

The Journey

THE WINCHESTER MULTICULTURAL NETWORK NEWSLETTER

Working for social justice goes better when you understand class cultures.

The title of an educational kit developed by Class Action.



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Happy winter, readers! We hope you will check out our website (www.wmcn.org) for news of International Connections activities, upcoming events, and other information that we normally include here. Please be sure we have your email address for notices of upcoming programs.

Exploring the Concept of the American Dream: Promoting Understanding and Respect

Does living in Winchester mean that we have achieved the “American Dream”? How have class issues impacted our experiences in Winchester?

What do we mean when we talk about “class” and how do class issues affect Winchester? This issue of the *Journey* will be devoted to an exploration of this topic which will be an ongoing theme for our Winchester in Transition programming.

What kind of Winchester do we want in the future? To be truly caring and connected as a community, we think it’s important to uncover some of the occasionally invisible causes of tensions that exist in our community. How can we bridge the differences that separate us? In her book *Missing Class*, Betsy Leondar-Wright asserts that it’s important to look at how volunteer groups work together through a class lens. Are class differences a source of conflict around decision-making in our town?

Network Community Advisor Fred Yen embarked on a “Listening Tour” this past December, which will be followed by a multi-stage conversation series about class. We welcome your participation. What kinds of changes have you seen in town that have affected your life? We want to hear from you! Just email office@wmcn.org with your name and preferred contact information and we’ll be in touch—or just send us your comments or story. We will maintain your confidentiality unless you advise otherwise. Our goal is to have honest conversations about this topic that is broad and deep.

“Sometimes I think of class as our collective, national family secret,” Felice Yeskel says in the introduction to the book *Class Lives*. “We have no shared language about class,” she says.

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“Most of us believe that the United States is a classless society, one that is basically middle class (except for a few unfortunate poor people and some lucky rich ones).” She goes on to say that “our class identity has a huge impact on every aspect of our lives: from parenting style, to how we speak, to what we dare to dream, to the likelihood we will spend time in prison, from how we spend our days to how many days we have.”

We will collectively dig into this complicated subject and invite you to join us. Some stories and questions to ponder appear below. There is also a sampling of resources to start the discussion.

What is “class?”

For definitions of “class” and “classism” we turn to a trusted organization, Class Action. Betsy Leondar-Wright, opens her book *Class Matters* with this definition:

Class is a relative status in terms of income, wealth, power, education and/or position.

According to Leondar-Wright, “Class in the US is a confusing and slippery topic. The definition that makes sense to one person may not make sense to another.” Leondar-Wright continues, “The U.S. has no hard and fast divisions between class groups. Income and wealth are both on spectrums, and most of us move a little up or down the spectrums during our lifetimes. Some people grow up in one class and live as adults in another. For immigrants, there’s another layer of confusion, as their class status in their country of origin is often different from their class status in the U.S.”

According to Class Action, “it may be useful for understanding class dynamics to cluster people” into groups. Class action lists the following groups: working class, lower middle class, professional middle class, low income or poor, and owning class. To simplify, we have listed five class categories but encourage you to go to www.classism.org for more detailed descriptions.

Ruling Class: A subset of the Owing Class who have so much wealth and power that they can lobby politicians, own media outlets, and heavily influence how we see and understand ourselves in our society.

Owning Class: Those that have substantial money to invest which yields so much extra income that they don’t have to work to pay for basic necessities.

Middle Class: Generally college-educated, salaried professionals and managers with varied assets and property ownership but not to the same extent as the Owing class.

Working Class: Those with little or no higher education, modest incomes, little to no savings, rent their apartment/home, and are employed in occupations in which they have little control in the workplace and are at the lower rung of the pay scale.

Poverty Class: A subset of the working class who chronically can’t get income sufficient to cover all their basic needs and may need to rely on public assistance.

Adapted from “Enough Curriculum” by Class Action.

Have You Been Affected by Classism?

Class affects us in many areas. Here are three big issues involving class and some questions to think about:

Childcare: Have you had to find affordable daycare so you can continue to work? Have you made the decision to stay home and been judged as “just a stay-at-home mom/dad?”

Healthcare: Have you had the loss of a job that left you without health insurance? Do you benefit from a good plan because you or your partner works at a large corporation? Do you worry about visiting the doctor because your health insurance has a high deductible, perhaps, because it’s the only plan your place of employment can afford to offer?

Education: Have you felt judged by those who went to a prestigious private college or university if you did not, or if you chose a different path than college? Have you had to talk to your teen about college affordability, financial aid, and public vs. private? Does your teen feel self-conscious when talking about what his/her college or post high school options are?

