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.

### References


__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 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

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“texts,” it actually obscured and ignored those radical activists who had synthesized intellectual and political action but never published any of their work.

Instead, the focus of cultural studies moved from radical struggle to cultural style and popular consumption. While folks like Dick Hebdige and Paul Willis saw the possibility of radical resistance emanating from subculture and style, most analytical work found itself hovering around television screens and music clubs in elite, knowledge-factory towns. Twenty-five years after *Hiding in the Light*, where Hebdige saw promise in linking cultural studies to the growing numbers of working-class students in junior and community colleges, cultural studies remains mostly irrelevant in conversations about class politics, public intellectuals, and radical knowledge production.

But in his recent book, *Tell Tchaikovsky the News: Rock & Roll, The Labor Question, and the Musicians’ Union, 1942–1968*, Michael Roberts not only helps restore a class analysis to the field of cultural studies, but also suggests a specific kind of American class politics that may explain why the path of cultural analysis took such a sharp turn toward the professional, the theoretical, and the elite. By focusing on the history and politics of the American Federation of Musicians (AFM), Roberts looks specifically at the period of struggle when elite musicians (self-identified as “skilled” workers and primarily white) fought against sanctioning rock ‘n’ roll musicians (primarily black at first) as union members. By harping on musical training and skills as “required” for the craft, classical and, in some cases, jazz musicians alienated a significant segment of the working class (not only rock musicians, but their fans as well) and hindered the potential growth and impact of the AFM. As Roberts explains, “Organized labor in America has often acted against its own interests, especially over issues about the identity of its membership as well as the identity of potential members, workers who fit the definitions of their bargaining unit but are yet unorganized” (p. 14). If the key to union growth and impact is the solidarity of all workers, the U.S. labor movement has often specialized in sabotaging its own objectives, primarily because it adopts the hegemonic framework of middle-class aspirations and white supremacy.

Race remains one of the largest and most divisive categories for labor and racism one of the most powerful challenges to class solidarity. While we often recognize how contemporary racism is narrated through a coded language and performed through displaced and obscured practices (public safety, failing schools, culture of poverty), Roberts deftly describes how racist union practices in the 1940s deployed language dichotomies such as “highbrow and lowbrow” or “trained or untrained” to maintain a socially constructed demarcation between white “classically” educated musicians and black “undisciplined” jazz and blues musicians. He argues that these largely “class” distinctions between traditional craft workers and newer musicians were “displaced through race” and racism. Ultimately, many jazz musicians, led by courageous and talented be-bop artists such as Dizzy Gillespie and Charles Mingus, battled against a racist class construction and won entry into the AFM.

Ironically, though, many of these newly minted, card-carrying union members, as they “carved out an oppositional culture against the racial establishment that controlled the music industry, also joined with white jazz musicians in the public attack against rhythm and blues and rock ‘n’ roll music” (p. 121). Similar to the path taken by Irish workers who fought to legitimize their status as privileged workers by proclaiming their “whiteness” instead of finding solidarity with similarly (if not more severely) oppressed black workers and slaves, white and black union musicians defended their craft or “class” status by dismissing the talents and accomplishments displayed by performers of Jump Blues, rhythm and blues, and early rock ‘n’ roll. On the one hand, the AFM had instituted an entrance exam or audition where musicians had to demonstrate that they could read music. This requirement discriminated against workers without formal education, musical training, or audition experience—essentially poor, non-white musicians. On
the other hand, the terms “morality,” “base-
ess,” and “depravity” were used to delegi-
timize and ostracize blues and rock artists, further dividing new and mostly African American musicians from the halls of labor. In the end, such practices also alienated working-and middle-class rock ‘n’ roll audiences from labor as well.

Fully excavating and appreciating irony may be the inherent cornerstone for good cultural studies, as Roberts clearly suggests that, just as the AFM became more racially integrated by accepting black jazz musicians, they continued to reinforce a class distinc-
tion by distancing themselves from pri-
marily black R&B, jump blues, and early rock artists. The irony then builds as Roberts explains how this class distinction often translated into divisions with country and folk artists as well, all at the same time that white musicians like Woody Guthrie, Johnny Cash, Sonny Burgess, and eventually Elvis Presley embraced the blues. Roberts writes, “In short, working-class whites in the South were attracted to blues music because African Americans had developed the most sophisticated cultural response to oppression and exploitation. Blues music has provided one of the most effective means for aggrieved communities to cope with or rise up against exploitation. The history of African American culture is particu-
larly rich in its creation of practices that pro-
vide oppressed populations the means to carve out spaces of autonomy within struc-
tures of domination in everyday life” (p. 91).

