The Undergraduate Journal on Work, Labor and Social Movements is a project of the Labor Extension Programs at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, Boston, Dartmouth, and Lowell. The Labor Extension Program is a statewide effort providing training, education and organizational development assistance to workers, their unions, and other workers’ organizations. The extension programs work in close partnership with the academic labor programs on each campus, enriching and supporting one another through service learning, internships, and connections to unions and community organizations.

EDITORIAL BOARD:

Annet Argyres, UMass Boston Labor Center
Clare Hammonds, UMass Amherst Labor Center
Elizabeth Pellerito, UMass Lowell Labor Education Program
Camilo Viveiros, UMass Dartmouth Labor Education Center
Kim Wilson, UMass Dartmouth Labor Education Center
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prize Announcements</td>
<td>III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editors’ Note and Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apart at the Seams: Injustices Against Factory Workers in Bangladesh’s Ready to Wear Garment Manufacturing Industry</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camille A. Nichols</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unpaid Internships: Espresso and Exploitation</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa Robinson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monster Dot Com</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael F. Donahue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><del>Money’s Currency</del></td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippe Warino</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanity’s Loss</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zachary Doherty</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economies of the Tragically Hip: Reflections on How I Didn’t Get Fired from the Job I Lost</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel Bazarian</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor Studies Academic Offerings at UMass Campuses</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call for Submissions</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Labor Extension Program honors the following prize winners for their essays in this issue:

RESEARCH CATEGORY
First Prize: Camille A. Nichols, UMass Dartmouth
Second Prize: Lisa Robinson, UMass Amherst

CREATIVE CATEGORY
First Prize: Michael F. Donahue, UMass Boston
Second Prize: Philippe Warno, UMass Boston
Third Prize: Zachary Doherty, UMass Lowell

ACTIVIST REFLECTION CATEGORY
First Prize: Daniel Bazarian, UMass Lowell
Two thousand nineteen was witness to a wave of labor actions and strikes, both here in Massachusetts and nationwide. The previous year had seen the end of a nationwide strike of Marriott workers represented by UNITE-HERE, including members of Local 26 in Boston. But anyone who thought that the widespread strike action of 2018 was a minor blip in labor history was mistaken. Just a few days into the new year, National Grid and United Steelworkers 12012 and 12003 agreed to a contract that would end a months-long, brutal lockout that attempted to force gasworkers into a two-tier contract and would reduce pensions and benefits. In April, more than 30,000 United Food and Commercial Workers members at Stop & Shop stores in the Northeast walked off the job. Dedham teachers, members of the Massachusetts Teachers Association, held a brief but successful wildcat strike in October. And Harvard graduate students welcomed the region’s first major snowstorm with a December strike.

“In a strong economy, why are so many workers on strike?,” asked a New York Times headline in October 2019. Volume 2 of the Undergraduate Journal on Work, Labor and Social Movements gives University of Massachusetts students at each of our four campuses the opportunity to answer this question. Increasingly, our students are recognizing that the economy isn’t designed with working people and their families in mind. If there is one theme that unites this year’s selections, it’s that workers - of all ethnicities, nationalities, ages, and job categories - deserve the right to dignity and respect in the workplace, particularly when it comes to health and safety, the right to a living wage, and benefits that allow us to care for ourselves and our families.
Like Volume 1, our second issue of this journal contains work from all four campuses (Boston, Dartmouth, Amherst and Lowell) and in a variety of formats (research, personal essays, and creative work). This year’s first prize research essay, “Apart at the Seams” by Camille A. Nichols (Dartmouth), examines the 2013 Rana Plaza disaster in Bangladesh not as a tragic fatal accident but as the outcome of the abusive and destructive ready-to-wear fashion industry. Nichols also analyzes international responses to the disaster and identifies key factors that would allow the largely female workforce a far larger measure of freedom and safety. Our other research prize winner is Lisa Robinson from Amherst, whose essay “Unpaid Internships: Espresso and Exploitation” is well-researched and provocative. Robinson digs into the finer points of law and guidelines from the Department of Labor to find the loopholes that allow companies to hire interns for unpaid work. This is detrimental to the company, the intern, and all other workers, Robinson argues. (Editors’ note: Some of our programs do provide internships for credit as an option for students to complete their degree requirements outside of traditional learning spaces.)

This volume also includes several creative pieces and personal essays. While fostering research skills is a key part of the educational mission of our programs, we also recognize that students have their own experiences with work and labor to share, and they are endlessly creative in how they reflect on and analyzes their experiences and their research. Our first prize winner for the creative category is UMass Boston’s Michael F. Donahue, whose “Monster dot com” provides an eloquent narrative of working class adolescence. As the narrator explores the impacts of poverty on family life, he comes to a new appreciation of his mother and the sacrifices she makes to raise three kids on her own. In “Money’s Currency,” ______(Boston) guides us through a cavalcade of liquid metaphors for the ways in which capitalism sweeps along everything in its path. The deck is always stacked against the poor when it comes to building the American Dream, and even those who have managed to see the system for what it is find themselves back in thrall to the greed of acquisition when they manage to rise out of poverty. In the end, we are left with the author, standing alone with his broken dreams, still determined to rebuild - a haunting image for our uncertain times. In “Humanity’s Loss,” Zachary Doherty (Lowell) brings us a screenplay from a dystopian future based on Neal Schusterman’s novel Scythe, revealing the revolutionary potential of fan fiction. In the world Doherty creates for us, artificial intelligence has taken over, supposedly eliminating war and poverty while ushering in a eugenic culling process for humans no longer deemed necessary for the machine to run. Doherty makes clever use of an on-screen “commercial” to critique our own allegiance to the algorithms that determine so much of our day-to-day life, a form of AI that is all too often dismissed as neutral and apolitical.

Finally, we chose one reflection to include in this year’s journal. Daniel Bazarian’s “Economies of the Tragically Hip: Reflections on How I Didn’t Get Fired from the Job I Lost” (Lowell) is a painfully funny and impeccably written essay on the disillusionment that comes from pulling the curtain back on working conditions in trendy lefty establishments. It’s easy to be taken in by businesses that utilize the language of progressive politics to sell lattes without standing by the values of equality and justice, Bazarian argues. Like Nichols, he finds hope in the possibility of collective bargaining, though he recognizes that the fight for unions in the gig economy presents its own unique challenges.
Camille is a senior at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, pursuing a B.A. in Sociology and Anthropology. She is a former intern for the UMass Labor Education Center, working with Camilo Viveiros on the third annual Fall River History Walk. In the spring of 2019, she presented “Apart at the Seams: Injustices Against Factory Workers in Bangladesh’s Ready to Wear Garment Manufacturing Industry” at the UMass Undergraduate Research Conference under the advisement of Dr. Lisa Maya Knauer. Prior to attending UMass Dartmouth, Camille earned her A.A. in Communications from Bunker Hill Community College, graduating with highest honors.

APART AT THE SEAMS: INJUSTICES AGAINST FACTORY WORKERS IN BANGLADESH’S READY-TO-WEAR GARMENT MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY

CAMILLE A. NICHOLS

**First Place Award for Research**

On April 24, 2013, thousands of employees arrived for work early in the morning at the Rana Plaza Building in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Factory workers, primarily women and girls, started their day on the floor of the garment manufacturing plant. Workers were aware that the Rana Plaza building was not structurally sound. The day before, inspectors told building owner Sohel Rana about cracks forming in the building’s foundation, and ordered workers to evacuate. The top two floors of the building had been added without a building permit, and could not hold the weight of machines and workers.1 Despite these dangers, the employees of the garment factory at Rana Plaza returned to work the following day, facing threats of docked pay if they did not comply.2 According to the BBC, four generators starting back up after a power outage sent vibrations through the building, causing it to rapidly collapse.3 1,134 people were killed, and 2,515 people were injured in the disaster. Many bodies and survivors remained hidden under rubble for days. To understand how this disaster happened, the underlying cause, the perpetrators of the injustice, and the victims of the disaster must be examined.