Many of us struggle with hard decisions. There are factors we cannot and should not simply take for granted. It’s important to avoid judgment when we talk about class.

The Journey

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The Journey is published three times a year and is one means that the Network uses to carry out our mission to inform, advocate, and respond.

Winchester Multicultural Network

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Heard on the Street: a few classist remarks heard around town

Although this is America, without a caste system or an ancestry-based class system, it has probably always been part of human nature to invent a way of sizing up people and classifying them according to their education, race, wealth, religion, kind of employment, ancestry, and a host of other categories. Yet, assessing a person based on these kinds of categories results in stereotyping and excluding certain individuals from our 'comfortable' circles. The following offhand remarks are real. They negatively affect those being 'sized up', and they perpetuate beliefs that may be untrue and are always unfair and/or hurtful.

- "Where did you learn to talk?"
- "You must always use my husband's title (Dr.) when you address an envelope to us."
- "Where did you go to college?"
- "Did you go to graduate school?"
- "That kid must be from the ABC house."
(upon seeing an African American teenager on the street in Winchester)
- "Do you belong to the Country Club in town?"
- "Is your family from that line of du Ponts?"
- "You aren't really Jewish, are you?"
- "Oh, do you live in the pit?" (nickname for an area in town)
- "Where do you go to church?"
- "He grew up in Roxbury, didn't he?"
- "Where does your husband work?" (the response was a dismissive: "Oh, Woburn")
- Question asked by a middle school student, after being told about a new friend her best friend had just made: "What side of town does she live on?"
- "Anything past Stop and Shop is Woburn."
- "We don't need a public swimming pool. People have their own or belong to the Boat Club."
- "They are not like us."
- "We don't want those kinds of people in our schools"
- "Where do you summer?"
- "Where did you go for February school vacation week?"

Crossword: Classism

by Steve Smith

1	2	3	4	5
6				
7				
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9				

ACROSS

1. A relative status in terms of income, wealth, power, education and/or position
6. Competitive cowboy sport
7. Pitchers
8. A dense rainforest usually having a cloud cover
9. Trapped, as a hunted animal

DOWN

1. Peak
2. Like the bottom rung of a social system
3. First name of singer Adkins
4. Work for
5. "Alas"

If we truly wish to break down barriers, create empathy, and effect social change, we must be willing to talk about class distinction, power, and wealth in an open and non-judgmental manner.

Jeanette Kolodiej

Chelsea to Winchester: Class Distinctions

by Paul Burns

Sandy Thompson asked me to write about changing class, from a start in a four-family near-tenement to living comfortably in Winchester. But it's not about changing class, it's about changing many classes: getting educated, getting "cultured," finding meaningful work I love with people I care about, and a whole lot more. From the perspective of one of the town's leading curmudgeons, now pushing seventy, I say that class change is a matrix. You start with certain attributes of different classes; on the journey you metamorphose to a bunch of interim states; and finally you settle down into a set of classes that, if you're lucky, is a set you'd choose.

My sister and I grew up poor and Jewish in Chelsea in the 1950s and early 1960s. Those were the two class distinctions that I was aware of. We always had enough to eat, though it was tuna fish casserole and macaroni & cheese at the ends of most months. We lived across the street from a corner grocery store, where the owners gave us credit until some money miraculously appeared. More than half of my clothes were hand-me-downs from my cousins. Poverty makes you aware of how you spend every dime. To this day, my first fossil thought before spending any significant sum is, how much will I have left after spending this, and how long will the remaining money last, though rationally, I know there will always be plenty.

My friends were Jewish and Catholic (Italian and Polish mostly, some Irish kids later), one Protestant (the only one I knew until college). Our holidays were different, and we didn't celebrate them together until late in high school. (As the father of one of my pals said, 'Hey, boy-o, Christmas is for everybody!') This religious division became a major social and cultural class division. Dating across these lines was a major taboo. How provincial and narrow it all seems now.

My sister and I were the only "divorced" kids I knew. My father left when I was eight; he divorced my mother six years later. I knew other kids whose fathers were simply gone with no divorce. In retrospect, it was probably because they were Catholic. The parents of my friends treated me a little bit differently; I was invited for supper a helluva lot more often than my other friends were. It might have been that they felt sorry for me, social affirmative action for the poor divorced kid.

Two closely related classes were (1) being smart, and (2) being perceived as being smart. We were tracked academically from second grade through the end of high school. I was always in the highest track (where the best and most demanding teachers were) and always did

well in school. These classes made and continue to make a huge difference in my life.

