

C | L | A | S | S **ACTION**

Building Bridges Across the Class Divide

**Created Equal: How Class Matters in
Our Lives**

Social Equity Leadership Conference 2016

USF Kalmanovitz Hall Room 172

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Facilitator Biography

Shane Lloyd received his Bachelors of Science degree in Behavioral Neuroscience from Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts. He completed his Master of Public Health degree at the Warren Alpert Medical School at Brown University. During his graduate studies, Shane investigated the impact of reactions to race on the mental health status of U.S. citizens, particularly racial/ethnic minorities. Shane serves as the Assistant Director for Brown University's Brown Center for Students of Color (formerly the Third World Center). In this capacity, he oversees several programs including: a social justice pre-orientation program, a mentoring program and a peer counseling program. He has nearly 10 years of higher education experience including residential experience in Boston, Australia and Greece.

11 Key Considerations about Class and Classism

1. **Class issues are taboo and hard to talk about in America. Class issues are shrouded in secrecy** and rarely openly examined, let alone discussed. Talking about class often brings up strong feelings (e.g. shame and/or guilt). These feelings may be different depending on our class positions.
2. **Classism does not exist in isolation.** Each of us is a complex being. We belong to many different social groups which influence class identities and experiences. Class issues clearly intersect with other aspects of social identity, such as race and gender. In the U.S., race and class have been particularly intertwined.
3. **Class is misunderstood.** Most people in the United States do not have a shared language for issues related to class or a common understanding of how class can inform cultural dynamics. Differences in class conditioning and culture can lead to tensions and misunderstandings in mixed class relationships and organizations. Stereotypes go both ways, which is different from systematic classism.
4. **Class is complex.** Class is not just about income, or even wealth. Other attributes, such as status, social networks, lifestyles, cultural norms, control over one's life and, most importantly, access to power, are critical aspects understanding class a dimension of social identity.
5. **The myth of a “classless society” is destructive.** In spite of growing and profound inequality, we have managed to perpetuate the myth of classlessness in the U.S. Outright denial, misinformation or limited to no information about the realities of class and classism pose barriers to organizing among working and middle class communities, and are part of the explanation for why these groups may vote against their class interests.
6. **Our class backgrounds are formative.** Our class position may change over time; however, our class conditioning from childhood affects us throughout our lives. We all derive strengths as well as limitations from our class background. None of us asked to be taught the oppressive beliefs we have learned. Change hinges on our ability to separate fault from responsibility.
7. **People have varying experience with class.** Everyone is at a different place with respect to understanding/comfort on issues related to class. Our national class-consciousness has ebbed and flowed throughout history. We are currently at a threshold of increased consciousness. Learning about class/classism is an ongoing process. We will not learn everything in one workshop, weekend or week long training.
8. **Classism is an important contributor to the current economic crisis.** The increasing economic inequality since the 1980s has created an unstable dual reality in America—a vast working and middle class who have seen stagnating wages and mounting debt, juxtaposed with a small, powerful elite who have seen exponentially accumulating wealth.
9. **Classism hurts everyone.** It is not just the poor who suffer from economic inequality. The shrinking middle class feels increasingly vulnerable and the owning class feels increasingly disconnected and isolated. Today's environmental crisis is directly related to classism. It is in the best interests of everyone to work against classism toward a more equitable and just society.
10. **Class position and class consciousness are not the same.** Knowing someone's class position does not tell you about their class consciousness or their politics. For example, there are people from owning class backgrounds who are actively using their power and privilege to work against classism.
11. **We can all become authentic anti-classist allies.** There are multiple avenues toward change: personal, institutional and cultural. Taking small steps, together we can chip away at the system of classism and build toward a more just society.

Definitions

Classism: The institutional, cultural, and individual practices and beliefs that assign differential value to people according to their socioeconomic class; and an economic system that creates excessive inequality and causes basic human needs to go unmet.

Internalized Classism: An umbrella term that refers to individual level manifestation of internalized subordination or domination within a person based on their class position relative to others. **Internalized subordination** is characterized by the acceptance and justification of classism by working class and poor people. Examples include feelings of inferiority compared to higher-class people, hostility and blame towards other working-class or poor people for their shortcomings or life circumstances, and beliefs that classist institutions/policies are fair. **Internalized domination** is described as feelings of superiority compared to people lower on the class spectrum than oneself, a sense of entitlement to resources, opportunities or positions, rationalizations of classist policies and institutions on the part of middle class and people on the upper end of the class spectrum. Both internalized subordination and internalized dominance are manifestations of internalized classism.

