

## **William Degenaro: Rhetorics Of Social Class**

Prof. Bill DeGenaro

### **Course Texts:**

James Arnt Aune, *Rhetoric and Marxism*

Julie Lindquist, *A Place to Stand: Politics and Persuasion in a Working-Class Bar*

Sherry Lee Linkon, ed., *Teaching Working Class*

Georg Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*

Mike Rose, *The Mind at Work: Valuing the Intelligence of the American Worker*

J. Elspeth Stuckey, *The Violence of Literacy*

Michael Zweig, *The Working Class Majority: America's Best Kept Secret*

### **Class Matters:**

Though the meaning and impact of class remains hotly contested, "social class" denotes a meaningful identity marker. Class refers at times to an economic category (one might claim membership in the mythic "middle class" due to, say, her \$45,000 annual salary) and at times to a cultural affiliation (another person calls himself "working class" because of his lifestyle and leisure-time pursuits) and at times to an extension of occupation (the individual who self-describes as a "professional" because she is an attorney with autonomy and agency in the workplace). Of course these categories overlap and blur.

Cultural mythology in the U.S. suggests that class is largely non-existent or irrelevant or *strictly a private matter*. Why bother talking about class in a land of equal opportunity and social mobility? Popular media rarely acknowledges the diversity of social classes (except in voyeuristic news reports about the extremely poor and entertainment representations of the extremely rich) or the distinct nature of particular classes (except to draw caricatures of archetypes like the working-class bigot).

Yet sociologists tell us that class matters a great deal, affecting in fundamental ways our lifestyles, our opportunities, our quality of life, the quantity and quality of our education, our healthfulness, even our longevity and mortality. So we all ought to think about class.

### **Class and Rhetoric/Composition**

Class should matter a great deal to those of us who are students of rhetoric. Scholars of rhetoric have long been concerned with how language and other symbolic systems might be used purposefully in the material world. As a burgeoning academic field, rhetoric and composition canonized a mythic "rhetorical tradition" of writers, teachers, and thinkers who attempted to articulate the dynamic uses of oral and literate behaviors. Since this tradition neglected various

marginalized groups and ideologies, rhetoricians have begun to seek out other rhetorical traditions and have changed "rhetoric" to "rhetorics" in order to stress pluralism. Scholars interested in issues of gender and sexuality have identified feminist and queer rhetorics. Race-conscious scholars in the field, similarly, have mapped out complex rhetorics of race. And turning to theories of class and mass culture as well as "alternative" rhetorical traditions, some in the field have begun to consider rhetorics of social class.

Teachers and practitioners engaged in domains that facilitate class consciousness have long been concerned with class. Teaching at an open-access institution or two-year college, for example, involves thinking about how best to serve working-class students. Carrying out ethnographic or action research in diverse locales involves consideration of how class interacts with other socially constructed markers to constitute identity. Finally, cultural critics and scholars of cultural and mass media studies draw on critical theories of class to help them understand concepts as fundamental as ideology and hegemony.

In this class, we will consider intersections of theories of class and theories of rhetoric, reading together theorists like James Arnt Aune, Basil Bernstein, Pierre Bourdieu, George Lukacs, and Theodor Adorno. We will also think about social class in the contexts of the workplace, the community, the college campus, and the classroom. We will consider literacy through a class-conscious lens, reading scholars such as Mike Rose and Elspeth Stuckey. With the help of writers like Lynn Bloom, Marc Bousquet, Sharon Crowley, Donald Lazere, and Richard Ohmann, we will analyze the composition classroom as a site of class conflict. And aided by emerging thinkers Lew Caccia and Julie Lindquist—who will both address our class this term—we will think about how we might intervene in broader community contexts as class-conscious rhetoricians.

### **Requirements:**

#### *Attendance & Participation:*

Regular attendance and engaged participation are required. As with most graduate courses, rigorous discussion of readings, course concepts, and your own projects comprise the heart of English 733. It is important that we read generously—seeking to understand purpose, audience, and context—all the while critiquing guiding assumptions, methods, and analyses.

*Responsibilities to Peers:* Read each other's work and make substantive and timely comments. You will share virtually everything you write this term, so be accountable to one another and help each other as thinkers, readers, and writers.