College changed a lot of things, but not everything. At MIT with a generous scholarship, where fraternities house one-third of the undergraduates, I remember vividly being rushed at one house that I liked a lot, and then, abruptly, being steered to a room with four other freshmen, one of whom was from New York City, the three others clearly of Indian or Pakistani extraction. (The movie *Animal House* has a striking, nearly identical scene.) The fraternity rush chairman, with whom I'd gotten along splendidly, asked me to take a walk outside on Bay State Road in Kenmore Square; he asked me if I were Jewish, based on my name. I said yes, and he said, "Look, we have a problem; our national charter has a white-Christian-only membership clause. We're trying to get that changed, but if we accepted you, we'd lose our charter, and the financial backing of the national." He then asked me what other fraternities I was interested in, and he knew immediately which ones would be off-limits and where not to waste my time. Well, that's all changed now.

I finally got a great schooling, as well as a terrific education, not without significant pain. I learned how to read good literature, to analyze and absorb great ideas; music; physics; how to invent and make ideas work, how to work with others, how to manage a program, to have the easy confidence and self-awareness that comes from the positive experience of being judged only on what I do and how I do it. The class divisions have all fallen away, at least for me, by virtue of rigorous education and a society that was willing to overlook all those early class differences. I wish that it were so for others. And my five best friends? Jewish (the same guy from 60 years ago), Catholic, atheist/agnostic, a possible Presbyterian, and a deeply religious Mormon; teacher, architect/engineer, librarian, lawyer, journalist. My only problem? The Mormon won't go out for a beer.

An American Dream Story

by Marianne DiBlasi

My father lived what we called, "The American Dream". His father died when he was 12 years old during the Great Depression. His mother raised five children as a single mom during this challenging time. As a young man, my father and his brother rented property in Boston to open a gas station and general auto repair shop so they could help provide for the family. They rode the subway back and forth to Revere, carrying their tools with them. Their hands were so cold, they were on the edge of getting frostbite. The day my father and uncle were able to build a shed to store their tools overnight was an enormous relief.

In his late twenties, my parents got married. They soon began a family and moved to a tiny two-bedroom house in Medford. I was their third child. On the day my mother went into labor with me, my father was at the lawyer's office filing for bankruptcy because the business was not earning enough money. I was born with a physical disability and was sent to Children's Hospital at five days old for medical treatment. Because of my parents' financial situation, they did not even have health insurance to pay for the medical bills. My parents were terrified and my father knew he had to do something bold to provide for his family. My father and uncle made the risky decision to retrain themselves and specialize in transmission repair. The risk paid off!

Within seven years, my parents were able to buy land in Winchester and build a 5-bedroom house in a new housing development. My father was incredibly proud that he was able to move his family of four children, with another one on the way, to a lovely suburban neighborhood in a town where his children would receive a top quality education. My father was living the American Dream of achieving success and prosperity through hard work, determination, and initiative.

About ten years after we moved to Winchester, my father's idea of living the American Dream was threatened. The town of Winchester proposed building low and middle-income housing in the open land across the street. My father was horrified at the possibility that this housing would bring in a lower class of people to the neighborhood and decrease our property value. He fought the proposal with an immense amount of energy and determination and the low to middle-income housing was not built.

Within a few years, houses were built on that land with the condition they could not cost less than one million dollars. We had gone from one extreme housing situation to the other. The families who moved in never connected

with people on our side of the street. I wonder if they thought we were of a lower class compared to them.

As I reflect back on this time in my family's history, I wish I had asked my father why he was so determined not to have people with low-to middle-incomes move into the neighborhood. After all, wasn't it only a few years earlier when my family was in this income category? My father was a hardworking man who wanted a better life for his family, just like the people who would have moved into the proposed housing. Perhaps there was a missed opportunity for my father to extend his hand to an up-and-coming neighbor and help him to be more successful and prosperous.

My hope for a new, revised version of the American Dream is that when someone is fortunate enough to be successful and prosperous, they share the wealth by reaching out to help the next generation achieve their hopes and dreams. That would be a beautiful world.

The Old Neighborhood Remembered

from someone who grew up in Winchester

The Plains refers to the old Italian neighborhood that was on the northeast side of town, the heart of it in the area of Florence Street, Olive Street, and Columbus Road. It extended all the way south to where the Winchester High School is today, north to the Muraco School, and west to the railroad tracks. Back in the day, you would have had a hard time finding a family living there without a vowel on the end of the surname, except perhaps for my father's family and a few others. The neighborhood had a baseball team that called themselves the "Millionaires," an ironic play on the word because it was the very poor side of town. My dad played on the Millionaires as did a few of his brothers when they were young. They had a great deal of pride, and always looked forward to beating the 'wealthier' teams in Winchester and other towns. I used to go to the reunions with my dad, usually held at the Sons of Italy on Swanton St.