The convergence and resonance of white and black working-class culture was espe-
cially notable in the South, where the very real and shared physical experiences of hard agricultural labor and abject poverty combined with the very real and shared social and emotional experience of being degraded by wealthy landowners, hounded by law enforcement, and finding some momentary salvation in church and speak-
easies. Reminiscent of Ronald Takaki’s story of Bacon’s army—that multi-racial, working-class, “giddy multitude whose rebellion against wealthy white plantation owners led to slave codes and the construc-
tion of an increasingly strict and articulated social and legal whiteness in Virginia” (Takaki 1993:61–65)—Roberts tells of the ways in which early rock ‘n’ roll (regardless of race) expressed those “hidden injuries of class” and encouraged overt and covert chal-
lenges to authority and declarations of auton-
omy, creativity, and joy. The reaction by both unions and general power structures was to try to marginalize its powerful aesthetic and growing popularity. They couldn’t.

Thus, in a final irony, rock ‘n’ roll evolves as the potentially radical voice of a rebellious generation and, along with folk, funk, and soul, becomes both the soundtrack for and the actual space of social and political revolu-
tions. One key aspect of these radical changes was the increasing crossover in cul-
tural and political spaces where anti-colonial and racial, ethnic, and other “power” move-
ments broke down rigid racial, ethnic, and even gendered identities. Activists and artists created the space where a more integrated, more autonomous, more liberated people might envision and articulate a new society. But, as Roberts suggests, these movements and their music, despite social and political critique, largely ignored class in general and workers in particular. The U.S. working class and its union movement would largely, if not completely, move towards conservatism, patriotism, subur-
banism, militarism, and middle-class, busi-
ness unionism. A social and political revolu-
tion without a class analysis or working-
class base for practice was doomed.

Similarly, the AMF sabotaged itself by iso-
lating rock musicians. The new music indus-
try adopted new labor relations, working conditions, and technologies of production and distribution that fed off unorganized workers. As Roberts contends,

The transformation of the division of labor through outsourcing work to non-union companies has displaced the musicians’ union from the power it once had. The loss of union influence has had a negative effect on countless musicians struggling to make a career, because the new business model has translated into lower wages, deteriorat-
ing working conditions, and the ero-
sion of benefits for virtually all music-
icians who have not reached the status of the relatively few rock stars who have been able to find success without

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help from the union. . . . Rock musicians were the unwitting pawns in the strategy of outsourcing production that created a cheap pool of easily exploitable labor and undermined the power of the AFM. (pp. 202–3)

For anti-colonial movements, identities and class are integrally linked; and intellectuals who attempt to disentangle such elements do so at their own peril. But radical scholars in the United States and perhaps other colonial powers (the UK in particular) developed a field of cultural critique that has reflected a professional (and, to a greater degree, institutional) discomfort with the problem of class. Institutionalized cultural studies (and perhaps labor studies, too?) has found a too-easy détente with neoliberalism in part because intellectuals have found autonomy and resources for their work, and in part because they get paid fairly well for doing this work. Like the labor aristocracy they sometimes partner with, public intellectuals and many (not all) left scholars now haunt the halls of academe just as Samuel Gompers still haunts the halls of labor.

But amid the bourgeois liberalism, corporate triumphalism, and pseudo-, multicultural nationalism that now shrouds the academy and what’s left of union halls, workers and radical scholars continue to organize and fight. Roberts gives us some of our marching orders in reviving the notion that, for a brief moment in the early 1940s when the AFM fought to guarantee that members would not be disempowered or made obsolete by technological advancement, they promoted a larger sense of what a worker’s (and, by consequence, a human’s) life should be. In fact, AFM President James Petrillo’s primary focus addressed workers’ precarity and economic insecurity as an inherent element of capitalist labor relations. Roberts reminds us of that “utopian dream, namely, the promise that technology would free human beings from the burden of toil that follows from economic scarcity” (p. 206). Today, workers around the world organize and struggle to unionize, to control their bodies, and to raise their families free from fear, disease, and war. Worker self-activity creates new dreams and new aesthetics to articulate those dreams. One only hopes that scholars and union leaders can wake up from our neoliberal slumber to join them.

References