The ready-to-wear (RTW) garment industry has been an integral part of the Bangladeshi economy for the last 30 years. Garment manufacturing in Bangladesh employs about 4 million workers, and accounts for more than three-quarters of Bangladesh’s export earnings.4 Garment industry work also has a significant impact on the lives of women, who make up about 80% of factory workers.

---

2 Loomis, Out of Sight.
I aim to explore this developing industry and examine how it has affected the lives of women. The first part of my research will review studies on women workers in Bangladesh and the environment they face as newcomers to the workforce. My analysis will discuss how the garment industry has shaped the economy of Bangladesh, how the industry has shaped the lives of women, and the specific threats faced by workers prior to the Rana Plaza building collapse in 2013. The second part of my research will discuss the national and international response to the disaster, from grassroots union organizing and international boycotts, and how small steps can change the lives of workers. The industry has changed societal norms for many women of Bangladesh, and has opened up new economic opportunities. However, due to social inequality, aggressive economic development in the export sector, and lax industrial safety policy and building code enforcement, women workers have been left vulnerable to preventable abuse, injury, and death. The Rana Plaza building collapse may have shed light on these conditions on an international scale, but substandard conditions remain a constant threat to women garment workers. Ultimately, an awareness on the part of the consumer, combined with union organizing, and grassroots efforts on the part of the women on the factory floor are the catalysts to create lasting and effective changes to Bangladeshi law.

Studies done in Bangladesh on the working environments for women in the garment manufacturing industry post-Rana Plaza show a positive economic benefit, but there remains a detrimental effect on worker health. Rachel Heath and A. Mushfiq Mobarak’s study published shortly after the Rana Plaza disaster argues that women are not only increasing income for their households, but furthering their education and delaying marriage. Heath and Mobarak’s article, written in the immediate aftermath of the Rana Plaza disaster, uses detailed data tables to establish education levels for women who reside near garment factories. Within their data, Heath and Mobarak establish increased earnings and education levels in these regions. However, according to a 2018 article by Humayun Kabir, Myfanwy Maple, and Syadani Riyad Fatema, women are uniquely vulnerable to illness, physical ailments, and abuse within Bangladeshi factories. The authors’ study uses interviews with Rana Plaza disaster victims to illustrate the dismal conditions that persist for women in the garment manufacturing industry. These two studies highlight the dichotomy of the RTW garment manufacturing industry; that of a financial and social benefit within an unsafe working environment.

Previous research on the garment supply chain has found that both the favorable economic conditions, and the hazardous working environments for women workers in Bangladesh (including the environment that caused the Rana Plaza disaster) have been orchestrated through trade agreements, factory construction, and multinational corporations. In his book on the dangers of corporate outsourcing, Eric Loomis places the blame for poor working conditions, and by extension the Rana Plaza disaster, in the hands of western corporations and factory owners such as Sohel Rana, whose business model is that of profit over people. In contrast, Elora Shehabuddin points out that the Bangladeshi government allowed for this high-output, low-cost export model. Shehabuddin explains that the development of the garment industry of Bangladesh was led by President Hussain Muhammad Ershad, who “enthusiastically encouraged foreign investment”. This led to a rapidly growing industry with women at the center. Shehabuddin’s insight emphasizes that rapid growth without appropriate oversight also contributes to injustice within the Bangladeshi garment industry.

Scholarship on possible solutions to improve working conditions within the Bangladeshi garment manufacturing industry are as complex as the garment supply chain itself. Human Rights Watch has a list of recommendations to the Bangladeshi government, the Ministry of Labour and Employment in Bangladesh, garment exporters and manufacturers, the corporations who contract garment factories, and the countries home to these corporations. Human Rights Watch’s recommendations are extensive, and include amended law, compliance enforcement, and increased worker protections on behalf of all factions of the garment manufacturing industry. Adding to these recommendations, in an editorial for The Conversation, Vanderbilt University researcher Brooke A. Ackerly recommends that the individual consumer should be aware of companies that continue to use factories in Bangladesh that are not up to code. Ackerly echoes the words of

7 Loomis, Out of Sight.

---
activist and former garment worker Kalpona Akter when she warns against corporate boycotts of factories in Bangladesh. Quoting Akter, she says that these boycotts would be damaging to both women workers and the overall economy of Bangladesh. There is no straightforward solution to garment worker injustice, but this research gives a clearer picture of what remediation should look like.

In Bangladesh’s conservative, patriarchal culture, many women marry young and forgo education and employment to stay in the home while men go to work. The RTW garment industry has shifted this dynamic; more women are earning their own income and delaying marriage and childbirth, and education is becoming a higher priority. In a 2013 study, Rachel Heath and A. Mushfiq Mobarak found a 50% increase in educational level for girls living near garment factory sites. In a first-hand account, Elora Shehabuddin quotes a mother of two daughters who was not only able to put off her husband’s request to try to have a boy, but was able to devote her income from garment factory work to educating her daughters, saying “one able daughter is better than 10 illiterate sons”. Factory work gives women workers a sense of independence and accomplishment, and can open up social opportunities not allowed within the home. Shehabuddin states that factory workers value the social aspect of their work in factories, “which replaced their previous isolation within the home”. This sense of pride in their work and earnings, along with a social outlet previously untapped, has empowered women in the Bangladeshi garment industry.

While there are indeed benefits to women participating in the workforce, many social and political factors leave them vulnerable to oppression in their working environments. When President Hussain Muhammad Ershad took power in 1982, he set forth a plan for an export-driven economy, establishing manufacturing for overseas consumer goods. As part of this plan, he held up the “competitive wages and docile labor” of women workers in Bangladesh as the key to economic development. It was in this decade the garment manufacturing industry in Bangladesh was born. Throughout the 1980s and 90s, hundreds of factories were built, and thousands of women were employed. However, indicating that mass production requires cheap and obedient labor for Western markets leaves women exploited. In an article about the United States’ occupation of Puerto Rico, author Shane Epting notes that upending long-held “traditional values, family structure, and cultural practices” at the hands of “US colonial business interests” leaves women with little autonomy, and can result in subjugation and abuse. While theoretically Bangladeshi women have a choice of working in RTW garment manufacturing, many of those employed in the industry come from poor, rural areas and are left with few opportunities. In Bangladeshi society, women are viewed as less physically and intellectually capable, with “tightly controlled social and economic lives”. They would accept this subjugation because they have little recourse.

In the immediate aftermath following the Rana Plaza disaster, in-depth research was necessary to understand the grave injustice that continues to impact current garment workers and survivors. Kabir, Maple, and Fatema’s study stated that women workers remain exposed to hazardous chemicals and poorly ventilated workspaces in garment factories, despite reported improvements. Many RTW garment workers suffer from head and ear problems, and show symptoms associated with long hours of work with few breaks or meals. Pregnant workers are denied breaks and maternity leave. Many workers suffer mental illness, with instances of depression and anxiety from being separated from their families. Women who survived the Rana Plaza disaster but suffered injuries find themselves cast out of the garment manufacturing industry altogether. Without a financial support system, some victims of the disaster are left with no other legitimate employment options, and resort to sex work. Kabir, Maple and Fatema interview a Rana Plaza survivor named Rokshana who lost her right hand in the disaster, and found herself unemployed afterward. Rokshana now engages in sex work full time, and says she “cannot force the clients for using the condom because they do not want to use the contraceptive.” The lack of control conveyed in Rokshana’s account highlights an economic system that does not support those who keep it running. Women workers are left with few resources for help, and continue to suffer

12 Shehabuddin, Reshaping the Holy, 96.
13 Ibid., 90.
14 Ibid., 89.
15 Ibid.
18 Kabir, Maple, and Fatema, “Vulnerabilities of Women Workers.”
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid., 228
physical and emotional pain from their work environments.

