



Learning to Labor in New Times

Edited by
Nadine Dolby and Greg Dimitriadis
with Paul Willis

Learning to Labor in New Times

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Foreword

STANLEY ARONOWITZ

When I first read Paul Willis's *Learning to Labor* my first response was: Finally, someone has addressed schooling outcomes for working-class kids not as an instance of failure or victimhood. Instead Willis shows that working-class kids more or less consciously reject the cultural and political implications of buying into the curriculum and accepting school authority. In standard sociological terms, far from being labeled as "losers," the lads are exercising "agency" by choosing to "fail." I wrote the preface to the American edition of the book in these terms. My preface was, to say the least, incomplete. As several articles in this collection demonstrate *Learning to Labor* is suggestive in several additional dimensions. Because industrial labor has traditionally been associated with "manly" endeavor and intellectual labor has a distinctly feminine connotation, the "lads'" rebellion against school authority, in the first place against the classroom teacher, is an assertion of masculinity. As Willis himself points out, this gendered gesture mediates the lads' rebellion because it helps reproduce male superiority within gender relations as well as reproducing class relations.

Subsequently others, including myself, have situated Willis's superb ethnography in its historicity. Their entrance into the factory to which the lads gleefully escape after leaving school reproduces the class structure, but also reproduces the oppositional working-class culture inherited from their families, neighborhoods, and peers. Although in a wider context forms of working-class association are considered "sub" cultures, this does not proceed from a presupposition of inferiority to the dominant middle-class aspirations of social climbing and consumerism. In fact, the bonds of (male) class solidarity are forged on the shop floor as well as at the sites of working-class public spheres: the pub, the union hall, and noninstitutional sites such as the street corner. But the factory jobs that were still available in the early 1970s, when Willis engaged the lads, are now gone not only from the Midlands and from Hammertown—the city that is the sight of his study—but from many major industrial cities in Britain, continental Western Europe, and the United States. As subsequent studies of working-class life in cities demonstrate (notably Jay McLeod's *Aint No Makin' It* and William Julius Wilson's *When Work Disappears*, both about Chicago, among many others including my own analysis, with William DiFazio, *The Jobless Future*), those who leave school without acquiring a credential are almost invariably consigned to low-paying service jobs or long-term, sometimes permanent unemployment. And in many cities of the United States where the working class is composed mainly of Blacks, Latinos, and Asians, despite shrinking job opportunities, the patterns Willis discerns generally hold. Contrary to some observers like Moynihan and Glazer, Wilson, and anthropologists such as Oscar Lewis, it is not the "culture of poverty" that leads to and derives from the formation of an "underclass" of

permanently unemployed people; casual and contingent work is the product of a new labor market regime of Global Capitalism.

The historicity of Willis's great ethnography consists in its location in time and space. Since the late 1970s the political economy of global capitalism has radically altered conditions of life. The decentralization of production to all corners of the planet's geography has led to the disappearance of good jobs in the metropolises of the United States and other industrially developed societies, not only in low- and intermediate-technology industries, but also in high-tech sectors. The tale of the losses in textiles, garments, steel, and other major production industries is by now a commonplace. But in the last few years the easy assumption that services on the one hand and computers on the other would do more than take up the slack has suffered crushing repudiation. In 2003 no significant economic sector has eluded massive reorganizations and steep job losses, but high-tech is no exception. After an explosion of hard- and software computer and computer-mediated manufacturing from the 1960s to the 1990s and the concomitant dot.com, boom both of which created employment for low-, moderate-, and fairly high-paid work, the turn of the 21st century has witnessed a pronounced bust. Chip makers have laid off low-paid Latino women in Silicon Valley just as software firms have shed computer programmers and engineers in the Microsoft Seattle empire and Silicon Alley in Manhattan. Recession tells only part of the story. Some of the best jobs have migrated to India and China, where, owing to good technical and scientific universities, engineers and computer scientists and technicians have proven able to design world-class equipment and software and earn a tenth of the salaries of their United States counterparts.

But overriding these considerations, the new regimes of computer-mediated industrial and service production—and the inability of labor unions to protect wages and benefits—have accelerated productivity, which far exceeds the economic growth rate, revealing the purpose of technological change: to reduce labor costs. Even without recession and job migration over time, cybernetic technologies reduce factory and service jobs absolutely and reduce them relative to the expansion of the labor force, even in growth periods. In the years between 2000 and 2003, even as the labor force grew by 3 percent the United States lost almost 3 million jobs, mostly in manufacturing, but increasingly in the services, including retail and wholesale trades and especially in financial services.

