

## REVIEW ESSAYS

### Crisis of Neoliberalism, Crisis of the World?

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The continuing economic crisis and the growing evidence that the United States no longer is able to shape world events to its advantage and liking have spawned a quickly growing library of books that seek to explain the causes of the crisis and variously predict the future or offer advice for government officials or for the reading and voting public. The books by David Kotz and Immanuel Wallerstein and his collaborators are worthwhile contributions to the ongoing debate even as they reveal limitations to their approaches and, for the most part, fail to address work from scholars outside their orbits.

Kotz is an economist who elaborated the “social structure of accumulation theory” first developed by Michael Gordon. In *The Rise and Fall of Neoliberal Capitalism*, Kotz, echoing Marx’s description of modes of production, sees the social structure of accumulation as a “coherent institutional structure . . . [that] centers around promoting profit-making and a stable capital accumulation process . . . . After one or several decades, each social structure of accumulation turns from a structure that promoted profit-making and accumulation into an obstacle to it, ushering in a period of economic crisis. The crisis period lasts until a new social structure of accumulation is constructed” (p. 3).

Kotz argues that U.S. history since the Civil War has been a repeating cycle of one social structure of accumulation that lasts for decades and spurs rapid growth for the economy along with rich profits for capitalists, followed by a crisis created by the dynamics of that structure that ends in the development of a different social structure of accumulation. The structures of accumulation vary in the degree to which the state

*The Rise and Fall of Neoliberal Capitalism*, by **David M. Kotz**. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015. 288 pp. \$39.95 cloth. ISBN: 9780674725652.

*The World is Out of Joint: World-Historical Interpretations of Continuing Polarizations*, **Immanuel Wallerstein**, coordinator. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2015. 208 pp. \$140.00 cloth. ISBN: 978161205 7170.

regulates capitalism and the extent to which growth is shared between capitalists and workers.

Kotz describes the period from the end of the Civil War to 1900, which Mark Twain called the Gilded Age (and also The Great Barbeque), as one of unregulated capitalism, albeit with heavy federal and state subsidies for politically connected firms such as railroads. Hyper-competition among numerous locally based small firms led to rapid economic growth at the cost of frequent recessions. Kotz finds that from 1870 to 1900 there were 179 months of contraction and 181 of growth (p. 184). Wages hardly grew in nominal terms, but massive long-term deflation, caused by intense competition among firms, meant that real wages grew throughout those decades. Capitalists pursued various strategies to profit in such a competitive and turbulent economy. Industrial entrepreneurs combined numerous locally based small firms into vertically integrated behemoths. Speculators manipulated markets and looted firms while bankers, who expanded beyond their localities by floating government and railroad bonds, began to

market stocks in the expanding large corporations.

Bankers emerged victorious in intra-class conflict. They used their growing leverage as the principal sources of credit to force firms to limit their competition and instead engage in what Kotz labels "co-respective competition." At the same time, government also imposed regulation on business in an effort to preempt the growing socialist movement. Regulation was less onerous for big business than socialists' and other radicals' suggestions to break up the recently formed monopolies and oligopolies.

For Kotz, popular mobilization (or its absence) is a key element in determining the direction and durability of reform. Thus, nationalist fervor during and after World War I allowed the government to crush the Socialist Party and weaken unions, allowing many of the Progressive reforms to be undone. Kotz is much too vague on how the retreat from regulation actually changed the institutional links among firms and with banks to undermine co-respective competition. He is much clearer on the consequences. Wages declined and mass demand was sustained only by a series of bubbles: real estate in the first half of the 1920s and then the stock market until 1929.

The Depression undermined *laissez-faire* as an ideology and fortified radical groups. For Kotz, the 1930s were an intensified version of the 1900s, creating a system of co-respective competition and of social benefits that in itself limited capitalists' competition. The cycle turned again in the 1970s as U.S. corporate profits declined. Kotz reviews various explanations for falling profits without coming down in favor of one theory or another. He shrewdly concludes that no matter the cause, corporate leaders felt threatened and responded by attacking unions and government regulation. Kotz argues that businesses were willing to put up with social welfare spending but objected when "social regulations" attacking pollution, protecting worker safety, and preventing consumer fraud were proposed. In addition, business leaders had, by the 1970s, only dim memories of the Great Depression and had forgotten earlier fears of a post-World War II collapse that was averted, he argues, by Cold War spending.

Kotz's analysis and his own research on business lobbying tracks the work of various sociologists, most notably G. William Domhoff (2013), but he does not engage them nor does he draw on either the archives or published works he cites in enough depth to explain why business elites were able to achieve their objectives in some eras but not others. Kotz instead asserts that if capitalists make good and steady profits, they are willing to tolerate unions and government regulation (up to a point); but when profits are endangered, they swing into action, developing new ideologies, lobbying and buying political candidates, and breaking unions. His simple model does not attempt to explain how ideologies are constructed and win adherents. While both Keynesian and neoliberal ideologies were convincing explanations of the phenomena of their times, so were other ideologies that failed to achieve salience. Thus, we need to turn to authors such as Greta Krippner (2011) or Manuel Castells (2011) to really understand how neoliberalism triumphed over competing interpretations of reality.