Activists and union organizers in Bangladesh have been pushing for worker safety for decades, typically at the risk of bureaucratic roadblocks, incarceration, and physical violence. Although the formation of trade unions are a “fundamental right” according to the Bangladeshi constitution, the organization of unions remains a dangerous endeavor. According to a news story from the Clean Clothes Campaign in 2010, Bangladesh Center for Workers Solidarity (BCWS) activists Kalpona Akter, Babul Akhter, and Aminul Islam were arrested for union organizing activity, and spent one month in jail. BCWS’ NGO status was denied by the Bangladeshi government during their incarceration, requiring them to resubmit their status upon release. The BCWS maintained that the organization should be legitimately reinstated without resubmission, but this petition was repeatedly denied. In the aftermath of Rana Plaza, labor laws protecting labor organizers and unions were amended. However, those involved in union organizing still risk being dismissed from their factory jobs, and often risk their lives to continue their activism. In one instance, activists for Bangladesh Federation for Worker Solidarity (BFWS) were severely beaten for suspected union activity at the Chunji Knit Ltd. Factory, a Korean-owned garment manufacturing plant. The perpetrators threatened to “cut out [the victim’s] tongue,” and left him with injuries to his back and kidneys. In a separate incident, a union organizer was beaten with metal curtain rods while pregnant, and was subsequently fired without back pay. If garment manufacturing unions are protected by the Bangladeshi constitution, legal and professional repercussions for interfering with union organization and should be enforced. The government and factory owners should allow workers to unionize without fear of arrest, assault, or any other hindrance.

The Rana Plaza disaster was a catalyst, elevating worker abuse to an international stage. According to a 2017 report from PRI’s The World, instead of boycotts, companies such as H&M and Adidas have bolstered their corporate social responsibility (CSR) policies to improve the conditions of factories that make their clothes in response. Individual boycotts and CSR have an impact on a company’s bottom line, as most consumers do not like the idea of buying clothes made with sweatshop labor. Legally-binding contracts such as Europe’s Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh has been signed as an act of good faith on behalf of corporations. For US-based companies, a nonbinding accord called the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety was established by Walmart, and was signed by companies such as Gap, Target, Saks Fifth Avenue and Lord & Taylor. As part of these accords, independent inspectors ensure that all factories that associate with companies in the accord are safe and up to code. According to a study by the Center for Global Worker’s Rights on the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh, nearly 100,000 hazards across 1,600 factories were rectified by inspectors. This would indicate the accord has been a success, but RTW garment factories have a long way to go. Corporate social responsibility is no substitute for changing government policies on worker’s health and safety. According to the Human Rights Watch, “rigorous enforcement of existing law would go a long way” toward improving working conditions for women in RTW garment manufacturing. Human Rights Watch has a number of suggestions for improving working environments that start with the Bangladeshi government, which includes bringing labor laws in line with international standards, developing plans for government labor and building inspectors, and establishing an effective outlet for worker complaints and violations.

Human rights groups, international NGOs and anti-sweatshop activists have called for boycotts on RTW garment factories in Bangladesh in the wake of Rana Plaza. Most often, international responses such as boycotts on behalf of corporations do more harm than good for marginalized groups. Boycotts from large western corporations effectively shut down production in an economically poor country such as Bangladesh. Kalpona Akter, in a speech to Vanderbilt University students, states that boycotts are “suicide” for Bangladesh. Organizations such as the Clean Clothes Campaign works directly with garment worker unions to improve working

24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
27 Ibid., 3. 
31 Ibid.
32 Brooke A. Ackerly, “Creating Justice.”
conditions. Rather than implementing boycotts, the most beneficial work being done to prevent disasters such as the Rana Plaza building collapse is activism that directly improves the lives of the women workers. Akter also states that changes can begin with the consumer. In an interview with Public Radio International, Akter suggests that if you are concerned with the working conditions of those who made the clothes, you should “start with the store managers.” She also suggests people can make a difference through direct action, and by carrying out individual boycotts against companies that have not signed contracts such as the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh and the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety.

When dealing with multinational corporations and a federal government driving an industry with little regulation, workers’ rights often fall by the wayside. As my research details, the garment industry of Bangladesh is an example of a rapidly growing garment industry that puts the safety and well-being of workers last. While Bangladeshi women have more job opportunities than ever before, their economic and social status, combined with a hazardous working environment puts them at risk. The Rana Plaza disaster caused over one thousand needless deaths. The negligence of the Bangladeshi government, the factory owners, and the corporations who outsource their production without oversight are responsible. Though small improvements have been made, in post-Rana Plaza Bangladesh, workers continue to face unsafe working conditions, abuse, and intimidation.

My research concludes that union organizing would improve working conditions and bargaining power for garment industry employees. For trade unions in the garment industry to be successful, it is required for the Bangladeshi government to enforce constitutional law protecting union organization. It is also necessary for those who threaten, assault, and fire union organizers to be brought to justice. Trade unions, combined with corporate responsibility, enforcement and updates to labor rights laws, and the continued work of NGOs such as the Clean Clothes Campaign are necessary for meaningful change.

33 Jasmine Garsd, “Are Factories Better.”

BIBLIOGRAPHY


UNPAID INTERNSHIPS: ESPRESSO AND EXPLOITATION

LISA ROBINSON

**Second Place Award for Research**

Introduction: Many college students choose to take part in an internship during their academic career. Interns may be rewarded with academic credit from their university, experience in a field they might be planning to enter into post-graduation, or in some cases, payment. Unpaid internships, however, have drastic impacts on labor. Unpaid internships set a dangerous precedent for fair labor due to their legal impacts, economic ramifications, and how they aid in the reproduction of inequality, for both societies and individuals.

Among almost all college majors, from students in the STEM fields to the arts, internships have grown immensely since the 1990s. Initially, internships were most popular for students who were in the STEM fields, particularly for those in engineering majors. However, today, they are popular among most majors and fields of study. Depending on where a student may participate in an internship, they may be given tasks that vary in educational relevancy. For some students, they might work hands-on with material that is pertinent to the learning process of their particular occupational field, but for others interns are forced to do “meaningless ‘grunt’ work, to fetch coffee and make copies.” Despite how meaningful the internship may be, students may feel compelled to take on this unpaid labor. As internships become more popular for students across all fields, employers are now finding it critical for many applicants to have taken an internship at some point prior to entering the workforce: “a period of internship is fast becoming regarded as an essential credential for accessing paid employment.” While internships become increasingly more vital for entry level positions, students who have not done one, which could be for a variety of systemic reasons which will be discussed later in this paper, are put at a disadvantage. Unpaid internships are changing the landscape of what entry level work means for recent graduates. Not only are they changing what work looks like overall, but specifically they are impacting labor in terms of their legal, economic, and ethical ramifications.