Having said this, working-class kids still drop out of school at alarming rates, while many others grimly hang in because they are well aware that there is no alternative to obtaining a credential of some sort, even if the credential carries no specific occupational qualifications. On the other hand, American colleges, technical institutes, and universities have, perhaps unwittingly, contributed to depressed salaries for credentialed computer workers by overproducing them in relation to the sagging job market. The hype of the 1990s—that computers would lead to almost infinite job and income opportunities—brought hundreds of thousands of students into a field that produced tens of thousands of good jobs. Armed with their associate and bachelor's degrees, many qualified computer technicians and programmers were delivered to a job market that offered only a small number of real jobs, but much part-time, contingent, and temporary work that usually carried no health benefits. For young people the first years of the new century have been disastrous. Many ended up waiting tables, working as construction laborers at nonunion

sites, vainly trying sales, or entering rapidly declining financial services sector as licensed brokers, but with few clients. And others simply withdrew from the labor force and took work in the underground or informal economy.

The new working-class jobs—coded as forms of “professional” labor—bring with them neither good wages and benefits, nor do they reproduce working-class culture. As the first generation to have earned a postsecondary credential, many working-class kids have been inducted into the value systems and expectations of the salaried middle class, but without acquiring the accoutrements. Class identities have become ambiguous. Even as they seek professional and technical jobs, many retain their ties with the neighborhood and with their families because they have learned that the academic promises for social mobility have proven to be ephemeral. Yet, with some exceptions, neither the family nor the neighborhood provides a secure anchor missing in their work situations. Economic dislocation has pulled many families apart as siblings, frustrated with the dearth of jobs in their hometowns, move away in search of a better future, leaving parents and grandparents behind. And in the major cities of New York, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, gentrification has driven millions from their once scorned ghetto and slum communities that nevertheless provided a sense of place for the Black and Latino working poor and the unemployed. What from outside appeared as ravaged neighborhoods were—and remain for many of their inhabitants—a haven in the heartless world, impoverished conditions notwithstanding.

Contemporary youth are frequently caught between still potent, although disintegrating, social networks of their childhood and youth and the stark reality that there are no good working-class jobs. Even as the struggle over loyalties never abates while they remain skeptical about the chances for good jobs, let alone genuine social mobility, school is perceived by a significant fraction of them as a necessary option. Needless to say, many working-class kids, Black, Latino, and white drop out of college because elementary and high schools have not prepared them, in either literacy or numeracy terms, for technical and scientific occupations much less the liberal arts.

Students who drop out of high school and community and senior colleges do not disappear from the face of the earth. Some, especially women, find full-time subprofessional or administrative jobs in government or in the health and education sectors. They work in so-called “caring” occupations such as nonprofessional nursing, dietary departments of schools and hospitals, and in commercial and residential building maintenance. These are now the “good” working-class jobs because they are usually unionized, provide health benefits, and are relatively protected from layoffs.

But most of them constitute the working poor. Contrary to ordinary belief, most work full-time for wages that are below the bogus official poverty line. They are the customers of the thousands of food pantries and kitchens because their meager take-home pay needs to be reserved for rent, which has skyrocketed almost everywhere in the Northeast and on the West Coast as well as in some cities of the heartland. Typically they live at home with their parent(s), relatives, and siblings. If they are fortunate to live in public housing, living conditions, although crowded, are somewhat better than in the tenements that, as everyone knows, were built to be slums. Or four or five take an apartment in order to pay the rent. And of course a certain number of dropouts enter the informal economy. They work off the books for subminimum wages or engage in illegal trade, mostly of drugs,

and a few do become petty thieves.

In every state the period of deindustrialization corresponds to the burgeoning prison systems, which today house more than 2 million residents, the highest number and percentage of the population of any industrial country. Most are incarcerated for victimless crimes such as drug use and drug dealing and, in many states, are obliged to serve prolonged mandatory sentences. Prison culture may be brutal but it is the culture of the oppressed. For young Black and Latino men, often the consequence of their antiauthoritarian revolt is to find themselves, sooner or later, in the so-called criminal “justice” system, either as inmates, parolees, or probationers. According to some students of the process, a third of all Black men between 16 and 25 years old can expect to be within the purview of the criminal justice system sometime in their adolescent or adult lives.