#### *Written Work:*

- Complete a total of three reader-response papers of two-to-three pages each. We will use these responses as the basis for class discussion. Reader

responses should offer a brief summary of the reading, respond critically to the ideas presented in the text, and pose questions about the text you would like the class to discuss. These responses need not be formal essays. They should help focus and deepen class discussions by helping us to understand, critique, or connect readings. Know that the genre is open-ended, though, and you may argue against a reading, explain how the reading extends or challenges an idea from a previous reading or class discussion, or offer a cumulative response to several readings. On weeks when you have a reader-response due, post your response to our blackboard site by Monday at Noon. You should also print out a copy to bring to class. All members of the class should read your response before coming to class and use your response as an in-road for thinking about the reading. To get to blackboard, go to My Miami ([mymiami.muohio.edu](http://mymiami.muohio.edu)), log in, and then click on "blackboard." Your responses should be posted in the "assignments" folder.

- Write a research proposal of three-five pages that lays out an idea for your seminar paper. The proposal should define the issue, problem, question, or controversy that you wish to address in your paper. You should also articulate a tentative line of argument that your paper will follow, explaining what kind of primary and secondary sources you will utilize in the paper. Begin in the proposal to situate your paper within current scholarship in the field. Finally, explain who specifically your audience will be for the paper, why you chose that audience, and in what venue you will attempt to publish the paper. We will workshop drafts of your proposals in class on February 9, so please bring five copies on that day. Final drafts of proposals will be due on February 16.
- Write multiple drafts of a seminar paper, geared toward publication in one of our field's leading journals. Because our field is interdisciplinary and because the critical study of social class draws on multiple fields, you have wide latitude in choosing a paper topic. All I ask is that you explore a topic related to the rhetorics of class. You may write about an historical figure, tradition, or cultural moment from a rhetorical standpoint. You may explore a theoretical question from any number of perspectives. You might explore a teaching question or teaching problem through the lens of a particular class theory. You might write about concerns associated with teaching students from a particular social class. You might engage in ideological or institutional critique. You might explore the art and aesthetics of class. You may choose to engage with popular culture or the mass media to analyze representations of social class. Feel free to draw on our readings or the texts listed on the supplemental bibliography I have provided. Begin thinking about potential topics immediately. Use me and your classmates as sounding boards during class. Finally, know that I am more than happy to listen to your ideas and provide feedback early in the process. We will workshop drafts of your papers during the final three weeks of class. A final draft is due at our final meeting-celebration, which will be held at my home during finals week. Day,

time, and menu tba. At this last meeting, I will ask you to give a short (five-ten minutes or so) presentation of your paper.

**Evaluation:**

Reader-Responses 25%  
Research Proposal 25%  
Seminar Paper 50%

**Schedule:**

January 12 Introductions

*Aesthetics & Elitism: Theories of Class Part I*

January 19 Read Bourdieu, "The Aristocracy of Culture"  
Beech, "Redneck and Hillbilly Discourse..."

January 26 Read Hebdidge, from *Subculture*  
Benjamin, "Author as Producer"  
Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society"  
LeBesco, "Citizen Profane..."

*Marxism: Theories of Class Part II*

February 2 Read Marx, from *German Ideology*  
February 9 Read Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness*("Preface,"  
"What is Orthodox Marxism," "Class Consciousness," and  
"Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat")

February 16 Read Aune, *Rhetoric and Marxism*  
*Rhetorics of the Workplace*

February 23 Read Caccia, "Workplace Risk Communication..."  
Rose, *The Mind at Work*, pp. 1-99  
Guest Lecture: Lew Caccia, Kent State University

March 2 Read Rose, *The Mind at Work*, pp. 100-216

March 9 Read Zweig, *The Working-Class Majority*

*Social Class and Literacy*

March 23 Read Stuckey, *The Violence of Literacy*  
Bernstein, "Social Class, Language and Socialization"  
Bernstein, "Class and Pedagogies"

O'Dair, "Class Work"

March 30 Read Bloom, "Freshman Composition as Middle-Class..."  
Soliday, "Class Dismissed"

Crowley, "The Bourgeois Subject..."  
Ohmann, "Advanced Placement..."  
Seitz, "Making Work Visible"