Legal Impacts

Unpaid internships create a dangerous precedent for fair labor due to the fact that their legality is unclear. On its surface, unpaid internships are essentially unpaid labor. Interns are given tasks and projects that may be similar to that of paid employees. Furthermore, even if they are simply given duties that are remedial like ordering coffees or printing out documents, they are still contributing labor to the organization for which they are not being compensated. Employers who hire unpaid interns are able to get away with this due to interns not being considered employees. By manipulating the language and fine details of the Fair Labor Standards Act, employers are able to exempt interns from the protections that are guaranteed to paid employees. The FLSA applies to individuals who are considered employees. As an employee, you are guaranteed certain protections that are included within the act including being required to be paid the minimum wage and receive overtime compensation when working over forty hours per week. Interns, however, are often defined as trainees. By being “characterized as a ‘trainee’ rather than an ‘employee’[...], the provisions of the FLSA do not apply.”

Employers are able to legally get away with not paying their employees or expecting them to work immense amounts of hours with no compensation. Due to their status as trainees rather than employees, interns have no legal leverage to challenge these decisions, and thus have no legal power against their employer, deepening the unequal relationship between employer and employee. In order to clarify the language of the FLSA, the Wage and Hour Division of the Department of Labor has set out a list of guidelines that internships must align with in order to legally be exempt from the FLSA’s protections. Although employers must abide by these guidelines, we can see that employers often act in violation of them. This list includes seven criteria that need to be met in order for interns to be legally considered trainees and not employees, and thus not included under the FLSA. The criteria are as follows:

1. “The extent to which the intern and the employer clearly understand that there is no expectation of compensation. Any promise of compensation, express or implied, suggests that the intern is an employee—and vice versa.
2. The extent to which the internship provides training that would be similar to that which would be given in an educational environment, including the clinical and other hands-on training provided by educational institutions.
3. The extent to which the internship is tied to the intern’s formal education program by integrated coursework or the receipt of academic credit.
4. The extent to which the internship accommodates the intern’s academic commitments by corresponding to the academic calendar.
5. The extent to which the internship’s duration is limited to the period in which the internship provides the intern with beneficial learning.
6. The extent to which the intern’s work complements, rather than displaces, the work of paid employees while providing significant educational benefits to the intern.
7. The extent to which the intern and the employer understand that the internship is conducted without entitlement to a paid job at the conclusion of the internship.”

In order to determine if an intern qualifies as an employee, courts are intended to use these guidelines as a reference and determine who is the “primary beneficiary” of an intern-employer relationship. In other words, courts are to decide which party is reaping more of the benefit from any given internship. When analyzing these factors, it often becomes challenging to determine if the intern is truly reaping more of the benefit. Further in this paper, we will be discussing how some of these points, when violated, have further implications in terms of the economy and ethics, however, even when viewing this strictly from a legal standpoint, it is important to see the dangerous precedent that violating these guidelines with no repercussions creates.

Following a wave of lawsuits against different companies by unpaid interns, the Labor Department felt compelled to clarify the language of these guidelines and loosen the standards. Furthermore,

some find the January 2018 update of these guidelines to be more lenient towards employers than the previous guidelines. The slew of lawsuits began with interns claiming that Fox Searchlight Picture had violated the WHD guidelines throughout their work on the set of the film Black Swan. Interns at Cosmopolitan, Marie Claire, and other magazines owned by the Hearst Corporation, along with interns from the PBS show The Charlie Rose Show have all waged lawsuits against their employers as well, with some interns succeeding in their court cases and others not. This inconsistency in enforcement could prove to be quite problematic when it comes to the enforcement of the WHD guidelines in the future.

Interns also receive less protection when it comes to workplace environment abuses, like sexual harassment and discrimination. According to one study, nearly 49 percent of interns experience harassment and discrimination. According to one study, nearly 49 percent of interns experience at least one instance of sexual harassment.7 Despite these staggering numbers, interns do not have the legal power to sue their employers for sexual harassment due to the fact that they are not technically designated as employees. For instance, in the case of Wang v. Phoenix Satellite TV US Inc., a former intern, LiHuan Wang, could not sue her employer for creating a hostile work environment since she was not technically considered an employee under the law.8 Sexual harassment can create a lot of strife and discomfort for interns, who may believe that internships are critical for the path to a successful career. Not only that, but legally, this excludes many people from receiving the protection from sexual harassment, although they may be sharing a workplace or responsibilities with employees who do receive the protection.

Discrimination is also a legal issue that interns may have to face in which they are not protected in the same way as employees. This discrimination is most evident in terms of ageism. For students who may be of an older demographic, they may face greater challenges when seeking internships that are not experienced by younger students. For instance, two applicants, ages 41 and 54, sued the magazine The Atlantic (at the time, known as The Atlantic Monthly), for denying them internships, stating that their program had an age cut off point.9 For employers, age is not considered a legal reason to deny someone employment, however, for interns who are not considered employees, this workplace protection is not guaranteed.

By creating an entire sector of the workforce that is not protected by certain labor laws, it weakens the legal legitimacy of these laws overall. If the scope of the FLSA is narrowed for the instance of unpaid internships, it creates a precedent for the scope to be narrowed even further. This could potentially mean fewer people are protected by the FLSA, and from this, could lead to further workplace abuses in the context of wages and overtime compensation. Interns must be made aware of these criteria before entering into an internship. By being educated of their rights as interns, and potentially employees, it could offer them the opportunity to challenge the relationship. Although educating interns on their legal rights is critical, it is also vital that employers are strictly supervised on how they carry out their internship programs. The activity of employers and interns calls for close analysis in order to see whether or not the program is in violation of the FLSA, in order to not only protect interns on an individual basis, but also to not weaken the FLSA for the future workforce.

Economic Impacts

Unpaid internships also have harmful economic ramifications, for both our economy in general, and for individuals. While it is challenging to exactly determine how much money companies save thanks to unpaid interns, Hart provides a conservative estimate of about $600 million per year.10 Some may view this as a gain for the economy, however, when we look deeper into this unpaid labor we can see how this lack of revenue is harmful to the economy overall. Due to the creation of unpaid internships as its own sector of the labor force, it eliminates an entire market of entry-level positions that would otherwise be available to recent graduates entering the workforce. As these masses of people are unable to find work, while interns occupy positions that could otherwise be available to them, this leads to large swaths of recent graduates unable to find sustainable jobs and contribute to the economy. Because of this, “displaced workers have to find other jobs, draw on unemployment compensation and may be reduced to welfare.”11 This puts a strain on our welfare system as more and more people need to rely on social welfare in order to survive, because they are unable to find jobs due to their positions being occupied by interns. Since employers do not need to pay interns, they are more incentivized to hire interns for these lower level positions rather than paid employees. This limits the possibility of paid employees being hired in the future as employers may feel that they are not reaping any immediate benefits

8 Ibid, 421.
9 Ibid, 423.

10 Hart, “Internships” 143.
from a paid employee over an unpaid intern. In the case of financial crisis, “economists have noted that unpaid internships slow overall economic recovery; because they have no income, unpaid interns cannot contribute to economic growth.”12 Since they have no means to contribute to the economy, it creates less of a stream of capital back into the economy in times of recovery.

On an individual basis, internships have economic harms as well. In addition to some of the impacts listed above, in terms of unemployment and increased reliance on social welfare programs, interns and graduates are participating in a system that works against their potential for better jobs in the future. Interns could be taking an internship in order for it to be a resume booster, and interns are occupying positions that could be otherwise available. Unpaid interns “effectively deprive themselves of considerable compensated job opportunities; thus, they collaborate in their own victimization.”13 To elaborate, interns contribute to a system that could potentially harm them in the future with the hope that the system will benefit them in that same future pursuit. Even before the challenges of searching for a job, working as an unpaid intern may come with individual financial hardship. Based on the amount of time interns must devote, some interns are unable to work a paid position in addition to the internship. Even if they are able to balance both, the increased commitment makes it challenging to work for pay as many hours as one might hope or need. Because of this, “unpaid interns are not contributing to social security or otherwise saving for retirement or accruing capital.”14 This can create potential economic hardships in the future for interns, as they are devoting a period of their life to labor yet they are not contributing any capital to secure their financial future.