One of Kotz's major contributions is to offer an overview of neoliberalism's limited achievements in the United States. He finds that while profits recovered, it was due mainly to wage stagnation and secondarily to cuts in corporate taxes. Neoliberalism since the 1980s, like *laissez-faire* in the 1920s, produced rising inequality and a series of asset bubbles that allowed workers with stagnant wages to go ever deeper into debt to purchase the mountains of stuff churned out by American and, in recent decades, foreign firms. The bubbles of the 2000s were, in Kotz's analysis, the inevitable result of the growing wealth of the rich combined with a lack of productive investment, since weak consumer demand and international competition meant that existing plants already were at overcapacity. Financial deregulation allowed unrestrained speculation.

The 2008 financial collapse and the resulting prolonged recession seemed to raise serious doubts about neoliberal doctrine and to revive interest in Keynesian solutions. But after a year or two of government stimulus, austerity has again come to dominate political discourse. After

beginning the book with the suggestion that the current recession is a historical turning point, when the neoliberal social structure of accumulation will give way to something new, Kotz concludes much more tentatively by identifying possible futures without suggesting which one is more likely or even offering a method for weighing how capitalists' organizational capacities or internal conflicts, mass mobilization, or factors external to the United States might shape the ultimate outcome.

Kotz's limitations stem in part from his single-minded focus on the United States. While he mentions that neoliberalism has been practiced elsewhere, he fails to systematically compare neoliberal policies among countries. Had he done so, he would have been able, like Monica Prasad (2006), to offer hypotheses on how and under what conditions ideology, capitalists' unity and organizational capacities, social movements, and politicians' autonomous interests combine to yield Keynesianism and regulation or neoliberalism or particular mixes of them in different countries. Kotz's book remains valuable for bringing sociologists a clear account of the economic achievements and ultimate limitations of Keynesian and neoliberal economic policies, but it needs to be combined with other approaches if we want to understand when and how new policies are adopted.

Where then can we turn for a fuller understanding of neoliberalism's origins, limitations (both in terms of implementation and accomplishments), and future prospects? As I mentioned above, comparative analysis is essential. Following Prasad, we need to examine why particular neoliberal policies were effectively implemented in some countries but not others. Such comparison also will help us to understand the different targets and achievements of social movements across time and place. Kotz's shrewd decision to remain agnostic on the causes of the economic decline of the 1970s also makes it more difficult to see how the particular economic conditions and institutions in each country affected political relations and made possible certain policy changes, as Michael Mann (2013) attempts to show. We also need to acknowledge not only that national economies are in competition, but that they are part of a global structure that

is shaped and distorted by cycles of economic growth and crisis that Kotz traces for the United States and others, such as Ha-Joon Chang (2002; 2011), Giuliano Garavini ([2009] 2012), and Giovanni Arrighi (2007), link to geopolitics.

Geopolitical openings or the needs of dominant powers, like the United States, to win and hold allies have an independent effect on economic policies. In addition, global warming and resulting ecological disasters no doubt will cause economic collapses in some places while spurring efforts at "mitigation" in other countries that can have as much of a Keynesian effect as the Cold War once did (Lachmann 2016). Similarly, if we want to understand what might follow neoliberalism in the United States, it pays to examine countries that have been able to challenge those policies in Latin America (see, e.g., Yates and Bakker 2014) or that avoided neoliberal nostrums and benefitted from state-directed development, at least until the 2008 financial crisis (Ó Riain 2004).

World systems theory offers a framework that relates economic cycles to geopolitics while seeking to account for ideological change and the causes and effects of social movements. The work of Giovanni Arrighi (1994; 2007) is the pinnacle, so far, of the efforts to explain the ongoing crisis of U.S. capitalism in terms of the tensions and limitations inherent in occupying the hegemonic position in the world system. Arrighi, who originated the concept of financialization, and whose work Kotz mentions briefly but misleadingly (pp. 190–91), sees the crucial cycle as not an oscillation between *laissez-faire* and regulation, but a move by each hegemon away from productive capitalism to financial manipulation. Whether and how long financialization can sustain U.S. dominance remains to be seen. Arrighi, who died in 2009, was unable to see if his predictions would be borne out; and it appears that China and other industrial competitors are willing so far, for a combination of domestic and geopolitical reasons, to cede financial supremacy to the United States (Hung 2009). That may prove as or more important than the factors that are Kotz's focus in explaining the future trajectory of American neoliberalism.