Nowadays it is fashionable to talk about race or gender; the uncool subject is class. It's the subject that makes us all tense, nervous, and uncertain about where we stand.

Bell Hooks

Class-Themed Films Reviewed by Mindy Arbo

Get On The Bus, 1996, 120 mins., R

Spike Lee, one of the great social chroniclers of our time, directs this set piece about a bus of individual black men, each with his own class background and motivation, on their way to D.C. to take part in the Million Man March.

Pride and Prejudice, 2005, 129 mins., PG

All of Jane Austen's books are imbued with an obsession with Class, in all its subtle and obvious manifestations, as it separates and predetermines the ebb and flow of current social relations and future lives in the countryside of 19th century England.

Small Time Crooks, 2000, 94 mins., PG

Woody Allen skewers "low lifes" and "blue bloods" alike, as a hapless loser and his wife accidentally strike it rich and grow apart as she aspires to a 'life of class'. Everyone's fair game in this one!

Black and White, 1999, 98 mins., R

Loose, inspired and inspiring, this oft-neglected gem depicts a group of white kids from the privileged Upper East Side, and their dangerous fascination with the Black hip-hop lifestyle. With common themes of irrational envy, mixed motives, and confused morals, it features star turns by Robert Downey Jr., Wu-Tang, Brooke Shields, and Mike Tyson.

Cold Comfort Farm, 95 mins., PG

A kooky nod to Jane Austen's impossibly plucky Emma, transported to the flapper era, where she takes on a rough rural English farm family full of eccentrics. With tongue firmly in cheek, the author depicts our heroine's solutions for all concerned, including some hapless landed gentry.

Good Will Hunting, 1997, 126 mins., R

A young street-tough genius discovers the different faces of acceptance, love, respect and reward but must decide which to trust and which to follow, learning that a willingness to risk is his only route through them.

The Great Gatsby, 2013, 123 mins., PG13

A classic film about the American Dream. Issues of Class and Love drive everything from the settings, to the

protagonists, to the plot and action. A poor boy gains wealth to win back the rich girl he has always loved.

The Fighter, 2013, 143 mins., PG13

Our own Mark Wahlberg directs an incisive, relentless family drama about a working class family in Lowell and the loud angry rift that develops when one of them seeks to choose his own separate path. Screenplay, acting, set design and pacing are jaw-droppingly realistic.

Amreeka, 2009, 96 mins., PG13

A feisty educated Palestinian divorcee moves with her teenage son to greener pastures in Amreeka (Arabic for America), where she joins the crowded suburban household of her successful upper middle-class relatives. But the winds of Nationalism springing from 9/11 soon affect all their lives. Our heroine's positive energy is put to many a demeaning test, and we suffer along with her, always rooting for the happiness she deserves.

The Women on the Sixth Floor, 2011, 106 mins., NR

A charming French comedy set in '60's Paris that contrasts a reserved and joyless middle-aged patrician couple with the vivacious Spanish domestics who live in the servants' quarters on their 6th floor. The delightful Fabrice Lucchini is the fifth generation stockbroker who "crosses the border" emotionally and socially as he discovers his better nature and changes the lives of those around him.

Other Films and Documentaries with the theme of class

Compiled by Jeanette Kolodziej

**Films: Drama, unless otherwise noted.
U.S. and foreign.)**

Elysium, 2013 (Sci-Fi), 97 mins., R

Snowpiercer, 2013 (Sci-Fi), 126 mins., R

Jumping the Broom, 2011 (Comedy), 107 mins, PG13

Les Miserables (Musical Drama), 2013, 158 mins., PG13

My Piece of the Pie, 2011 (France), 100 mins., NR

My Left Foot, 1989 (UK/Ireland), 103 mins., R

- Days of Heaven*, 1978, 95 mins., PG
- Room at the Top*, 1959, 1118 mins.
- 12 Angry Men*, 1957, 95 mins.
- Mrs. Brown*, 1997, 103 mins., PG
- The Outsiders*, 1983, 91 mins., PG
- Gosford Park*, 2001, 137 mins., R
- A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, 1945, 128 mins. PG
- La Nana*, 2008 (Chile), 117 mins., NR
- Elena*, 2012 (Russian), 109 mins., NR
- High Hopes*, 1989 (Comedy/Satire UK), 110 mins., PG
- Billy Elliot*, 2000 (Comedy/Drama, UK), 111 mins., R
- Educating Rita*, 1983 (Romantic Comedy, UK), 110 mins., PG
- La Grande Illusion*, 1937 (France, WWI), 111 mins.