*Critiquing Our Own Work: Class, Classroom & Community*

April 6                      Read   Lazere, "Class Conflict"  
Zebroski, "The English Department..."  
Harris, "Meet the New Boss..."  
Beech and Lindquist, "The Work Before Us..."  
Bousquet, "Tenured Bosses"  
Bousquet, "The Rhetoric of the Job Market"

April 13                      Read   Lindquist, "Class Affects..."  
Linkon, *Teaching Working Class* ("Working-Class  
Students," pp. 15-141)  
Workshop drafts of seminar papers

April 20                      Read   Lindquist, *A Place to Stand*  
Guest Speaker: Julie Lindquist, Michigan State University  
Workshop drafts of seminar papers  
April 27                      Wrap up discussions  
Workshop drafts of seminar papers

Finals week                      Meet at my place for end-of-term celebration for food and mini-  
presentations of your papers

Supplemental Readings:

Adorno, Theodor W. "Cultural Criticism and Society." *Prisms*. Trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber. Cambridge: MIT P, 1967. 19-34.  
Beech, Jennifer. "Redneck and Hillbilly Discourse in the Writing Classroom: Classifying Critical Pedagogies of Whiteness." *College English* 67 (2004): 172-186.  
-- and Julie Lindquist. "The Work Before Us: Attending to English Departments' Poor Relations." *Pedagogy* 4 (2004): 171-189.  
Benjamin, Walter. "The Author as Producer." *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*. Eds. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt. New York: Continuum, 1994. 254-269.  
Bernstein, Basil. "Class and Pedagogies: Visible and Invisible." *Education: Culture, Economy, and Society*. Ed. A.H. Halsey et al. New York: Oxford UP, 1997. 59-79.  
--. "Social Class, Language, and Socialization." *The Routledge Language and Cultural Theory Reader*. Ed. Lucy Burke, Tony Crowley, and Alan Girvin. New York: Routledge, 2000. 448-455.  
Bloom, Lynn Z. "Freshman Composition As A Middle-Class Enterprise." *College English* 58 (1996): 654-675.

- Bourdieu, Pierre. "The Aristocracy of Culture." *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Trans. Richard Nice. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1984. 11-63.
- Bousquet, Marc. "The Rhetoric of the 'Job Market' and the Reality of the Academic Labor System." *College English* 66 (2003): 207-228.
- . "Tenured Bosses and Disposable Teachers." *The Minnesota Review* 58-60 (2003): 231-240.
- Caccia, Lew. "Workplace Risk Communication: A Look at Literate Practices within Rhetorical Frameworks." Unpublished ms. 22 pp.
- Crowley, Sharon. "The Bourgeois Subject and the Demise of Rhetorical Education." *Composition in the University*. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 1998. 30-45.
- Harris, Joseph. "Meet the New Boss, Same as the Old Boss: Class Consciousness in Composition." *CCC* 52 (2000): 43-68.
- Hebdidge, Dick. excerpted from *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. New York: Routledge, 1979. 1-29.
- Lazere, Donald. "Class Conflict in the English Profession." *Coming to Class: Pedagogy and the Social Class of Teachers*. Ed. Alan Shepard, John McMillan, and Gary Tate. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook and Heinemann, 1998. 79-93.
- LeBesco, Kathleen. "Citizen Profane: Consumerism, Class, Race, and Body." *Revolting Bodies: The Struggle to Redefine Fat Identity*. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 2004. 54-64.
- Lindquist, Julie. "Class Affects, Classroom Affectations: Working through the Paradoxes of Strategic Empathy." *College English* 67 (2004): 187-209.
- Marx, Karl. excerpted from *The German Ideology*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 1994. 33-104.
- O'Dair, Sharon. "Class Work: Site of Egalitarian Activism or Site of Embourgeoisement?" *College English* 65 (2003): 595-606.
- Ohmann, Richard. "Advanced Placement on the Ladder of Success." *English in America: A Radical View of the Profession*. Hanover, NH: Weleyn UP, 1976. 51-65.
- Seitz, David. "Making Work Visible." *College English* 67 (2004): 210-221.
- Soliday, Mary. "Class Dismissed." *College English* 61 (1999): 731-741.
- Zebroski, James Thomas. "The English Department and Social Class: Resisting Writing." *The Right to Literacy*. Ed. Andrea A. Lunsford, Helene Moglen, and James Slevin. New York: MLA, 1990. 81-87.