* (1989)—were mentioned as notable books by the *New York Times*. The selection below is from *The Time Bind: When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work* (1997), based on Hochschild's study of the effects of the family-friendly worktime policies of a Fortune 500 corporation to which she gave the fictitious name Amerco.

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### *Working Women in the Time Bind*

Arlie Hochschild (1997)

Amerco, a highly profitable, innovative company, had the budget and the will to experiment with new ways to organize its employees' lives. Its Work-Life Balance program could have become a model, demonstrating to other corporations that workforce talents can be used effectively without wearing down workers and their families. But that did not happen. The question I have asked is: Why not? The answer, as we have seen, is complex. Some working parents, especially on the factory floor, were disinclined to work shorter hours because they needed the money or feared losing their jobs. Though not yet an issue at Amerco, in some companies workers may also fear that "good" shorter-hour jobs could at any moment be converted into "bad" ones, stripped of benefits or job security. Even when such worries were absent, pressure from peers or supervisors to be a "serious player" could cancel out any desire to cut back on work hours. The small number of employees who resolved to actually reduce their hours risked coming up against a company Balashev. But all these sources of inhibition did not fully account for the lack of resistance Amerco's working parents showed to the encroachments of work time on family life.

Much of the solution to the puzzle of work-family balance appeared to be present at Amerco—the pieces were there, but they remained unassembled. Many of those pieces lay in the hands of the powerful men at the top of the company hierarchy, who had the authority and skill to engineer a new family-friendly work culture but lacked any deep interest in doing so. Other pieces were held by the advocates of family-friendly policies lower down the corporate ladder, who had a strong interest in such changes but little authority to implement them. And the departmental supervisors and managers, whose assent was crucial to solving the puzzle, were sometimes overtly hostile to anything that smacked of work-family balance. So even if the workers who could have benefited from such programs had demanded them, resistance from above would still have stymied their efforts.

But why *weren't* Amerco working parents putting up a bigger fight for family time, given the fact that most said they needed more? Many of them may have been responding to a powerful process that is devaluing what was once the essence of

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Excerpt from *The Time Bind: When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1997), pp. 197-199, 214-216, 229-230, 232-233, 257-259. Copyright © 1997 by Arlie Russell Hochschild. Reprinted by permission of Henry Holt and Company, Inc.

California at Berkeley commentators consequences of—*The Managed Shift: Working Parole* books by the *When Work Becomes* of the effects of which she gave

family life. The more women and men do what they do in exchange for money and the more their work in the public realm is valued or honored, the more, almost by definition, private life is devalued and its boundaries shrink. For women as well as men, work in the marketplace is less often a simple economic fact than a complex cultural value. If in the early part of the century it was considered unfortunate that a woman had to work, it is now thought surprising when she doesn't.

People generally have the urge to spend more time on what they value most and on what they are most valued for. This tendency may help explain the historic decline in time devoted to private social relations, a decline that has taken on a distinctive cultural form at Amerco. The valued realm of work is registering its gains in part by incorporating the best aspects of home. The devalued realm, the home, is meanwhile taking on what were once considered the most alienating attributes of work. However one explains the failure of Amerco to create a good program of work-family balance, though, the fact is that in a cultural contest between work and home, working parents are voting with their feet, and the work-place is winning. . . .

### A Third Shift: Time Work

As the first shift (at the workplace) takes more time, the second shift (at home) becomes more hurried and rationalized. The longer the workday at the office or plant, the more we feel pressed at home to hurry, to delegate, to delay, to forgo, to segment, to hyperorganize the precious remains of family time. Both their time deficit and what seem like solutions to it (hurrying, segmenting, and organizing) force parents . . . to engage in a third shift—noticing, understanding, and coping with the emotional consequences of the compressed second shift.

Children respond to the domestic work-bred cult of efficiency in their own ways. Many, as they get older, learn to protest it. Parents at Amerco and elsewhere then have to deal with their children, as they act out their feelings about the sheer scarcity of family time. For example, Dennis Long, an engineer at Amerco, told me about what happened with his son from a previous marriage when he faced a project deadline at work. Whenever Dennis got home later than usual, four-year-old Joshua greeted him with a tantrum. As Dennis ruefully explained,

Josh gets really upset when I'm not home. He's got it in his head that the first and third weeks of every month, he's with me, not with his mom. He hasn't seen me for a while, and I'm supposed to be there. When a project deadline like this one comes up and I come home late, he gets to the end of his rope. He gives me hell. I understand it. He's frustrated. He doesn't know what he can rely on.

This father did his "third shift" by patiently sitting down on the floor to "receive" Josh's tantrum, hearing him out, soothing him, and giving him some time. For a period of six months, Joshua became upset at almost any unexpected delay or rapid shift in the pace at which events were, as he saw it, supposed to happen. Figuring out what such delays or shifts in pace meant to Joshua became another part of Dennis Long's third shift.

Such episodes raise various questions: If Josh's dad keeps putting off their dates to play together, does it mean he doesn't care about Josh? Does Josh translate the language of time the same way his father does? What if time symbolizes quite different

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things to the two of them? Whose understanding counts the most? Sorting out such emotional tangles is also part of the third shift.