Note: We haven't mentioned any T.V. series here, but it's worth noting the popularity of the series *Downton Abbey*.

Other Resources:

Excellent resource is UC Berkeley's Media Resource Center:

<http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/MRC/socialclass.html>

From Class Action

http://www.classism.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/resources_film.pdf

Documentaries:

American Dream, 2013, PBS
<http://www.pbs.org/pov/americanpromise/film-description/>

Winner, U.S. Documentary Special Jury Award, 2013 Sundance Film Festival. A co-production of Rada Film Group, ITVS and POV's Diverse Voices Project, with funding provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB).

People Like Us, 2001, PBS
<http://www.pbs.org/show/people-us/>

Class Dismissed: How TV Frames the Working Class, 2005. An award-winning documentary that breaks important new ground in exploring the ways in which race, gender, and sexuality intersect with class.

Organizations:

Class Action (www.classism.org) is a national nonprofit founded in 2004. Class Action inspires action to end classism by offering interactive trainings, workshops, presentations, organizational consulting, and public education.

Resource Generation (www.resourcegeneration.org) is a national non-profit organization that supports and challenges young people with wealth to explore how their financial resources relate to social justice and and provide tools for them to take action.

United for a Fair Economy (www.faireconomy.org) supports social movements working for a resilient, sustainable and equitable economy

Books

Below is a small sampling of books that focus on class issues. We have noted the publication dates as some are new and some much older. All books are available to peruse or borrow at the Network office, 2A Winchester Place.

Classified: How to Stop Hiding Your Privilege and Use It For Social Change by Karen Pittelman and Resource Generation (2005)

Class: A Guide Through the American Status System by Paul Fussell (1992)

Class Lives: Stories From Across our Economic Divide edited by Chuck Collins, Jennifer Ladd, Maynard Seider, and Felice Yeskel (2014)

Missing Class: Strengthening Social Movement Groups by Seeing Class Cultures by Betsy Leondar-Wright (2014)

Limbo: Blue-Collar Roots, White-Collar Dreams by Alfred Lubrano (2004)

The Power of the Past: Understanding Cross-Class Marriages by Jessi Streib (2015)

Where We Stand: Class Matters by Bell Hooks (2000)

Answer to
 Crossword
 (page 3)

1	C	2	L	3	A	4	S	5	S
6	R	O	D	E	O				
7	E	W	E	R	S				
8	S	E	L	V	A				
9	T	R	E	E	D				

Growing Up Black in Winchester

Although Doug Cromwell was born in Cambridge, his father moved the family to Winchester and bought the Harvard Street house once owned by Doug's grandmother, who had purchased it as a rental. Doug and his sister Carol attended the Washington School, then an elementary school on Highland Avenue. As he grew up in his old Italian and Black neighborhood, Doug doesn't recall experiencing racism or any other classism. Of the 12 to 15 families on Harvard Street, he remembers, there were seven Black families. Even then, there was an awareness of class distinctions. "As a kid, I knew that if you lived on the West side of town, you were rich."

After Doug's parents divorced, his mother moved to Cambridge. When she became ill, Doug and Carol moved back to Winchester to live with their father in the Harvard Street house. After Doug and Carol's paternal grandparents died, Doug's father bought a home on Irving Street, where he took care of his uncle, who was developmentally disabled.

In 1983, Doug's father passed away, and Doug moved his own family from Haverhill to the house on Irving

Street in order to care for his uncle. Of this time, Doug remembers, "When my own kids started school, it was different. Maybe it was that my awareness as an adult was different, but there was more separation. I was a soccer coach, and we saw people because of our children and sports; however, we didn't interact much." Even so, Doug coached soccer for 11 years and remembers being close to one wealthy family who lived on the West side. He believes this was because of their soccer connection.

Doug notes, "As a girl, my daughter, now 30, experienced class issues more than her older brother did. In the high school, the girls tended to hang in cliques based on their class and wealth, and she often felt snubbed. Maybe it's harder for girls." Nevertheless, Doug says that he has seen "positive changes in Winchester—incredible changes, especially around the fire and police departments." In the past, Doug recalls being stopped a number of times by police, which he considers profiling, and his son had similar experiences.

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