Immanuel Wallerstein, like Kotz, challenges “the dominant view in social science . . . that the modern world shows a pattern of linear development in which all positive trends go upward in more or less linear fashion” (p. 1). Wallerstein and his collaborators in *The World Is Out of Joint* (20 authors for 10 substantive chapters) offer a global and *longue durée* analysis. This book can be read in a number of ways. First, it offers schematic histories of the central social phenomena of the past 500 years. Thus, we learn that world inequality has been remarkably stable for centuries, as rich countries’ relative egalitarianism coexisted with, and depended upon, the export of low-wage jobs to and extraction of resources from peripheral lands with much higher levels of inequality. Roberto Patricio Koreniewicz and Timothy Patrick Moran show that migration partly mitigates global inequality and that the unprecedented rise of China and India is changing the global distribution of income to a greater extent than at any time in the history of the world system. At the same time, Peter J. Taylor et al. show that the foci of rapid urban growth have shifted over centuries from political centers to core economic centers, then to core frontier cities, and in recent decades to peripheral economic centers. Eric Vanhaute et al. look at the peasants left on the land in the wake of urbanization. Like the other authors, Vanhaute et al. find a widening divergence between core and peripheral regions. While agriculture becomes more efficient and uses far fewer workers in the core, “in the global South more agricultural workers were employed per unit of farmland in 2000 than 1950” (p. 65).

The quality of and insight offered by the chapters, unfortunately, is highly uneven. The chapters on ecology, intellectual property, “women’s spaces and a patriarchal system,” and citizenship are superficial, and the conclusions of all but the latter read more like speeches to the like-minded than analyses from which one can learn something new. The chapter on state, by Atilio M. Borom and Paloma Nottebohm, offers valuable data on public expenditures in a number of countries, but some of the conclusions drawn cannot be justified by the data. The authors argue that U.S. government spending increased in the 2000s

because Bush and Obama “increased military expenses to record-high levels” (p. 103). In nominal terms the spending is high, but as a percentage of GDP it is far lower under both those presidents than it was under Reagan, Kennedy-Johnson, or Eisenhower. The jump in overall spending under Obama was due mainly to Keynesian spending from the stimulus and for social programs that have built-in counter-cyclical effects. The same was true of other rich countries.

Jorge Fonseca traces changes in the form of large firms over 100 years and in the flows of foreign direct investment over the past century. He finds that the United States has shared rather than dominated international capital. While Fonseca doesn’t draw out the implications of his findings, his research could provide the basis for a deeper understanding of the difficulties the United States faces now, and has faced in the past, in controlling the global capitalist system.

Fonseca’s chapter shows the strengths of Wallerstein’s collective project: the ability to examine a wide range of phenomena and to marshal researchers to create new data that give a more precise picture of change over time. However, his brief chapter also reveals the limitations of this volume. Whether this is a decisive limitation of the entire project remains to be seen: hopefully future volumes, either by individual authors or the collective working group, will go into greater depth than is possible in chapters of 15 to 20 pages, give fuller accounts of what they have found, and then go on to elaborate their analyses.

Ari Sitas et al.’s chapter on deviance offers an innovative and provocative theory. They differentiate what they call existential deviance (where a whole group is considered a deviant “other” deserving of removal or elimination) from behavioral deviance (the focus of most theory and research), deviance expression, and what they call miasmatic deviance (the carrying of “impure substances, such as bad spirit or diseases”) (p. 148). They relate these four types to each other and explain the rise and fall of the policing of each type to world systemic cycles and to long-term changes in the global structure. Their arguments deserve further elaboration and study.

Wallerstein concludes the volume by drawing out the implications of his

collaborators' findings for studying the current global crisis. He sees a common thread in all the chapters: the world is becoming increasingly polarized, and "the system bifurcates" (p. 167). Neither neoliberalism nor renewed social democracy can cure the crisis, in Wallerstein's analysis. He predicts that states will weaken under the double burden of "reduced incomes and increased expenditures" (p. 167). At the same time, people will turn to those weakened states for protection from crisis. States' loss of capacity will strengthen regional structures such as the EU. As Wallerstein has written before, the world's future will be determined by the outcome of struggles between popular forces seeking a more democratic and egalitarian world order and those with wealth and power who, worried "that they cannot secure their future through the existing capitalist system . . . will seek to bring into existence some other system, one based not on a central role of the market but rather on a combination of brute force and deception" (p. 168).

If Wallerstein is correct, neoliberalism will turn out to have been a short episode in the long history of capitalism, albeit one that propelled the world system's instability. He and his collaborators have performed a valuable service in focusing our attention on the multiple sites at which the struggle for the future will be played out. However, we will need to draw on other perspectives in addition to world systems theory to identify and understand the forces that will shape future turbulence. The great task ahead will be to develop frameworks that will allow us to see how multiple factors interact in contingent chains of conflict and structural change that produce varying consequences in different parts of the world. That will then give us the basis to analyze how unexpected events, such as the catastrophic consequences of global warming, will affect the dire developments already in process.

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 Manufacturing Fear: Muslim Americans and the Politics of Terrorism
 

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Muslims in the United States today are widely considered as actual or potential terrorists, with predictably negative consequences. Since the attacks of September 11, 2001, there has been a five-fold increase in recorded hate crimes against Muslim Americans. Assaults in which victims are targeted because they are Muslim, arson attacks on mosques, and related acts now make up 14 percent of hate crimes motivated by religious bias (Federal Bureau of Investigation 2013). Everyday expressions of hostility and insult are similarly widespread. Muslim Americans, as well as people perceived to be Muslim such as Sikh men, face abuse and discrimination in a variety of social settings and communities.