Prisons are awful places, but, like families, neighborhoods, and peer groups, they are, perhaps, more important educational sites than the schools. For what Paul Willis has taught us—and this may be the most important contribution of *Learning to Labor*—is that schools are in constant competition for the hearts and minds of youth with powerful, oppositional cultural sites that regard schooling from an adversarial perspective. That in the context of urbanism the current form of these cultures is often coded in racial rather than class terms does not erase the fact that for the overwhelming majority of Blacks, Latinos, and Asians, segregation and economic deprivation are both class and race issues. More to the point, the constellation of circumstances—jobs or the lack thereof, segregated neighborhoods, common cohabitation in prisons, social relationships that form communities of class/race solidarity—reproduces an oppositional, if not an explicitly working-class culture, the representations of which in the media, rap music, and other popular forms are as ubiquitous as they are misapprehended by the dominant social formations.

CHAPTER 1

Learning to Labor in New Times

An Introduction

NADINE DOLBY AND GREG DIMITRIADIS

This book grew out of two panels at the 2002 annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association that honored the 25th anniversary of the U.S. publication of *Learning to Labor*, and the indispensable contribution of Paul Willis to educational research worldwide. Willis's many contributions during his (still flourishing) career speak to the importance of everyday worlds and lives, and to his commitment to ensuring that youth's realities—of school, of work, of home, of community, and of media culture—are consistently at the forefront of our agendas for research, and for political change. From the seminal *Learning to Labor*, to his more recent work on a major policy document, *The Youth Review*, Willis repeatedly insists that what youth *do* is important: they function as political actors, and they are not simply dupes of a wholly reproductive class system.

Several words continually reappear in the copious amounts of literature devoted to the study and critique of Willis's work over the past quarter century: *class*, *education*, and *ethnography*. An exploration of these three connected aspects of his writing and research structures this volume's engagement with his work. Such an emphasis is particularly appropriate at this moment, as all three terms are undergoing profound, substantive changes that reconfigure the way that educational researchers will approach their work in this century. First, as we discuss throughout this introduction and the book, "class"—as an explanatory category and a site of identification—is reemerging as a key locus of academic inquiry.¹ Second, "education" as a public good is under threat globally, as corporate practices and privatization are increasingly accepted as the norm (Apple, 2001; Klein, 2000; Stromquist, 2003). Finally, "ethnography," as a practice is reshaping itself in light of decades of harsh critique, so that it can continue to be a significant force in academic practices that help us to understand, and transform, social and cultural worlds. In this introduction, we map these three trajectories in Willis's work, and then introduce the essays in this volume. As is evident throughout this volume, Paul Willis's remarkable contributions to the rich literature on class, education, and ethnography are formative sparks that will undoubtedly mold how educational researchers make sense of, and attempt to influence, this new terrain.

Learning to Labor: Twenty-Five Years Later

Learning to Labor: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs is arguably one of

the most significant educational research studies of the 20th century. The book was originally published in Britain in 1977 by Gower Press. Since that time, it has been reprinted nine times in Britain, published in a separate U.S. edition in 1981, and published in German, Swedish, Finnish, Japanese, Spanish, Portuguese, and Korean. Based on an ethnographic study of a group of working-class boys in a secondary school in an industrial area of England in the 1970s, Willis's analysis of the lads' role in the production and reproduction of their position in the working class stands as major contribution to multiple fields, including education, anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, and political science. Within education, Willis's work precipitated a major shift in the way that researchers have come to understand the school as a site of political, social, and cultural struggle, and the way that youth's identities are constituted within schools, ground largely in their own particular autonomy.

Through the 1970s, the dominant approach to class analysis in education had been structural (see Morrow & Torres, 1995). Bowles and Gintis's influential *Schooling in Capitalist America* (1976) was perhaps the most important text in this regard. For Bowles and Gintis, schools had a key functional role in the reproduction of capitalism, preparing young people to take their places in a differentiated class hierarchy. Schools operated on what they called a "correspondence principle," and were anything but a meritocracy. One's class position was determined by family income rather than one's achievement in school. Schools helped, more often than not, to create and justify the *illusion* of meritocracy, but not its reality. For Bowles and Gintis, the pedagogical experience was about learning to take one's place in the capitalist system. Ultimately, or "in the final instance," capitalism was reproduced. There was little room for transformative action, for an understanding of human agency, or for the rearticulation of ones circumstances.