Class Privilege: Refers to the many tangible or intangible unearned advantages held by individuals of higher-class status. Examples of these benefits and privileges include close personal contacts with employers, good childhood health care, inherited money, speaking the same dialect and accent as people with institutional power.

Class Ally: A person from the more privileged classes who holds attitudes that are anti-classist, demonstrates a commitment to increasing their own understanding of issues related to classism, and is actively working towards eliminating classism on many levels.

Race, Class & Gender Intersections: In the U.S., class has been racialized. A greater percentage of people of color are adversely affected by the explicit and implicit rules of the economy. Some people are surprised to learn that the rates of poverty and unemployment experienced by African American, Latino (Hispanic), and Native American populations are more than double the rates experienced by white Americans. Other people are also surprised to learn that most poor people are white—a common misperception given prevailing images of the impoverished here in the U.S. We all need to broaden our understanding of how race, class, and gender oppressions are linked in order to address issues of oppression effectively.

Bill Fletcher, president of TransAfrica and former union leader, writes, "*Class is the fault line of US society, and race is the trip wire.*" He advocates a "rainbow populist" movement, in which people of every race organize together for economic uplift for all. Our vision of a United States without racism should not be that the income distribution for people of color parallels that for white Americans. Even the inequality gap among white Americans is much wider than in most other industrialized countries. Our vision is a fairer economy without extremes of wealth and poverty; an environment in which everyone gets a fair chance at developing their talents and becoming prosperous. Only by uprooting racism and sexism, as well as class oppression, will this vision be achieved for everyone.

Working Definitions of Class Identities

Excerpt from *Class Matters* by Betsy Leondar-Wright

Class in the U.S. is a confusing and slippery topic. The definitions that make sense to one person may not make sense to another. These definitions are offered to provide some shared language to facilitate conversations about class.

What do we mean by class?

Class is relative social status based on income, wealth, education, power and/or position. The U.S. has no hard and fast divisions between class groups. Some people grow up in one class and live as adults in different one. For immigrants, there is additional confusion because the class status in their country of origin is often different from their class status in the U.S. Nevertheless, it can be useful for understanding class dynamics to organize people into these four groups:

Working Class & Lower Middle Class (~60% of U.S. households)

Signs that someone might belong to the working class can include:

- little or no college education— in particular no BA from a 4-year college;
- low or negative net worth as defined by a greater amount of bills (debts) compared to valuables (assets);
- rental housing, or one non-luxury home long saved for and lived in for decades;
- jobs involving hard physical work and/or little control over one's time in the workplace.

Lower middle class families are somewhat more prosperous and secure, but they have a lot in common with working class people, such as less college than a BA, and/or less control over their work, and/or fewer assets than professional middle-class families. If they own a small business, it can only survive by the proprietor's hands-on work.

The majority of the members in this group are white. When compared to the makeup of the U.S. population, they are disproportionately people of color and white women, and disproportionately have strong ethnic and religious identities.

Chronic Poverty (~5% of U.S. households)

A subset of people within the working class who over decades or generations cannot get income needed to cover all their basic needs. Signs that someone might belong to this class can include:

- substandard housing or homelessness;
- long-time use of public benefits, such as welfare, or charity;
- chronic unmet needs for health care, food, or other necessities;
- frequent involuntary moves, chaos and disruption of life.

Members of the low-income group are disproportionately people of color, white women and children. Because some low-income people see "poor" as a negatively loaded term, many activists use "low-income" as a more respectful term.

Professional Middle Class (~30% of U.S. households)

This group includes college-educated, salaried professionals and managers and their family members. Signs that someone might belong to the professional middle class can include:

- a 4-year college degree, especially from private &/or residential universities, sometimes a graduate degree;
- secure homeownership, often with several moves up to bigger houses in a lifetime;
- more control over their hours and methods of work than working-class people, and/or control over the time and work of others;
- greater economic security than working class people (although that difference is eroding), but no way to pay bills without working.

Members of the professional middle class people are disproportionately white.

Upper middle class families have more in common with owning class families, such as more luxuries and travel, than most middle class families.

Owning Class (~5% of U.S. households)

This group refers to investors and their family members who have enough income from assets that they do not have to work to pay basic bills.

A subset (about 1/10 of 1% of this population) of this group has positions of power or such vast wealth that put them in the **ruling class**.

Signs that someone might belong to the owning class can include:

- elite private schools and colleges;
- large inheritances;
- luxuries and international travel;
- possession of multiple homes.