The actions of law enforcement and security agencies also suggest an official equation of American's Muslims with terrorism. Muslim Americans are routinely surveilled and screened as threats to the public order, despite considerable evidence that such racial profiling is misplaced. Few Muslims in the United States (fewer than 20 per year) have been associated with any act or plan for violent terrorism in the United States in recent years (Kurzman 2015). Indeed, Charles Kurzman and David Schanzer's (2015) national survey of law enforcement agencies found that 74 percent cited anti-government extremism as one of the top three threats of violent extremism in their jurisdiction, compared to only 39 percent that selected "Al-Qaeda inspired violent extremism." Such evidence to the contrary, efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism in the United States have focused almost exclusively on Islamic-related terrorism, with little attention to the more frequent plans for mass, politically targeted violence by anti-government extremists and white supremacists.

Media accounts commonly depict terrorism as essentially Muslim. Violence connected to Islam in any way is quickly framed as terrorism while nearly identical actions by

*Terrified: How Anti-Muslim Fringe Organizations Became Mainstream*, by **Christopher Bail**. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015. 248 pp. \$35.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780691159423.

anti-government "patriots" or white supremacists are described as an outcome of the perpetrator's mental illness, troubled family, or shaky employment. The duality of this discourse can be quite stark. Mental health problems were widely cited as the cause of the mass murder of nine African Americans in a Charleston, South Carolina church by a white man who frequented white supremacist internet sites and posted his admiration for Hitler. In contrast, the assault on a Texas gathering that showcased cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad—in which only the assailants died—was framed as yet another instance of global Islamic terrorism.

What accounts for the widespread assumption that the threat of domestic terrorism lies within America's Muslim communities and that any Muslim American might become a terrorist? A common answer points to a toxic synergy of racial-religious hierarchies and the events of 9/11. As outsiders to the normative and privileged status of whites and Christians, Muslim Americans have been vulnerable to negative labeling. Their outsider status as nonwhites and non-Christians has made it easy to target them as terrorists and enemies, similarly to how right-wing political commentators find it acceptable to label immigrants from Mexico as criminals because Mexican Americans are already regarded as racially inferior by many white Americans.

One immediate virtue of Christopher Bail's *Terrified: How Anti-Muslim Fringe Organizations Became Mainstream* is to debunk this easy answer. In fact, non-Muslims in the United States did not become

negative toward Muslim Americans simply because they regarded them as complicit in or sympathetic to the attacks of September 11. If that were true, there would have been a sudden uptick in unfavorable attitudes toward Muslim Americans after 9/11. But there was not. To the contrary, favorable opinions of Islam and Muslim Americans increased right after September 11 as inter-faith and civic organizations and many prominent politicians, including President George W. Bush, made concerted efforts to distinguish the religion of Islam from the political agendas of those who perpetrated mass violence in the name of global Islam. In the confusing and fearful months that followed 9/11, most Americans continued to regard external self-described Islamic militants intent on harming the United States as essentially different from loyal, politically moderate Muslim American citizens. Even conservative Republicans became more favorable toward Muslim Americans after September 11 (Pew 2001). If the devastating attacks on U.S. targets in the name of global Islam did not turn most Americans against Muslims in this country, why did Americans turn against their Muslim minority population years later?

Christopher Bail's superb research traces how a handful of civil society organizations shaped a remarkable transformation in public discourse years after 9/11, changing the popular image of Muslim Americans from that of an unremarkable religious group to that of a scary network of potential terrorists. More broadly, Bail undermines the conventional claim that the messages and frames that are broadcast by social movements and civic organizations are most influential with the public when they resonate with existing broad cultural understandings.

Two innovative approaches allow Bail to unlock the circularity of assuming that new ideas best resonate with the public when they fit with existing ones. First, he moves beyond the traditional scholarly focus on success to look also at failure. Rather than concentrate on the movements and organizations that effectively reshaped public discourse about Muslim-Americans, he examines a broader population of civil-society organizations that disseminated messages about Muslims, both those whose messages

were influential and those whose messages failed to attract an audience. In line with emerging scholarship in social movement and organization studies that seeks to avoid truncating the population under study, Bail's study demonstrates the analytic leverage gained by comparing effectual and ineffectual attempts to forge cultural transformation.

A second innovation is his analysis of messages, rather than only the groups disseminating messages, as mainstream or fringe. This makes it possible to distinguish those civil-society organizations that are successful because their messages resonate with existing public understandings from those that are successful because they shift the cultural environment so that their messages become understood as mainstream. Considering mainstream as a dynamic concept allows Bail to show how anti-Muslim ideas moved from being fringe to being mainstream, or vice versa, and how such transitions reshape what is included within the boundaries of the cultural mainstream. Before and immediately after 9/11, for example, few Americans would likely have believed the claim by today's conservative politicians and media outlets that President Obama was raised as a Muslim. Nor would most Americans have understood that this meant that Obama was not fit to be a national leader. Yet, after a concerted effort by a variety of organizations and movements to change the mainstream view of Muslim Americans, a distressingly large number of Americans now accept and understand this claim.