Willis's *Learning to Labor* came out of a very different kind of history and academic tradition. Although Bowles and Gintis were both economists, trained in statistical methods, Willis situated himself within the more interpretive, humanistic, and ethnographic tradition of the Birmingham School for Cultural Studies. Here, there was an effort to understand the cultural dimensions of everyday life, how people lived through the structural conditions they found themselves in. There was, of course, a stress on agency and creativity in this regard, and an effort to understand social structures from the ground up.

Learning to Labor is an ethnography of working-class youth in an industrial town Willis calls Hammertown, conducted between 1972 and 1975. Hammertown is, for Willis, an "archetypal industrial town." It had first been industrialized over 200 years before Willis began his work (p. 6). As Willis explains, the total labor force in this town was about 36,000, with an extremely high percentage—79%—involved in manufacturing. Half of these jobs were in metal and metal goods, whereas the other half included the production of bricks, pottery and glass, and food, beverages, and tobacco.

For this study, Willis followed a small group—about 12—of working-class youth throughout their school day. He attended classes and leisure activities and at points accompanied them onto the shop floor. He interviewed individual youth, recorded group discussions, and interviewed parents, senior masters at the school, the youth's teachers, and career officers. As the study was multisited, Willis also interviewed and spent time with a smaller cohort of other youth.

Willis's findings are, by now, well known. These working-class boys create a culture of resistance and opposition to authority. As Willis writes, "The opposition is expressed mainly as style. It is lived out in countless small ways which are special to the school institution, instantly recognized by the teachers, and an almost ritualistic part of the daily fabric of life for the kids" (p. 12). These boys spend their days "dosing, blagging, and wagging." Above all else, "having a laff" is key. "Opposition to the school is principally manifested in the struggle to win symbolic and physical space from the institution and its rules and to defeat its main perceived purpose: to make you 'work'" (p. 26). These boys enact everyday resistances to all symbols of school authority—teachers as well as conformist youth.

Willis powerfully documents the emergence of an aggressive, White working-class masculinity. The youth in his study violently mark out the boundaries of their lives: They are aggressively territorial about their neighborhood and are quick to fight. The lads are also sexist and racist. Young women must be sexually attractive, but "giving in" to sex devalues them immeasurably. Courtship is complicated business. "The referent is the home—dependability and domesticity—the opposite of the sexy bird on the scene. If the initial attraction is based on sex, the final settlement is based on a strange denial of sex" (p. 44). A kind of "domestic code" rules the day (Weis, 1990). In racial terms, the boys define themselves against Asians and West Indians, seeing both as "foreign," "smelly," and "dirty" yet still differentiated (and threatening) in sometimes divergent ways.

Willis displays the counters of an emergent White working-class masculinity. He focused on these young men's resistance to school authority and the way they were able to subvert dominant culture on a local level through devaluing school life. Crucially, it also means that they are invested in masculine kinds of labor activities, the kinds of work associated with manual labor and heavy industry. Perhaps Willis's most important insight is that these young men are complicit in their own class reproduction. The kinds of dispositions they generate in school prepare them for life on the shop floor. In addition to the immediate financial rewards, they are more likely to "have a laff" on the shop floor. The culture of resistance generated in school is entirely continuous with work culture. It is a cruel irony. In one of the book's more trenchant moments, Willis asserts:

For no matter what the larger pattern of working class culture and cycle of its continuous regeneration, no matter what the severity of disillusionment amongst "the lads" as they get older, their passage is to all intents and purposes irreversible. When the cultural apprenticeship of the shopfloor is fully worked out, and its main real activity of arduous production for others in unpleasant surroundings is seen more clearly, there is a double kind of entrapment in what might be seen, as the school was seen before, as the prison of the workshop. Ironically, as the shopfloor becomes a prison, education is seen retrospectively, and hopelessly, as the only escape. (p. 107)

This is only one of the study's most enduring findings. Along with this class reproduction, however, is the notion that there are cracks in this edifice. Reproduction is never total. In what Willis refers to as moments of "partial penetration," the lads

understand that they are positioned as abstract labor. These are key insights: insights about the nature of the lads' labor and their control over it. However, as noted, these penetrations are largely subverted by their own resistant practices.