However, people who live modestly on investment income are also owning class. Owning class people are disproportionately white.

Members of the groups listed above are varied in culture, values and political beliefs.

Select Historical Factors for the U.S. Racial Wealth Gap

African Americans and other minorities hold far less wealth than whites. But why should the wealth gap be so large— even greater than the racial income gap? It turns out that government has played a major role. Throughout U.S. history, countless specific laws, policies, rules, and court decisions have made it more difficult for nonwhites to build wealth, and transferred wealth they did own to whites. Here are some examples

Native Americans:

When European settlers came to the U.S., Indian tribes in general did not consider land to be a source of individual wealth. Europeans believed land was owned by individuals and used it to generate private profit.

- Over 400 treaties signed in first century of U.S.
 - Indians forcibly removed from land.
- 1862 Homestead Act
 - Transferred vast amounts of land from Indian tribes to white homesteaders giving any white family 160 acres of land for free if they farm it for 5 years.
- Legal concept of "trust responsibility" for Native nations
 - Money from sale of land or natural resources placed in trust fund and managed for "best interest of tribes." Despite rampant mismanagement of the trust fund by the U.S. government, the Native nations were not allowed to hold their managers accountable.
- Dawes Act of 1887
 - This act pressured Indians to assimilate, broke up reservations into individual plots and forced Indian to farm "western" style and "surplus" land was sold to whites (millions acres transferred from Native Americans to whites).
- 1953 – U.S. government terminates trust status of tribes
 - Supposed to free Indians from government control but also included loss of tribally held land.

African Americans:

- From earliest years of European settlement until 1860s, enslaved African American were considered assets for their owners to be bought and sold. Slave owners were able to derive more wealth from the labor or sale of slaves' children.
- Slaves and their labor served as the basis of wealth creation for plantation owners, the people who owned and operated slave ships, and the companies that insured them.
- End of Civil War
 - The Freedmen's Bureau and occupying Union Army distributed land to ex-slaves – "Forty Acres and a Mule."
 - Freedmen's Bureau disbanded after seven years and most distributed to the former slaves was returned to former white owners.
 - Slaves become sharecroppers in a system that perpetually left them in debt to white land owners.

- 1883 – Supreme Court overturned Civil Rights Act of 1875 which had given blacks right to protect themselves and their property.
- By 1900 – The Southern states passed laws that kept African Americans separate and unequal.
- Some African American families and communities prospered despite all this, but they were often targets of vigilantes who destroyed their homes and businesses and lynched individuals.
 - Example: African American business district in north Tulsa, known as "Black Wall Street," were torched on June 21, 1921 by white rioters. This incident destroyed about 600 black-owned businesses.
- New Deal
 - African Americans were often barred from new asset-building programs which largely benefited whites.
 - Significant Black occupations of domestic and agricultural work excluded from Social Security, unemployment insurance, and minimum wage.
- Post WWII:
 - Veteran benefits, such as GI Bill of Rights provide little benefits for Blacks because so many colleges don't accept them; housing discrimination means less benefits for low interest mortgages.

Latinos:

(The following examples relate mostly to Mexico and Mexicans – largest Latino population in U.S. and the one with longest history.)

- 1824 Monroe Doctrine
 - Promised newly independent nations of Latin America "protection" from European powers, but actually allowed U.S. to intervene and politically and economically dominate Mexico and Central and South America causing "push and pull" for people in and out of U.S.
- Mexicans and Anglos fight together to free Texas from Mexican rule creating "lone Star Republic of Texas" – annexed to U.S. in 1845.
- 1848 – The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo gives U.S. half of Mexico's land. The land was then transferred from Mexicans to Anglos. Racial categories were used to determine who could obtain land.
- 1924 – The first U.S. Mexico border patrol— deportations common.
- During WWII
 - The Bracero program brought Mexican workers to the U.S. to work for sub-minimum wages. Mexican laborers were then kicked out when they were no longer needed.
- Latino workers disproportionately represented in occupations not covered by Social Security Act.
- North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and Central American Free Trade Agreement, and Free Trade Agreement of the Americas
 - New "incarnation" of Monroe Doctrine – Trade and immigration policies used to maintain U.S. control over resources and oppress workers.