Bail argues that a handful of previously fringe anti-Muslim civic organizations were able to change broad public discourse in a relatively short time. It was not their networks or financial resources that made them successful, as one might expect. Rather, building from Jeffrey Alexander's theory of emotional energy and communicative theories of the public's taste for drama, Bail argues that it was the ability of anti-Muslim organizations to deliver messages that harnessed emotions of fear and anger in the wake of a major national crisis that made them effective. Civic organizations that sought to present a more positive view of Muslim Americans were generally less successful, despite their more substantial

organizations and broader networks. They were also caught in a downward spiral. Faced with the onslaught of anti-Muslim messages, they turned to attacking the hitherto-fringe anti-Muslim organizations. Predictably, these attacks backfired by increasing the public profiles of the anti-Muslim organizations and essentially shifting them from politically fringe to politically mainstream.

Anti-Muslim organizations, by contrast, moved in an upward spiral. Once they gained a measure of public visibility, they solidified their place in the mainstream discourse by creating an infrastructure of fundraisers, self-identified terrorism experts who could provide a quick analysis, public speakers, and an extensive media empire. Ideas that earlier seemed peculiar became the stuff of serious discussion. By 2012, for example, legislation meant to stop "creeping Shari-ah," the imposition of Islamic law on U.S. citizens, was proposed in almost two-thirds of all U.S. states despite the legal and political implausibility of this scenario. Beyond the time horizon of Bail's study, the flood of anti-Muslim propaganda shows no sign of abating; and these ideas circulate through mainstream culture with remarkable speed. Media, internet sites, and politicians present as factual a variety of threatening possibilities with no evidence, most recently the ideas that "no-go zones" are being set up throughout American and foreign cities in which non-Muslims are barred or that a "flood" of Muslim American young adults are secretly leaving for Syria to become "foreign fighters" for ISIS and install an imminent Islamic caliphate.

*Terrified's* ambitious process-oriented methodology opens new directions for researchers of social movements and civic society, particularly in the use of plagiarism-detecting software as an analytic technique. Bail uses this software to extract a variety of textual content, both verbatim and paraphrased, from the press releases distributed by pro- and anti-Muslim organizations and from a large body of materials published or broadcast by the media. By comparing text in press releases and media, he is able to trace whether—and how—the messages of civil-society organizations are picked up and circulated by the media. This analysis is

extended with in-depth qualitative analysis of these civic and media organizations and actors and systematic examination of the precise nature of the transmitted content. The book largely discusses whether messages are positive or negative toward Muslims, although the frames from which these categories were derived, such as "Muslims as Enemies" and "Muslim Empowerment," suggest that other dimensions can be explored.

Bail's multiple measures and approaches provide unusually sharp insights into the mechanisms of cultural change effected by civic organizations. By including a broad range of civic organizations in the study, he captures how messages move from civic organizations to the media as well as when they fail to do so. The value of this comparison is illustrated by the cases of the Middle East Forum, a fervent anti-Muslim organization, and the Center for Security Policy, a conservative and hawkish organization focused on the threat of Islamic radicalization. Both appear unremarkable by comparison with other civil-society organizations that had influence on the media. Compared to all organizations that tried to distribute messages about Muslims, however, it is clear that they are on the fringe. Bail also traces the circulation of messages from media broadcast to the general public through a range of data collection and analytic approaches, ranging from conventional case studies, network analysis of interlocking connections among civic organizations, media, and politicians, and in-depth interviews to more novel big-data analyses of postings on the social media platforms Facebook and Twitter.

A project of this scope necessarily leaves some avenues unexplored. One is the extent to which the broader conservative movement of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries set a foundation for the mainstreaming of anti-Muslim organizations and discourse. Certainly, media institutions like Fox News provided a powerful venue for disseminating both coded and openly hostile statements about Muslim Americans, which this book mentions. But conservatives also created a broader stage on which anti-Muslim organizations could appear legitimate in other ways, by establishing foundations, think-tanks, writers



and intellectuals, and networks of financial backing that could bring right-wing ideas into public discourse.

A follow-up study could explore a broader range of the anti-Muslim discourse that has permeated the political mainstream. Bail focuses mostly on terrorism, but issues of gender are also important. It is likely, for example, that one reason that anti-Muslim rhetoric can become acceptable in public discourse is its assertion of the need to protect women from purported abuse within Islam. Tracing the circulation of gendered anti-Muslim discourse would open a lens into the interconnections of anti-Muslim organizations and the set of right-wing groups, politicians, and writers that position themselves in a fragile political space of women's rights, racism, and nationalism.