Youth, Common Culture, and The Ethnographic Imagination

One of the most sustained legacies of *Learning to Labor* is its focus on youth's agency. Though the lads' resistance and "victory" was pyrrhic, Willis drew attention to the importance of scrutinizing youth's everyday lives and practices through ethnography. In Willis's later work (*Profane Culture* [1978], *Common Culture* [1990], and *The Ethnographic Imagination* [2001]) he specifically extends and examines the substantive and methodological implications of what he terms youth's everyday cultural lives. The "ethnographic imagination perspective" that Willis develops is one that acknowledges the "art" of everyday life, that understands people make sense out of their lives in creative ways and that there are moments of penetrating insight worth exploring and documenting (Willis, 2001, p. xx). Youth are a critical focus for understanding contemporary societal dynamics, for, as Willis notes, youth are at the forefront of confronting and negotiating the new modes of technological and human transformation at the core of modernization. He writes,

Young people respond in disorganized and chaotic ways, but to the best of their abilities and with relevance to the actual possibilities of their lives as they see, live, and embody them. These responses are actually embedded in the flows of cultural modernization, but to adult eyes they may seem to be mysterious, troubling, and even shocking and anti-social. (Willis, 2003, p. 391)

Yet, as Willis reflects, it is not enough to simply document or record the minutiae of youth's everyday lives, as if it existed in some pretheoretical world. Instead, researchers must creatively bring this experiential material into "some relation to theory," thereby "maximizing the illumination both of wider change and of the ethnographic data" (2001, p. 114). Indeed, Willis implores us to avoid the twin dangers in contemporary social scientific work—the danger of presenting empirical material divorced from theoretical reflection, as well as the danger of theoretical reflection divorced from an engagement with the empirical.

For Willis, there is something irreducible about the human experience. Reflecting on *Learning to Labor*, he noted that he had "a 'common sense' view which knew that your identity was always *more* than class, gender, or ethnicity, involving a whole set of points about the way you lived, how you fitted in, who you knew, what the myriad of your personal and domestic relations were: these things were separate from the theories that I picked up specifying obvious binary divisions" (Mills & Gibb, Appendix, this volume). Ethnography is a way at getting at some of this cultural complexity, a way to reflect on experience in ways that go beyond easy categories and distinctions.

Ultimately, this kind of work points us to a broader project that looks to understand the ways people creatively deal with their realities, which is one of the enduring lessons of *Learning to Labor*. Willis's politics center on capturing this spark "of creativity or

aspiration”—which is at the core of the lads paradoxical “moment of partial penetration”—and using it to propel us into the terrain of new possibilities. Here we find Willis’s hope, as he reflects that this spark is “routinely lost, distorted or alienated or turned into reified forms” though “never quite lost” (Mills & Gibb, Appendix, this volume).

Willis has spent much of the past few years extending these concerns, studying young people’s cultural lives. In particular, his influential *Common Culture* documented the multiple uses to which a group of young people put popular culture, or, as he writes, the “common culture” that young people create and sustain. Willis, for example, celebrates the ways that young people subvert dominant music and fashion industries by taping music from the radio for free and buying secondhand clothes and using them in exciting and interesting ways. He also documents the ways in which an all-pervasive media culture has come to wholly saturate the rituals of everyday life,

The omnipresent cultural media of the electronic age provide a wide range of symbolic resources for, and are a powerful stimulant of, the symbolic work and creativity of young people.... The media enter into virtually all of their very creative activities. But whilst the media invite certain interpretations, young people have not only learnt the codes, but have learnt to play with interpreting the codes, to reshape forms, to interrelate the media through their own grounded aesthetics. They add to and develop new meanings from given ones. (Willis, 1990, p. 30)

Willis does much to highlight the work that young people invest in popular culture and the ways in which popular culture is occluding contemporary school culture for many. If *Learning to Labor* focused largely on school life, *Common Culture* was a more fully contextualized look at young people’s creative lives as they traverse a wider range of spaces. Indeed, one of the major implications of *Common Culture* was its impulse to decenter “school” as the most relevant node in young people’s lives and open up a much wider range of texts and sites for study.