Asian Americans:

- The Chinese made up the first large wave of Asian immigrants.
 - Naturalization Act of 1790 restricted eligibility for citizenship to "whites."
 - Many law suits were filed to determine who was white.
 - Court decisions yielded confusing outcomes – South Asians, for instance, classified as Caucasian and white, then in later cases classified as Caucasian, but not white
- Chinese immigrants were involved in Gold Rush, but Foreign Miners Tax pushed them out of mining.
- Chinese Exclusion Acts 1882
 - The first nationality to be denied right to join "immigrant" nation.
- Japanese immigration
 - At first successful farmers and business people.
 - National resentment led to the 1924 Alien Land Act which prohibited non-citizens from owning land.
 - WWII – 1942 Roosevelt administration forced Japanese Americans to relocate to internment camps. Japanese home and business owners were given a week to sell their homes and businesses to whites at "fire sale prices."

Based on Doubly Divided by Meizbu Lui

Class Cultures

*All generalizations are to some degree inaccurate, however they can be helpful.
There are many subgroups that vary from the generalizations in each group.*

Working Class	Professional Middle Class	*Owning Class
Life's Purpose:	Life's Purpose:	Life's Purpose:
Being and Belonging Character Oriented Present/Here and Now Oriented Life as Tangled Web of Relationships Anti-Status Interdependent/Solidaristic	Doing and Becoming Achievement Oriented Future Oriented Life as Transformation Concerned with Status Individualistic	Dreaming Fulfillment Oriented Past and Future Oriented Play and be good at the game of life Expansive sense of time Anything's possible Enjoy the good life
Values:	Values:	Values:
Being Generous Being Kind-Hearted Being Cooperative Being Connected Stability Tradition	Being Brilliant Being Ambitious Being Successful Being Competitive Being Independent Change Progress	Being free to choose Being successful Being on the cutting edge, a trend setter Being in charge Being responsible Being Philanthropic Tradition
World View:	World View:	World View:
More Parochial Stronger Loyalty to Persons, Places, Groups, and Institutional Affiliations	More Cosmopolitan Weaker Loyalty to Persons, Places, Groups, and Institutional Affiliations	More Global Global view, global allegiances, multiple homes, loyalty to family and other class members and institutions
Best Result:	Best Result:	Best Result:
Secure community	Individual achievement has positive human impact.	Visionary/Big picture Thinking outside the box Undeterred by barriers and difficulty Generous with time & money
Worst Result:	Worst Result:	Worst Result:
Unachieved potential	The lonely individual	Arrogant, Entitled, Isolated, Unaware, Overwhelmed by choices

Adapted from Barbara Jensen & Jack Metzgar, 2001 Working Class Studies Conference, Youngstown State University

*Based on Betsy Leondar-Wright's *6 Pitfalls and 6 Potentials in Owning Class Culture*, (www.ClassMatters.org) for Making Money Make Change, Nov.2005, adapted by Jennifer Ladd

First-Generation College Students

Entering college from a working-class background can be extremely difficult. Students often arrive with little knowledge about what to expect, how to adjust, or who to contact with questions. This site offers resources, suggestions, and personal accounts of other students in your position.

Common Feelings – Expressed by First-Generation Students

Confusion – feeling lost when it comes to applications, graduation, job searching, or graduate school.

Responsibility – having to help contribute significantly to tuition and living costs.

Excitement and Nervousness – thrilled but also frightened about being away from home or living independently.

Pride – possessing an overwhelming sense of pride about being the first in the family to attend and complete college.

Guilt – wondering if it is fair to be attending college while parents struggle financially at home.

Embarrassment – experiencing shame over socioeconomic status or being different from peers.

Connect – Students Speak Out! (links)

- [Students revealing how much they pay for college](#)
- [“Multicultural Voices in the Classroom”](#) by Nan Byrne
- [“Class Divide in Internships”](#) by Ruzielle Ganuelas
- [“A Story of Crossing the Tracks”](#) by Celeste Harmer
- [“Homeless to College”](#) by Jessica Boyle
- [“The Anger of a First-Generation College Student”](#) by Emily Loftis
- [“The First-Generation Stories Project”](#) - A project through California State University, Fresno
- [“Nevada’s First Generation”](#) - A 34 minute documentary about the experiences of first-generation college students
- [“Who We Are”](#) - A short profile video featuring interviews with four UC Berkeley students

Learn More – Educate Yourself about the Reality of Classism on Campus

- *The First Generation Student Experience: Implications for Campus Practice, and Strategies for Improving Persistence and Success* by Jeff Davis
- *Limbo: Blue-Collar Roots, White-Collar Dreams* by Alfred Lubrano
- *A Hope in the Unseen: An American Odyssey from the Inner City to the Ivy League* by Ron Suskind
- [The Interactive Relationship Between Class Identity and the College Experience: The Case of Lower Income Students](#) by Elizabeth Aries and Maynard Seider
- *First-Generation College Experience* by Amy Baldwin
- *First in the Family: Your High School Years: Advice About College from First Generation Students* by Kathleen Cushman
- *The Little College Handbook: A First Generation’s Guide to Getting In and Staying In* by Melissa Mellott, M.Ed.