Finally, Bail studies cultural change after a major event. He shows that even an event of the magnitude of the 9/11 attacks did not itself prompt a drastic increase in unfavorable opinions about Muslim Americans, although it set the stage for anti-Muslim organizations to position themselves in the mainstream. Left open is the question of whether similar mechanisms of transition from fringe to mainstream (and vice versa) are likely to operate in the absence of

extraordinary events. As an example, the recent history of the political right in the United States and, more dramatically, the mainstreaming of the traditional far-right French National Front show that such transition is possible; but the specific mechanisms by which rightist organizations and movements enter and exit the broader cultural environment are largely unexplored.

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## What Time Shows Us about Inequality, Gender, and Power at Work

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"We're not going to tolerate sickness," managers told a nursing assistant in Dan Clawson and Naomi Gerstel's timely study, capturing some wishful thinking, to be sure, but also employers' typical approach to the low-wage health workers they retained (p. 145). Of course, sickness happens, as do accidents, the deaths of loved ones, vacations, doctor appointments, and other moments in which employees' non-work lives intrude on their scheduled jobs. In fact, such moments are so common that Clawson and Gerstel come to call them "normal unpredictability." *Unequal Time* documents, with some restrained outrage

*Unequal Time: Gender, Class, and Family in Employment Schedules*, by **Dan Clawson** and **Naomi Gerstel**. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2014. 324 pp. \$35.00 paper. ISBN: 9780871540140.

and, at times, dry humor, how gender and class intersect to shape the ways health care employers and workers of varying advantage handle "normal unpredictability." Along the way we can see what people will do with time when they have the power to control it: the book demonstrates that the

and intellectuals, and networks of financial backing that could bring right-wing ideas into public discourse.

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extraordinary events. As an example, the recent history of the political right in the United States and, more dramatically, the mainstreaming of the traditional far-right French National Front show that such transition is possible; but the specific mechanisms by which rightist organizations and movements enter and exit the broader cultural environment are largely unexplored.

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## What Time Shows Us about Inequality, Gender, and Power at Work

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"We're not going to tolerate sickness," managers told a nursing assistant in Dan Clawson and Naomi Gerstel's timely study, capturing some wishful thinking, to be sure, but also employers' typical approach to the low-wage health workers they retained (p. 145). Of course, sickness happens, as do accidents, the deaths of loved ones, vacations, doctor appointments, and other moments in which employees' non-work lives intrude on their scheduled jobs. In fact, such moments are so common that Clawson and Gerstel come to call them "normal unpredictability." *Unequal Time* documents, with some restrained outrage

*Unequal Time: Gender, Class, and Family in Employment Schedules*, by **Dan Clawson** and **Naomi Gerstel**. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2014. 324 pp. \$35.00 paper. ISBN: 9780871540140.

and, at times, dry humor, how gender and class intersect to shape the ways health care employers and workers of varying advantage handle "normal unpredictability." Along the way we can see what people will do with time when they have the power to control it: the book demonstrates that the

inequalities of time depend on shared understandings about which of our commitments are recognized, sanctioned, and visible, and which are not.

By presenting an in-depth look at schedule unpredictability, *Unequal Time* offers a crucial addition to the work literature, which has largely focused on work-time as a fixed quantity in studies of overwork, underemployment, or the 24/7 economy. Yet what if one is employed, but in a schedule that is continually changing, sometimes with very little notice? Work-hours unpredictability is likely increasing, the authors suggest, because the rise in employed married women and in the percent of single-parent households both cause a commensurate decrease in people (spouses) available to act as backup in the event of workers' (normal) emergencies. *Unequal Time* is the latest in a string of collaborative efforts by the two University of Massachusetts-Amherst sociologists, who have long worked together on care work, unions, and family issues.

Clawson and Gerstel's elegant research design included observing and interviewing four different kinds of health-care workers who vary by gender and class, as well as analyzing union contracts. Such a design allows us to see in compelling detail how doctors and nurses have more control over their work schedules than EMTs and nursing assistants, so that, for example, a nurse says diarrhea is a fail-safe reason to call in sick, even if she actually wants just a mental health day, while a nursing assistant reports that "if you've got diarrhea or vomiting, they still want you to come in," even if it puts at risk their frail or elderly patients (p. 145).

In addition to giving texture to inequality, the book treats us to a host of other powerful research findings. We learn that those who enjoy greater control over their work schedules often put that power in service of conventional gendered arrangements, so that nurses (virtually all women) are able to arrange their schedules to defer to their family priorities and the hospital becomes a "feminized institution," compelled by nurses' near-zero unemployment to jump in response to their family-caregiving demands. Doctors, mostly men, arrange their schedules to prioritize their work,

proudly declaring they manage to make it to heralded family moments like graduations and performances—a form of "public" fathering, the authors assert. Women doctors are far less sanguine, often struggling with significant family responsibilities, with less cultural and institutional support for perennial schedule hiccups. Their rhetoric of "choice," however, fails to challenge the conventional gendered configurations that periodically tie them into knots. Confessed one such doctor: "I leave the little ones guarded by the family dog" (p. 200).