Ironically, many Amerco parents were challenged to do third-shift work by their children's reactions to "quality time." As one mother explained,

Quality time is seven-thirty to eight-thirty at night, and then it's time for bed. I'm ready at seven-thirty, but Melinda has other ideas. As soon as quality time comes she wants to have her bath or watch TV; *no way* is she going to play with Mommy. Later, when I'm ready to drop, *then* she's ready for quality time. . . .

In such situations, pressed parents often don't have time to sort through their children's responses. They have no space to wonder what their gift of time means. Or whether a parent's visit to daycare might seem to a child like a painfully prolonged departure. Is a gift of time what a parent wants to give, or what a child wants to receive? Such questions are often left unresolved. . . .

### Women's Uneasy Love Affair with Capitalism

A second way of trying to evade the time bind is to buy oneself out of it, an approach that puts women, in particular, at the heart of a contradiction. Like men, women absorb the work-family speedup far more than they resist it; but unlike men, women are the ones who shoulder most of the workload at home. Naturally, then, they are more starved for time than men. It is women who feel more acutely the need to save time and women who are more tempted by the goods and services of the growing "time industry." They are the ones who shop for time. What the speedup takes away, the new time industry sells back in time-saving goods and services, many of which are geared to appeal to eager working women, especially of the urban middle and upper classes. But at what point does this infatuation with consumerism become a problem?

There are many substitutes for family services—summer camp for children or retirement homes for the elderly, to mention two—that have already become acceptable features of modern life. Increasingly, though, new products and concepts are being developed to extract smaller and smaller bits of time and effort from family life and return them to the family—for a price—as ready-made goods and services.

Some of these replace the practical activities of a 1950s housewife. In some parts of the country, a family can now phone in a dinner order to a child's daycare center in the morning and pick up both the child and the meal (in an ovenproof container) in the evening. Bright Horizons offers dry-cleaning services based on the same principle. According to one news report, some daycare centers will schedule your child's extra time, arranging for and making sure that children get to swimming or gymnastics classes, for example. As the president of Bright Horizons notes, "At Christmas we even have vendors come in and set up displays so parents can buy gifts."

A mail-order company called Extended Family Food From Home allows people to order a week's worth of dinners, \$64.95 plus shipping. Meals are cooked, flash-frozen, and delivered two days later in an insulated box. A week's worth of prepared breakfasts can be shipped out in brown paper bags. Merry Maids, an Omaha-based company with six hundred franchise offices nationwide, will regularly clean the house, or for a special price do the annual spring cleaning. . . .

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This trend toward the commodification of home life appears to be reinforcing itself. The fastest-growing sector of the American economy is the self-employed, a majority of whom are now women. Many of their small businesses have been set up to take various tasks out of the hands of busy working mothers. So some of the women consuming items produced by the time-industry do so in order to go to work selling more of the same to other women in similar situations. . . .

Any successful movement for social change begins with a vision of life as it could be, with the notion that something potential could become real. So let's imagine Gwen Bell picking up her daughter Cassie at childcare twice a week at 3 P.M. instead of 6 P.M. and saving those fudge bars for late afternoon treats. Picture John Bell working a half-day Fridays and volunteering at Cassie's center. And what if Vicky King arranged with the eight male executives in her office for "coverage" and took Wednesdays off? Let's imagine PTA meetings to which a large majority of the parents come, libraries where working parents can afford to devote their spare time to reading or literacy programs, and community gardens in which they and their children have the leisure to grow fresh vegetables. Picture voting booths in which parents choose candidates who make flexible work time possible. Finally, let's imagine Janey King turning the music back on and finishing her dance.

But vision alone will not be enough. A time movement will not succeed without change in many of the underlying social conditions that make it necessary. The rising power of global capitalism, the relative decline of labor unions, and the erosion of civil society will all test the resolve of such a movement. Such trends tighten the time bind we live with, of course, but they also highlight the driving need for a way to gain release from it. Job scarcity can make people "work scared" (and thus work longer hours), but it can also force corporations and unions to look at ways to share more lower-hour jobs. Under the right political and social conditions, the growth of technology, which is extending the "anywhere, anytime" work-place into the home, might help people balance work and family even as it squeezes nonwork time even harder.

Finally, I believe that the rising number of working women—and their partners—are a growing constituency for a time movement. At all levels in the workforce, there are women and men whose potential selves are clamoring for more time at home. At a hypothetical future meeting of time activists, a unionized auto worker who wants to cut down on overtime in order to give hours back to laid-off comrades may yet join together with an upper-middle-class, working mom who wants to job share.

The two could find common cause in their children. In fact, the most ardent constituency for a solution to the time bind are those too young as yet to speak up. Fifteen years from now, ten-year-old Janet, home alone in the afternoons, and four-year-old Cassie, waiting to be picked up at the Spotted Deer Childcare Center, will have passed through a childhood of long waits for absent parents. They may say "enough" to the family equivalent of Charlie Chaplin's automatic feeding device. It is they who could form the core of a movement to reclaim private time. But if that would be a good thing in the future, why leave it as an angel of an idea now? ♦