Unpaid internships have also been found not to provide as much of a ‘foot in the door’ benefit as could be expected. The National Association of Colleges and Employers, an organization that tracks trends, salaries, and other job-related information pertaining to college graduates, conducted a three-year long survey regarding unpaid internships. They asked graduating seniors if they have received a job offer as well as if they’ve ever participated in a paid or unpaid internship. Of the 9200 students interviewed, they found that 63.1 percent of students who had completed a paid internship had received at least one job offer. Conversely, only 37 percent of students who had completed an unpaid internship had received a job offer. Even more startling, this was only a 1.8 percent advantage over students who had never completed an internship at all. Furthermore, these findings were fairly consistent among most majors. From business, to communications, to engineering, unpaid interns did about the same or worse on the job market compared to students who had never completed an internship.15 Intern Bridge, a consulting firm who conducts similar research on college recruiting, found similar results when they conducted a survey regarding job offers for former interns. This survey was conducted for 11,000 students who were in their sophomore year or higher, who had completed internships. The survey asked if these students had received job offers at the conclusion of their internship. The survey found that paid interns were about twice as likely to receive a job offer as their internship concluded than unpaid interns.16 This can harm an individual on a personal basis, economically, due to the potential misbelief that unpaid internships may promise some sort of job opportunity in the future.

For both the economy overall and individuals’ finances, unpaid internships have negative consequences. The continuation of this sector actively works against interns who may be seeking jobs in the future. Furthermore, due to the fact that they aren’t generating any capital, they are unable to contribute to social security programs or towards the economy. This has damaging impacts on the economy as a whole. On a personal level, interns may find it challenging to devote their time to both an internship and a paid job, so because of this they may forced to deal with personal financial struggles, like an inability to invest in a future retirement plan. Unpaid internships create major economic consequences on a widespread and an individual level, which certainly warrant further criticism.

Reproduction of Inequality

The third area of labor where internships have drastic impacts is how they aid in the reproduction of inequality. The fight for labor prioritizes fairness and justice, however, those two qualities are being neglected within the world of unpaid internships. Many students simply cannot afford to devote a period of time to working without pay. For these students who must devote their time to working a paid position, they are excluded from taking unpaid internships and thus must deal with greater challenges when applying to jobs in the future. While there is the narrative of the

---

12 Hart, “Internships,” 144.
14 Hart, “Internships,” 144.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
‘American Dream,’ this goal is unavailable to many when struggling to move forward with their career: “individualism remains ‘bounded’ by social biography, as young people negotiate […] according to their capital and resources.”17 Students who are expected to financially provide for themselves, or whose parents do not have the means to fully support them, must excuse themselves from participating in an unpaid internship, which also limits them from all of the benefits that go along with internships. This further perpetuates a cycle of systemic inequality. As more employers are considering internships essential to a job offer, these students who may not be affluent enough to not work for pay, continue to be thrust into a lower class of job offerings. Since higher, better quality jobs may require an internship, these recent graduates who were unable to be interns now only have access to a smaller, lower quality pool of job offers. This perpetuates the cycle of inequality since social mobility is now contingent on financial security rather than merit. Although two applicants may have attended the same college and participated in the same campus activities, the student who had the financial means to devote a summer to working as an unpaid intern could have an advantage over a student who needed to work a minimum-wage job in order to support him- or herself. An employer may determine if an applicant is qualified or not based on whether they have completed an internship, however, many students simply do not have access to these qualifications.

Another aspect of unpaid internships that is ethically unsound is receiving college credit for completing an unpaid internship. Many colleges and universities offer students academic credit upon finishing an unpaid internship, which can go toward their graduation requirements. While to many, this offers an easy way to receive credit and potentially speed up the path towards graduation, this quid-pro-quo is not as beneficial as it may seem. Many schools require their students to pay for the credit that they are receiving. So for unpaid interns, not only are they devoting their labor “for no pay, but it also involves the students actually paying thousands of dollars to their schools […] for academic credit.”18 This further deepens the inequality between the haves and the have-nots, as students who have the financial means to afford this are receiving the added benefit of academic credit, while students who cannot afford this extra charge, are awarded simply with the ability to list it on a resume and potentially have access to more job opportu-

18 Gregory, “Problematic Employment Dynamics,” 260
Information regarding the cost of credited internships is a bit more challenging to locate. After clicking through a few different embedded hyperlinks, the University of Massachusetts gives a fairly simplistic table of maximum credits allowed per semester, how to pay for your credits, and how they are graded in their computer system. One interesting thing to note is that for internships, students who are taking them during the academic year are not required to pay any additional cost for the credits earned through internships, however, if a student completes an internship during the summer or winter, that student must pay per credit. Students are allowed to receive a maximum of 14 credits worth of labor, with 1 credit received for every 40 hours worked, during the summer, and a maximum of 4 credits in the winter.\textsuperscript{19} Although this information could eventually be found, the more challenging this information is to find, the less students will be aware of all of the requirements of credited internships. Students may be unaware of these restrictions, like the maximum amount of credits allowed, and unknowingly commit to too much work without any academic reward for it.

Despite the fact that many pages that provide more in-depth details about internships needed to be accessed by initially clicking other pages first, the information regarding how the University of Massachusetts Amherst provides credits to their students for their internships was fairly transparent. In addition to information regarding merely registering for these credits, they also provided tips about professionalism and housing. Although the information was pretty clear it is also important to note how strongly this institution encourages students to take internships, and the amount of resources they devote into pushing this agenda. The weekly information sessions as well as their database Handshake gives students ample opportunities to pursue the internship process. While on one hand students may receive future benefits from pursuing an internship, on the other hand, it is critical to recognize the underlying reasons as to why institutions like the University of Massachusetts Amherst urge their students so strongly to undertake one.

**Conclusion**

Unpaid internships have major impacts on the legal bounds of labor. Students who may pursue internships are disqualified from certain protections granted to employees, although they work within the same environment and are often tasked with similar, if not the same, responsibilities. This not only is harmful for interns themselves, due to the fact that they may be subject to workplace abuse, this can weaken labor laws overall, as it sets a dangerous precedent for which sectors of the job force are protected by these laws and which are not, thus allowing employers possible avenues for exploitation.

Although unpaid interns contribute a massive amount of money to the economy due to the capital that is saved by not paying them, there are still significant economic consequences. Students who participate in unpaid internships take the immediate financial hit of working without pay. This means hours lost to what could be spent earning funds to financially support themselves. Additionally, they may face greater challenges when seeking a paid employment position in the future, as they are participating in a system that removes many entry level positions from the job market. Unpaid interns furthermore may not be as likely to gain job opportunities than their intern-less counterparts, essentially lowering the usefulness of internships when it comes to the post-grad job search.

Lastly, unpaid internships contribute to structural inequality because of the fact that they are exclusionary towards lower income students and the conflict of credited internships. Lower income students may need to earn an immediate income and thus forgo an internship, which can lead to a greater job disparity in the future, if only those who have completed internships are considered qualified applicants. Universities which offer students college credits for their internships create a greater conflict, as it not only dilutes the quality of an academic credit, but also further excludes low income people from this opportunity due to the fact that an intern must pay their institution in order to receive these credits.