Willis’s expansive engagement with the lives of young people, it’s critical to note, is imperative to developing policy from below. Just as Willis challenges the official role that schools play in young people’s lives, he also opens up a space for us to ask what kind of policies make sense from “the ground up.” This was also a vital part of *The Youth Review* compendium he helped to put together. The study, undertaken in Wolverhampton and sponsored by the Labour party, was an effort to understand the effects of unemployment on local youth, asking one of the most persistent new questions about work and class: What happens to the working-class when work disappears? As Willis reflects, this study indexed the “new social condition” of youth, and, consistent with his commitments to youth’s realities and agency, asserted that “policies could be derived from the actual existing condition of the youth, rather than from the view of the powerful as to how they should change or be formed” (Mills & Gibb, Appendix, this volume).

Willis in New Times

At the time of publication, and shortly thereafter, *Learning to Labor* was critiqued for privileging class analysis over the persistent dynamics of gender and race. Most notably, Angela McRobbie charged that Willis overlooked the lives of young girls, reinforcing the lads' own sexist stereotypes. She wrote:

Questions around sexism and working-class youth and around sexual violence make it possible to see how class and patriarchal relations work together, sometimes with an astonishing brutality and at other times in the 'teeth gritting harmony' of romance, love and marriage. One of Willis's "lads" says of his girlfriend, "She loves doing fucking housework. Trousers I brought up yesterday, I took 'em up last night her turned 'em up for me. She's as good as gold and I wanna get married as soon as I can."

Until we come to grips with such expressions as they appear across the subcultural field, our portrayal of girls' culture will remain one-sided and youth culture will continue to "mean" in uncritically masculine terms. Questions about girls, sexual relations and femininity in youth will continue to be defused or marginalized in the ghetto of women's studies. (McRobbie, 1991, p. 18)

McRobbie's critique was incisive, and one that resonated with then-growing interest in questions of "identity" and "recognition" in the academy. In the United States in particular, although the mantra of race, class, and gender was often evoked, it was questions of race and gender that moved to the center of academic analysis. Although there are varying perspectives on why class analysis slipped off of the agenda of the left in the 1980s and 1990s (see Peter McLaren & Valerie Scatamburlo-D'Annibale, chap. 3, this volume), one of the most certain realities is that the "working class" was harder to find and locate as a political movement and social force. Politically, the Thatcher and Reagan "revolutions" of the late 1970s and 1980s largely articulated working-class concerns to a rightist agenda that appealed to White, nativist sentiments, at the same time that the clout of labor declined, and the structural conditions of the economy changed. The new social movements of the 1960s and 1970s sutured identities around gender, race, sexual orientation, and disability, displacing any sense of collective identities that were specifically linked to class location—despite the fact that movements based on social identities were often fractured and ultimately rendered powerless by latent class splits.

The late 1990s and the turn of the 21st century have bred a new set of realities, and a new set of contexts vis-à-vis class and capitalism and their relationship to schooling. Willis brilliantly documented a particular moment in the historical narrative of capitalism—a moment that has now evaporated, to be replaced with a story that is more complex and, in many respects, more troubling. First, it is clear that the structural conditions of capital have shifted dramatically since Willis's study of a small industrial town. Corporations in "First World" nations such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia have largely closed domestic operations and industrial production, moving operations to free trade zones and "Third World" countries where

they exploit a largely destitute, Black, nonunionized workforce that is desperate to simply stay alive. This literal relocation has been devastating to the economic health of the White working class, who may now look back on the lads' situation with nostalgic longing, for at least the lads had a job awaiting them. Today's working class in the industrialized world is largely employed in low-wage jobs with no possibility of advancement, overwhelmingly, Black, often immigrant, and largely female. Second, such changes also reflect the material changes in the constitution of capitalism, as "productive labor" fades as the real basis of the economic structure, to be replaced with an age where the economy is largely driven by the circulation of capital through the fluctuations of markets. As Benjamin Lee and Edward LiPuma (2002) argued, the shifts in the way that capital is imagined has material consequences for its function, changes that have rapidly accelerated in the 30 years since the Bretton Woods agreement, which created enormous transformations in international financial markets. Such changes have also had implications for the cultural imaginings of modernity (Appadurai, 1996), the relationship between culture and capital (Jameson & Miyoshi, 1998; Lowe & Loyd, 1997), and the constitution of human and economic communities (Castells, 2000; Ong, 1999; Sassen, 2001, 2002).