Meanwhile, those with less control over schedule unpredictability found themselves enacting less conventional gendered arrangements. The EMTs were much more involved in the daily routines of childrearing like after-school pickups and handling ear infections than the (male) doctors; theirs was the everyday intimate involvement of "private fathering." In contrast, nursing assistants, mostly women, talked about work as a family, a respite, a treat—living the kind of counter-intuitive work-family reversals that Hochschild (1997) documented in *The Time Bind*. "To me at work . . . it's like a big old ice cream cone," one nursing assistant said (p. 243).

The book also contributes the palpable sense of work-time as a web, rather than simply a quantity. When one person touches the web—through a schedule change, due to a sick child or a car accident—the repercussions reverberate, as someone steps in to relieve them but first must rearrange their own configuration of care for out-of-work needs, which jiggles yet another person's web. Employers will sometimes strive to find replacements, particularly for nurses, albeit unhappily ("This is such a waste of my time," said one administrator [p. 176]), while less advantaged workers often must arrange their own swaps if they can, or, worse, are threatened with dire consequences if they make any such changes at all.

While employment rates and demographic trends shape workplace policies, the broader implications to which the book points us are largely about the reach and impact of culture, which help to extend the book's impact beyond work-family scholars to those who attend to culture, gender, or inequality:

- 1) *"Culture" as Luxury*: "Culture matters less to organizations when it comes to disadvantaged workers," Clawson and Gerstel contend (p. 266), meaning not that arrangements for low-wage workers are "without culture," but that employers don't have to listen to the cultural preferences of the EMTs and nursing assistants. We see this deafness codified in institutional expectations, as when negotiated contracts give employees more time off for the death of a spouse or child than a grandmother or a sister. The distinction provoked great outrage among the nursing assistants when they were confronted with the mismatch between the (extended) families they relied upon and the (nuclear) families these contracts expected them to have. "I need a week for my grandmother!" one nursing assistant shouted (p. 172). The interplay of structural unemployment and cultural intractability is powerfully illustrated throughout. Said one human resources staff member, for example: because "you have a bigger [labor] pool to pick from [for nursing assistants], you're not necessarily going to have the same family issues [as with nurses]" (p. 168). Such a blithe statement reveals more about whose family issues employers feel compelled to take seriously, of course, than about whether or not particular workers "have" those issues at all.
- 2) *Laws to protect workers' time are ineffectual—and in fact contribute to inequality—if not backed by cultural consensus*: The United States lags behind other developed nations in its policies around parental leave, vacation time, overtime, and other work-time provisions, but the 1993 passage of the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) was at least supposed to protect workers from being fired for absences due to caregiving or sickness, even though its mandated leave is unpaid and only applies to workers in firms of 50 employees or more. Yet in the world Clawson and Gerstel portray, the FMLA is an effective tool for the already-advantaged nurses who use it to claim indisputable leave but is essentially invisible for the nursing assistants who need it. Indeed, as *Unequal Time* records, at one particularly punitive nursing home, none of the nursing assistants they interviewed had heard of the FMLA, and all reported that they were penalized for even the first day they reported being sick and would be fired on the third callout (another nursing home was more lenient, although still in violation of the FMLA, extending a warning only on the third sick day). Additionally, one state policy, the "Small Necessities Act," was designed to allow workers a few hours off for school conferences or medical appointments; workers made no use of it and typically did not know about it. Absent a broad cultural consensus about what employers owe workers, laws served to entrench existing power differentials instead of establishing minimum standards for worker rights.
- 3) *Cultural ideas frame "normal unpredictability" as problems for individual workers to solve*: Among the nursing assistants, *Unequal Time* documents the conflict between employers who want the efficient use of cheap labor and workers who want regularly scheduled work at a living wage. Yet when reading hundreds of pages about the tailspin an ill child can cause in a work schedule—of the nursing assistant who might get fired if she calls in sick again, but who doesn't want to ask her mother to babysit because she stayed late last night, so instead has her healthy 10-year-old stay home from school to look after her sickly 8-year-old—we see not only the inequality of time. At the core of the issue—the social assumption that creates these individual problems—is the cultural precept of children-as-private-property. Just whose responsibility is it when a child is sick (or other dependents are needy, for that matter)? The answer generates all the

contortions of time and resources that *Unequal Time* documents, as well as the emotional wrangling between skeptical administrators and incensed employees and the steely sorting of workers into the accommodated and the ignored: a sick child (or a confused elderly parent, or a disabled spouse) is just one (female) worker's problem to solve, if she is not in a market position to demand workplace concessions.

*Unequal Time* is smoothly written, carefully argued, and thoroughly researched; and it offers sophisticated but clear contributions based on intersections of class and gender. The book relies heavily on interviews, which the authors generally treat with an interpretive sensitivity, noting, for instance, when a doctor responds to a question about the potential compromises to patient care posed by family life by switching from talking about himself to talking about his physician wife.