Moving forward, it is critical that we question both the need for internships and their impacts. Although interns may receive valuable information about a career path they want to pursue following their college experience, there are great dangers that come from a world with unpaid internships. Society and individuals are heavily impacted by a world with unpaid internships, and for the most part, in a negative way. If this workforce will continue with unpaid internships, we must loosen the legality of the definition of employees in order to incorporate interns. We must make internships more accessible to people of different economic backgrounds. We must close the gap between those who can reap the benefits of unpaid internships and those who cannot. Unpaid internships warrant a great amount of scrutiny in the field of labor due to the consequences they impose for both society and individuals.

\textsuperscript{19} “Career Services,” The University of Massachusetts Amherst, Accessed April 29, 2019, http://www.umass.edu/careers/internships/process.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


“What are we having for dinner?” I ask Mom. She sits at the dining room table with a sea of papers spread out in front of her, trying to figure out how to pay the rent, insurance, and credit card bills without the money for any of them.

“Nuggets and fries.” She says without looking up, “Is that alright?”

“Yeah, ‘course.” I mumble, mildly dissatisfied with the answer. I don’t know why. I don’t know what else I should have expected. We’ve been eating chicken nuggets and french fries two or three times a week for as long as I can remember. If we aren’t having hot dogs on white bread, or mac & cheese or Chef Boyardee or something like that, there’s a pretty good shot we’re eating nuggets and fries. Every now and then we’ll have ‘breakfast for dinner’, but really that’s just a nice way of saying we were out of ‘dinner for dinner’ options and cereal with toast would have to do.

“Turn the oven to 350 for me.” Mom asks, still staring intently at the figures in front of her, as if glaring at the unpaid sums would reduce them.

“Yup.” I say, walking to the kitchen and twisting the small piece of metal that once held the knob of the oven. The oven was in rough shape, the knob had gone missing years ago and there was still no trace of it, two of the burners on top needed to be lit with a match, and if you tried to put it above 400 degrees the whole apartment began to smell dangerously of gasoline. I’m certainly not complaining though. I remember when it was completely broken for like a year and a half. There was something wrong with the way the gas hooked up or something like that. The oven had just kinda sat there in the kitchen, more useful as a cabinet than anything else, while we cooked every meal in the toaster oven set up on top of it. When Mom had finally saved enough money to fix it, we ate a full Thanksgiving meal in the middle of April to make up for the rotisserie chicken we had eaten in November.

***

Michael was a junior majoring in Economics at UMass Boston in 2019; he graduated Magnum Cum Laude in the spring of 2020 with a degree in Economics and Philosophy. He enjoys walk in the woods, otters, and talking to the moon. He wants to explain why he chose to use the word “retard” in his story: “I feel I should explain a choice I made in the story to use the word “retard”. I have a brother who is mentally handicapped and have always found the use of that language disgusting. Despite this personal opinion, I chose to use the word in this story in order to represent both, one of the characters and the type of things that tend to stand out most sharply in our memories. Whether to include this word was something I wrestled with and so I wanted to make sure my personal beliefs are not misconstrued with those of a character in this story.”

Michael F. Donahue

**First Place Award Creative**

“W
We weren’t supposed to still be in this apartment. I remember when we sold our house. That’s what my parents told me anyway, “we sold the house”. In reality the bank had foreclosed and booted us out. But my dad told me that we’d only be in this apartment temporarily. A month, three at the most, until he found a new job and hunted down a new house. He said the next house would be even better than the last. He said that this one would have a big backyard and I’d get my own room, instead of having to share one with my baby brother like I did back in the old house. That had been when my baby brother was still a baby. He started first grade a few months ago. And here we are, still in this apartment. We don’t have a bedroom to share here, instead we share the living room. I get the couch; he gets the love seat.

I remember I was so excited for our new house. I left all my toys in the brown boxes we had packed them in, saying I didn’t want to play with them until I was in the new backyard. Mom told me I should go ahead and unpack. She had a better grasp on the gravity of our situation than anyone. I didn’t listen. Hope of a return to my normality was far preferable to accepting our bleak new reality.

After two years I finally cracked the seal on those boxes. I pulled out the cars and action figures that once seemed so alive. I played around with some of my old favorites for a bit, but they had lost their luster, cooped up in cardboard so long. When I tried to spur my imagination into action and bring my old friends back, I only succeeded in dwelling on the past. It had been a long two years. Far too long for hope to continue dissuading reality.

***

Mom clears the table of our family’s obligations and takes over the supervision of dinner while my sister and I set the table. When dinner is served, my brother is called away from his YouTube video and we all huddle around the table. Me and my brother munch on our balls of breaded chicken, I hardly taste them anymore. My little sister slurps her soup; she swore off solid foods and now only eats shakes and soups. Whenever a pack of storebrand Oreos makes its way into the apartment, she seems to find an exception to her new dietary restrictions though. My mom, for her part, sips at a cup of coffee. She rarely eats, she seems to sustain herself on a diet of stress and caffeine.

We eat quickly and quietly, keeping our heads down until our plates are cleared. All our small talk has already been exhausted. We’ve heard each other’s stories from the day, we’ve relayed any important information, the only thing for us to do is eat.

My mom stands up and goes back to her stack of papers, indicating to everyone that dinner is over. My sister puts the leftovers in a tupperware while my brother helps me do the dishes at the sink; scrubbing by hand with a previously yellow sponge. A big bubble, tinged blue, forms on one of the plates. My brother smacks it with one of his fat little fists. We both laugh.

***

My dad tried to get us that new house though. He seemed to spend all day on job sites, looking for anything that met his specifications. He was so determined to nail something down that he made Monster.com the homepage of our Internet Explorer. We probably couldn’t afford internet at that point. My mom had already sold our only remaining car and was taking the bus to work by then. But he said we needed internet if we had any chance of getting out of, what he called, “this shit hole”. But while my mom went to work, and my siblings and I went to school, the hours my dad spent in front of the computer did nothing to get us out of “this shit hole” or, what we had taken to calling it, “home”.

I suppose my dad would eventually get bored of browsing his job sites. His attention span had been short even before his temper got that way. But there are few times I’ve seen Mom angrier than when we had to get rid of the computer. It had gotten a virus. My dad threw it away while we were all out, saying it wasn’t even worth trying to fix. He blamed it on “those fucking spam emails” that everyone sent him. By that point I had learned the value of his words.

***

Mom goes to bed shortly after dinner. It’s still pretty early, but she has to get up for work the next morning.

I sit in the living room and watch TV with my sister. American Idol is on tonight and she loves one of the judges. My brother colors a picture of Peppa Pig and her perfect family on the floor. He pretends to hate American Idol. He says he doesn’t understand why we want to watch people just sing. But within a few minutes when he sees us laughing, the masculine aversion he had fabricated crumbles away. He asks my sister about the different contestants, wondering if anyone on the show is famous or rich. She answers him eagerly, pointing out what she likes about some
people, what she hates about others. She’s excited to have someone to share her wisdom with.

***

My dad left. Like forever. I don’t blame him though. He had nothing here except for his family, and honestly, I think the importance of family gets overexaggerated. He wasn’t happy here. Him and Mom were always fighting. At first, they fought about money, then they fought about everything. The way my sister chewed her food (“If she doesn’t learn how to chew like a fucking human being, people are gonna think she’s a retard”), the way my mom’s boss treated her (“You know why he talks to you like you’re a slut? Cause you don’t have any fucking respect for yourself”), even the cleanliness of the apartment (“How the fuck do you think it’s acceptable to let your family live in a shit hole like this?”), it seemed like they never stopped fighting. I felt like I was living in London during the bombings of World War Two. Every time they began fighting, my sister, brother, and I would take shelter in my sister’s room and pretend to not hear the vulgarity and hate that were raining down on the rest of the apartment. The difference between that and war was that the only carnage we saw in the aftermath were the tear stains on Mom’s cheeks after my dad stormed out to “get some air”.