Take Action

- **Start a support group on your campus for first-generation college students.** Stimulate dialogue and come up with solutions for the challenges that first-generation students commonly face.
- **Bring a Class Action workshop to your school!** Help train an organization or group on campus and further the education of classism.
- **Check out this [webpage](#), a searchable database through CSO College Center.** The database includes all the community-based organizations and college access programs across the country that are working to promote a college-bound culture among first-generation and traditionally under-served student populations. If you find any programs you like, try to get a similar one started in your community!
- **Get engaged by joining the dialogue and increase education by sharing your opinions and experiences** through taking this [survey](#) to help us learn more about what we can do for you and other first generation college students!

Class Action's vision

A world without classism:

- Meets everyone's basic needs;
- Treats people from every background, class status and rank with dignity and respect;
- Supports the development of all people to their full potential;
- Reduces the vast differences in income, wealth and access to resources
- Ensures everyone has a voice in the decisions that affect them.

How to get involved with Class Action

- Sign up for our listserv, online at www.classism.org or on today's sign-up sheet, to learn about new resources.
- If you use social media, 'like' our Facebook page (facebook.com/ClassActionNow) and follow us on Twitter (@ClassismExposed).
- Sponsor a Class Action workshop at your workplace, school, religious congregation or other organization.
Find out more at <http://www.classism.org/programs/bring-class-action-to-you>
- Follow our blog, *Classism Exposed*, at www.classism.org/blog. Do you have a story or opinion about class and classism? If you write it up in ~500 words and email it to info@classism.org, it may be published on Class Action's blog.
- Do you know any first-generation college or low-income students from a working-class background? Tell them about our support groups and resource page: <http://www.classism.org/resources/resources-generation-college-students>
- Are you a high-school teacher, youth leader or other educator of teens? Try out some of the activities our new curriculum on class and classism, *Created Equal*, available online at www.classism.org/store.
- Please consider making a tax-deductible contribution to Class Action (www.classism.org/donate). We are a nonprofit that depends on individual donors to work towards our mission of a world without classism.
- Do you know others who are concerned about classism? Tell them about Class Action! Email friends and colleagues about this workshop and include the link to our website, www.classism.org. Ask your local library to buy our publications. Consider buying one of our books to read and lend; start a book group.

A few good books about class

Castañeda, Nora and the Women's Development Bank of Venezuela, *Creating A Caring Economy*, Crossroads Books, 2006

Collins, Chuck, *99 to 1: How Wealth Inequality is Wrecking the World and What We Can Do About It*, Berrett-Koehler, 2012.

hooks, bell. *Where We Stand: Class Matters*. Routledge, 2000

James, Selma, *Sex, Race and Class - The Perspective of Winning: A Selection of Writings 1952-2011*, PM Press. 2012

Lubrano, Al, *Limbo: Blue Collar Roots, White Collar Dreams*, John Wiley & Sons, 2003

Stout, Linda, *Bridging the Class Divide and other Lessons for Grassroots Organizing*, Beacon, 1996

Tea, Michelle, *Without a Net: The Female Experience of Growing Up Working Class*, Seal Press, 2004

Zweig, Michael. *The Working-Class Majority*. 2nd ed. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011.

Classism materials available from Class Action (www.classism.org/store)

New! *Reading Classes: On Culture and Classism in America*.
Book by Barbara Jensen

New! *Created Equal*
The only high school curriculum on class and classism

Cross-Class Dialogue Manual
Class Action's founders guide others to replicate their transformative experience

Class Matters: Cross-Class Alliance Building for Middle Class Activists
Book by Betsy Leondar-Wright

The Color of Wealth: The Story Behind the U.S. Racial Wealth Divide

Enough DVD and curriculum
Conversation-provoking 11-minute video by 13-year-old Zoe Greenberg.

Visions of transformative education

“Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity...

“...or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.

“...Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other.”

Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 1970

“Progressive, holistic education, ‘engaged pedagogy’ ...emphasizes well-being.

“That means that teachers must be actively involved committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own well-being if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students.

“The academy is not paradise. But learning is a place where paradise can be created. The classroom with all its limitations remains a location of possibility.

“In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labor for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress.

“This is education as the practice of freedom.”

bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 1994