There are nonetheless some limitations to the study. Clawson and Gerstel acknowledge the relative analytical absence of race, which their own data suggest is an important omission. In one nursing home where they observed, the nursing assistants were mostly white, while at the other they were mostly people of color. This composition appeared consequential for the kind of management regime in practice, such that the white nursing home operated in a high-trust climate with a sympathetic scheduler, while management at the other facility seemed convinced that the staff were trying to shirk their work and adopted a punitive approach. Race and/or ethnicity likely shape the administration and experience of schedule unpredictability, particularly for low-wage workers. The book's discussion of these women also seems partial without taking into account existing scholarship on race/ethnicity. We know, for example, that African American and Caribbean immigrant women are more likely to work outside the home and have more reliance on extended kin (Hill 2005, Chamberlain 2003). Thus it is not just that these jobs create those kinds of families, but perhaps that those kinds of family arrangements allowed them to take these jobs in the first place.

The book's research design also led Clawson and Gerstel to underplay other important issues. Their discussion of "second jobs: predictable extra hours" misses the notion that those who can add a second job are able to do so if they have a fairly stable *first* job. The Starbucks barista featured in recent *New York Times* coverage of unpredictable work (Kantor 2014) could not have added a second job, even if she wanted to, because, like many other retail employees, she only got her work schedule three days beforehand, and it changed from week to week. Even being able to add a second job is an advantage, then, in a world of normal unpredictability.

Clawson and Gerstel also report that they were unable to observe nursing assistants with the residents in their care. On occasion, this absence matters, as when we are listening to how the nursing assistants feel about their work and some of the interview data seems a bit thin, based on honorable claims and some display work (e.g., "I love to talk with them" [p. 239]). In other sections, terrific ethnographic nuggets sprinkled throughout convey more about time than any informant's most fervent avowal; for example, when the authors observe that "moving between patients, sometimes hospitalists run up the stairs because they find the elevators too slow" (p. 42), or, in describing the chaos of the city hospital: "some patients were not waiting for rooms but for funeral arrangements" (p. 45).

Ultimately, when we close the book, we want to know: how does schedule unpredictability at work affect family and intimate life? Does the constant need to stay flexible change the tenor and stability of the commitments workers make at home, to people in their care? We know that job insecurity and job losses affect children, for example, making them less likely to believe that hard work pays off (Barling et al. 1998). What is the impact of the instability of parents' work-hours on children, and how does that intersect with inequality? Does schedule unpredictability further crowd the significance of family, amplifying the fraught symbolism of those promises that workers can actually make? The outrage of *Unequal Time* is grounded in a keen sympathy for the unsettled worker; it opens the way for



more research about what volatility at work does to the cultural practices and emotional experience of family life.

In this study, Clawson and Gerstel put schedule unpredictability on the map, helping to analyze and evaluate a crucial feature of contemporary work. *Unequal Time* investigates the intersectionality of class and gender in how people interpret and manage unstable work-hours and, along the way, raises important questions about how people and institutions use culture to impose, express, and manage inequality.

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## Roll Over Sam Gompers: Race, Class, Culture, and Revolution

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In virtually every year since 1919, American workers have either led, or were second or third, in both the absolute and relative numbers of hours lost through strikes. In 1932 there were only 840 strikes; in 1933 there were 1,700; by 1936, 2,200; by 1937, 4,740; in 1938, only 2,500; in 1941, 4,000; in both 1944 and 1945, 5,000 . . . . And as the strike wave developed the unions grew. But most important, it all occurred not *because* the older unions tried to organize industrial workers, but in spite of these unions and even against their opposition. When the crisis came, the response of the AF of L unions was to protect their own members' jobs and wages from the onslaught of millions of unorganized workers placed in the pool of the proletarians.

George Rawick (1969), *Working Class Self-Activity*, emphasis added

The working class is big, and the matrix of race, class, and culture is complicated. The postwar period of anti-colonial struggles, economic and cultural globalization, and burgeoning technologies and popular media gave rise to highly politicized artistic expressions and cultural criticism around the

*Tell Tchaikovsky the News: Rock 'n' Roll, the Labor Question, and the Musicians' Union, 1942-1968*, by **Michael James Roberts**. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014. 254 pp. \$23.95 paper. ISBN: 9780822354758.

world. From C. L. R. James and Frantz Fanon on the African Diaspora to E. P. Thompson and Raymond Williams in Britain, to Armand Mattelart and Ariel Dorfman in Latin America, ideological and cultural critique grew out of and informed radical movements. In many ways, this convergence and integration of cultural and political action gave rise to the field of cultural studies.

By the 1980s, however, the field lost most of its powerful links to anti-racist, anti-colonialist, and anti-capitalist movements around the world. Instead, practitioners wrote texts promoting theoretical achievements and institutional formations in higher education. Raymond Williams himself had warned that a difference existed between "project" and "formation" and that the institutionalization of cultural studies not only pulled the field away from action, but, by concentrating on theory and producing