He never hurt my mom (physically anyway), but it always felt like he was a hair away from it. I would sit in the room, listening for any indication of violence, waiting for it really. I prayed to everything I knew how to pray to, begging for peace on my mother’s behalf. I was scared and sorry, I just didn’t know what for. I had made up my mind long ago that if he were to ever hurt her, I’d make him pay. The sick part of me almost wanted it to happen. It’s like I wanted an opportunity to take vengeance on my family’s plague.

Even when they weren’t fighting my dad was miserable. He had been an extremely ambitious man before we lost the house. He was always talking about starting his own company or designing a million-dollar app. But after a few months of listening to the stomping of our upstairs neighbor in the middle of the night, his ambition seemed to whither. He stopped trying to create, instead contenting himself with criticizing everyone else. I could tell he resented us for the situation our family was in.

The day he walked out the door of “this shit hole” with a duffle bag of clothes and the promise that he would come back, I felt relieved. Not relieved that he was gone, he’s still my dad and sometimes I even miss him. But more relieved that all the anger and bitterness that he harbored were gone.

That wasn’t entirely true though, for months it felt like his ghost still lingered in the apartment. Mom was still on edge, quick to snap at anyone for little things. She had gotten so used to having a foil to argue with, that she had trouble abandoning the hostility that he had ingrained in her.

***

I send my sister to bed after her show ends. It’s already well after her bedtime, but I won’t tell Mom if she doesn’t.

My brother is sleepy, but refuses to succumb to the urge. He asks if I’ll read him a story. I reach behind the couch and pull out the book we’ve been reading at night. It’s a Magic Tree House book. I remember when my dad used to read the same stories to me before bed when I was younger. My brother enjoys looking at the pictures, I savor the nostalgia. When we read, he does the voice of Jack and I do the voice of Jack’s younger sister Annie, a high-pitched falsetto squeak that cracks him up every time.

Just as Jack and Annie are about to use their magical tree house to travel through time, my brother stops me and asks, “If you had a tree house, where would you go?”

“I don’t know. Maybe Ancient Greece or something, see what all the fuss is about.” I say, knowing he’s just waiting for me to ask the question back, “What about you? What time would you take your tree house to?”

“I’d take it to Bill Gate’s house.” He says wisely.

“Not exactly the point of a time machine.” I mumble to myself, then ask, “What would you do there?”

“I’d steal all his money.” he answers, “I’d put it in bags like bank robbers and bring it home with me.”

“I don’t think Mr. Gates would like that very much.” I tell him.
“I don’t care. He’s like the richest guy in the world and we’re the poorest.” He says.

“We’re not the poorest, bud. Think about all the stuff we have. You’ve got a nice warm place to sleep, and food to eat, and toys to play with. A lot of people aren’t that lucky.” I try to reason with him.

“But it’s not fair that Bill Gates can have whatever he wants and we can’t and other people can’t.” His voice is whiney as he says this, his head heavy with sleep.

“Yeah, it’s not fair.”

***

I don’t appreciate Mom enough. I never have, I never could. Every day she seems to tackle a list of labors that not even Hercules could rival.

She’s worked in the same office for almost ten years now. She gets there ungodly early every morning to accept shipments from suppliers, she stays late when they need her to, she takes work home with her on the weekend, and has been going in on Saturdays to clean the office for extra cash ever since they got rid of their cleaning company. Around Christmas she picks up hours at a diner she worked at when she was a teenager so that she can fill our tree. Every year it feels like a miracle to wake up and see the brightly wrapped presents shining under the tree’s twinkling lights. A miracle procured through sheer will power and a mother’s love.

Her determination to provide for her children is intimidating and humbling. She resolves herself to rise above the world’s expectations for her, an impoverished single mother of three, and provides us with a lifestyle beyond what we have any right to expect. She sends us on field trips when we beg her to save the money, she hunts down fun things for us to do as a family that won’t jeopardize that month’s cluster of bills, and more than anything, she’s there for us at the drop of a hat. Are you sick? She’s there with the remedy. Are you having trouble in school? She’s there with an explanation that makes more sense than anything your teacher taught you. Was someone mean to you? She’s there, like a cloud of doom, determined to defend your right to happiness. Or, do you just need someone to talk with? She’ll prove that despite her innumerable responsibilities, you’re her only priority.

How could I ever appreciate her to the extent she deserves?

***

My brother breaths quietly from his bed. I lay awake, looking in front of me, deep in the thoughts that endlessly churn through my head.

I go to the kitchen and look for something to eat. The cabinets offer few solutions to my grumbling stomach. I return to my couch with a granola bar in hand. I peel the shiny foil wrapper from the perfect rectangle. I break a corner off the bar and pop it into my mouth. I savor the syrupy sweet granola as my mouth waters with delicate overexcitement. My stomach gives a hollow laugh at my insulting attempt to quell it, but this will have to do.

I take another bite and get the delightful surprise of a chocolate chip. In the dark I hadn’t been able to read the label on the packaging, but this makes the thrill even greater as my blind indulgence is rewarded by the sweetness of this chocolate morsel.

I once read that chocolate was a food for kings. As I sit here, enjoying the chocolate my taste buds harvest from amidst the mass of granola, I understand why. In this moment, I feel like royalty. I am king. King of the couch. And over there is my brother, prince of the living room and lord of the loveseat. By royal decree I have determined that all the kingdom’s chocolate shall be rounded up and distributed amongst all my loyal subjects. Let us all enjoy the comforts of royalty and the splendor of life’s riches!

My tongue fishes the last of the granola from my teeth as I settle down to sleep on my throne.
What permits the unlicensed chauffeur that drives capitalism,
To be overdressed with generational wealth for today’s success?
As it Runs not for cover as the naked truth of poverty, addresses the inherited findings of racism.
A social dress code and genes that only the few and selective are lucky to possess.

Yet, there is an underpaid dream job that entails one to ask, where to boss?
The driving force, behind wealth in midst of stolen freedom.
Escorting, the image of excellence as the poor is faced with another loss.
No lucrative capital in the truth, when looking in the direction of tomorrow’s freedom.

I’m I free, to trust not in the printing cartel for the Bank of Greed?
Or enslaved, to the dropping of two nickels on the floor, to stop on a dime?
For there is no withdrawal of equality only ends that justify an enterprise that segregates
prosperity, money and the freed.
When, the idea of money is a cinder block of corruption, falling through the construct of time.

The cost of a thoughtful moment is a timeless present, wrapped with events that captures the now.
Yet, the nature of the trade that has evolved into a state where one side wins and the other holds
on to a failure that cannot be let loose.
Defeat comes with the constant change of money’s forecast, whether it freely and heavily rain
down as of now.
If, it was all up to the “moneyologist”, I would have to take out a loan to pay for my right to
choose,
Not to invest in the Bank of Greed, a corrupted hand trying to shape the rights to the paradox of
being free.

So, as it rains down some of us still remain dry and poor.
Soak in all that we lack and while taking cover under the “trickledown” umbrella of inequality.
The top 1% and all their money in the world, couldn’t pay the struggling to remain poor.
Better yet put your money away, it’s no good here, instead trade your financial deficiency for my
poverty,
While keeping the generational thought of having money…

Phil completed his bachelor’s degree in Sociology, with a minor in
Psychology, at UMassBoston in December 2020. He is interested in
spirituality and science, and where they meet or not in the light of
the objective truth. He is also an aspiring Beatmaker/Songwriter/
Producer who loves basketball and lives in Dorchester, MA.
For you are compensated for your worth and not works. With a currency that pays the rich and tease the unfortunate. In less than a minute, money and inequality procreate the deeds of its own works. An infinite amount of fortune that only seems useful to the unfortunate.