Of course, these global repositionings also have implications for the ways that scholars theorize about the relationship between school, work, class, and capital, and how we make sense of youth's school and work identities. For example, Lois Weis's (1990) study of a White working-class high school in a deindustrializing area of the United States examines what happens to working class identities when there is no work, a theme that is also probed in several of Stanley Aronowitz's latest books (Aronowitz, 2001; Aronowitz & Cutler, 1998). Although Willis's study assumed a close relationship between the state, the economy, and the schools, such linkages are no longer as strong, as economies and educational systems are increasingly positioned within global, not national, contexts (Apple, 2003; Burbules & Torres, 2000; Stromquist & Monkman, 2000). Despite these powerful and often overwhelming forces, Willis's work reminds us that sparks proliferate, and that we must continually look to youth and their creativity to understand the potentials that exist at any specific moment. For example, as Naomi Klein (2000) demonstrated, there is a growing anticorporate sentiment among young people today. Within the context of schooling, Willis (2003) recently argued that educational researchers must focus attention on what he terms the "third wave" of cultural modernization, in which commodities are central to creative processes of identity, and to the revamped terrain of social and political relations and power.

Willis's work matters because it taps into questions that are at the core of any contemporary research or practice that is concerned with (re)building what Michael Apple termed "thick democracy" in a historical era when citizenship has become conflated with consumption (2003, p. 12; Dolby, 2003). For example, how do we define and think about the working-class in the context of changed state power, new global formations, and empire; how do youth still "learn to labor" under these conditions; and how can schools, as sites of power and struggle, change these realities? As Paul Willis demonstrates through his work over the last 25 years, the everyday lives of ordinary people—the literal and metaphorical "streets" of the world—are at the center of the answers (Willis, 1990).

The Essays

The essays in this volume are divided into three sections. In the first section, Madeleine Arnot, Peter McLaren and Valerie Scatamburlo-D'Annibale, Michael Apple, and Fazal Rizvi engage with the complexities of *Learning to Labor*, taking up both its limitations and possibilities within its own historical moment, and as we reflect on it from the vantage point of 2004. In the second section, Jane Kenway and Anna Kraack, Lois Weis, Kathleen Nolan and Jean Anyon, and Cameron McCarthy probe *Learning to Labor*, and Willis's other works, for their relevance for "new times," how we might retain and reinvigorate Willis's insights about class into the remarkably different economic, cultural, political, and cultural landscape that we face, and the ways that Willis's work can motivate and inspire a new generation of educational scholars. The volume concludes with reflections from Paul Willis, and David Mills and Robert Gibb's 2001 interview with Paul Willis, "'Centre' and Periphery."

Section I: Reflecting on *Learning to Labor*

In Section I, authors focus their reflections and analysis on Willis's work. Although *Learning to Labor* provides the anchor for this section, other texts are also discussed, within a broad framework of assessing the impact of *Learning to Labor* for educational theory, analysis, and policy.

Madeleine Arnot's chapter, "Male Working-Class Identities and Social Justice: A Reconsideration of Paul Willis's *Learning to Labor* in Light of Contemporary Research," opens the volume with a discerning analysis of *Learning to Labor*, examining three different readings of the book, and then placing *Learning to Labor* within the context of contemporary research on male working class identities. Arnot's thorough essay carefully interrogates many of the historical and contemporary critiques of the book, specifically in regard to the intersection of gender and class in Willis's work.

Although Arnot's work explores the intersection of gender and class, the second chapter of the volume returns us to the "abiding centrality of class." In "Paul Willis, Class Consciousness, and Critical Pedagogy: Toward a Socialist Future," Peter McLaren and Valerie Scatamburlo-D'Annibale explore the political trajectories and possibilities that emanate from several of Willis's works, including *Learning to Labor*, *Common Culture*, and *The Ethnographic Imagination*. McLaren and Scatamburlo-D'Annibale argue for a politics that moves beyond the defetishizing of cultural practices into the development of the working-class consciousness that is evident in Willis's analysis. Drawing on Willis, McLaren and Scatamburlo-D'Annibale aim to resituate class as both a lived culture and an objective existence, and to use this positioning to move towards a socialist future.

The concluding two essays of this section analyze Willis's work for what can be understood about yet another intersection: this time, between class and race. In his contribution to this volume, "Between Good Sense and Bad Sense: Race, Class, and Learning from *Learning to Labor*," Michael Apple begins by tracing the influence of