Besides, redistribution of wealth and Going green isn’t the finance that’s going paint the town red. It’s the poor, that must complete the job before this blue nation. While, the privilege and their daily 9-5, sleeps with in a social comfort and not a soft bed. Reroutes, capitalism back to the road of success and not any map like direction.

If Siri and Alexa were paid and not programmed to have a conversation. They’ll both concluded that money makes the world go around. Anything else that don’t make cents can walk in a straight line right of the face of the earth or speak with the dialect of a rich and wealthy position.

Yet, Fluent in all languages, but only talk to those who have the expenses to listen as words are the unpaid workers of sound.

Conceptually grown on the notion of greed, and not fallen lumber or standing trees. Get rich or die trying. While the poor beg for change in the streets. The mentality to a misconception, that replaces what it means to be truly living.

Dead presidents buried in our democracy. As they all lie, I tell no untruths when I see one standing cherry tree, in the midst of inequality. Deemed to be at the root of all evil, the missing strings to a puppet that controls the minds of the people.

Oh, if the poor could just refurbish their new-found penny and find a buyer that is worthy, to ensure that poverty is left sheltered, behind in their painful memories. Once they receive their fair share of plenty. Could they now buy out their dreams? Or in return will they invest in the idea of injustice, to justify more for their means.

As they forget, where they come from and live out their nightmares of monetary greed? Living a life that once was despised, rolling up in luxury, to floss on those now less than. To show all this floss on my fingers, around my neck and in my teeth but not that typical usual gold, when I smile platinum best fits me. With hopes that they are not too poor, to pay attention.

No formal education needed to understand, money’s currency. An undertow that seems perfectly guided by those desiring more. It flows right past the uneducated and those rich in poverty. like Pirates that will rob the seas of its shores.

Then sell it back to a bright-eyed tsunami, that’s wet behind the ears to gain even more. Well, have it all even my damp refurbished penny, just leave me with my broken dreams, that I will now restore piece by piece. As each one is its own special revamping… To get the poor rich or die trying, with the very same currency, that was wasted, understanding...and not the utility of Money.

Currency: the fact or quality of being generally accepted or in use. - Dictionary.com

For money’s currency is greed and when that moral value is exchange and converted to the state of sharing and caring.

Money’s currency is then and only then transfer into understanding. Until then, all that is above remains as greed for money.
EXT. SUBURBAN ROAD - AFTERNOON
We are first introduced to STEIN, a young twenty-one year old apprentice. His dark, brown filled eyes are in deep thought as he walks slowly up a long narrow hill. His complexion is colorful, but the creases on his forehead show the stress his job has on him. He wears a long black trench coat that drags along the pavement, like a weight is always being applied to him.

STEIN
Are you sure about this Atlas? The man hasn’t done anything wrong.

Here is where ATLAS, Stein’s master, is first shown. He is a middle aged man with grey hair that makes him seem like he is much older. However, the rest of his features show his youth. It seems as though this he does not care for much just by the way he walks. He is sluggish, and moves with the care of a sloth. His blue eyes are dimmed and unfocused, as if he has a million things rushing in his mind. At any moment, this man could die, and he is okay with that.

ATLAS
You know the rules Stein, we must treat everyone equally. No one gets a pass.

STEIN
I know, I know. But with everything that has transpired over the last few years, I just want to make sure we aren’t doing anything wrong.
Stein puts his head down, looking at the cracks in the ground. He wishes that this world he accompanies had more to offer than just this blob of nothingness. A world where everything is grey, and no spark of life can be found.

Part of me hopes you’re wrong.

Atlas looks to Stein, his eyes as cold as ice. He can see the sadness in his apprentice’s appearance. He places his hand on Stein’s shoulder, consoling his friend.

I hope I am wrong as well.

EXT. SUBURBAN HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Stein and Atlas arrive in front of a small house right up the road. They march forward, and knock lightly on the door, waiting for an answer. Stein’s heart skips a beat as the seconds count down. They are here for a reason, and he knows that, however, he prays that there was another way.

Atlas, looks bored, like the world could blow up right now, and he would just sit there in the flames of destruction. Stein breathes slowly, allowing his lungs to leave all the anxiety on the porch.

The doors opens and reveals JOHNATHON. He is a teenager, wearing normal school clothing. He is innocent, and you could tell just by how he smiles at the Stein and Atlas. Hi back is arched up straight with a sense of pride, almost like he is not afraid of death itself. His blonde hair is trimmed perfectly short, and his smile is that of a movie star. Beautifully white and perfect.

Atlas places a hand on his chest, and any sort of boredom the man had on his face, has changed to kindness and sincerity.

Jonathan Lance, my name is Scythe Atlas.

Atlas now guides his hand over to his apprentice Stein, who gives Jonathon a nod of respect.

How do you look at it Master?

My apprentice we all have cheated death. There is nothing that fears us anymore. The only thing we can fear is ourselves.
Jonathon, have a seat.

Jonathon takes a seat, accompanied by Atlas. However, Stein still remains standing, but at Atlas’s side. Atlas waves his hand away from Stein, ordering him to leave the room.

ATLAS

Leave us.

Atlas and Jonathon sit together, the silence echoing the very foundation of the room. Atlas leans forward, his hands joined together. He is looking directly in Jonathon’s eyes.

ATLAS

I suppose you have a lot of questions.

Jonathon taps his foot on the carpet floor. He is nervous, and he knows he is showing it too much.

JONATHON

Of course, I do, but I bet you can’t answer them.

Atlas leans back in his seat and looks up the ceiling above them. He knows where this is heading.

ATLAS

Try me.

Jonathon stands up, furious with how this scythe master is treating him. It is like this man could care less that he is about to take a human life.

JONATHON

Shut up with that self-righteous crap! The only reason why your kind show up is to kill people.

Atlas does not look intimated. He is in control and had dealt with much worse.

ATLAS

Do you believe that is all we do? Just kill people?

There is another silence in the air, as Jonathon lets his anger fume inside of him.

JONATHON

Yes.

Atlas leans over, his whole body relaxing.

ATLAS

Then you won’t mind if I tell you a little bit about us killers.

JONATHON

Sure, not like I have a choice.

Atlas gestures for Jonathon to sit back down. The boy complies, his arms folded in anger as he is being treated like child throwing a tantrum.

ATLAS

Exactly. So, shut up and listen. Scythes were created to make sure that the human population doesn’t over grow due to death being no longer a necessity.

JONATHON

I know that, but you still haven’t answered my question.

ATLAS

Why you? Why do you have to die? Simple answer is that there is no simple answer. You were chosen based off data taken from the AI system, or the Thunderhead. All you are is a spec. A bug that we must crush.

Jonathon looks to Atlas, the annoyance clearly visible on his face.

JONATHON

I know that, but you still haven’t answered my question.

ATLAS

Why you? Why do you have to die? Simple answer is that there is no simple answer. You were chosen based off data taken from the AI system, or the Thunderhead. All you are is a spec. A bug that we must crush.

The anger is extracted from Jonathon. The fight he had is drained as the information is being processed to him.

JONATHON

Not sugar coating it, huh?
Atlas does not look away from Jonathon. His eyes are staring directly at the teenage boy, examining him like a scientist stares at his experiment.

ATLAS
Would you have liked me to lie to you?

JONATHON
No, but I wouldn’t have minded it.

ATLAS
Don’t worry, I don’t like to glean people slowly. It will be quick and painless.

JONATHON
Funny, you use the word glean instead of kill. Does it make you feel better?

Atlas rises from his chair, and steps closer to Jonathon, but before anything is shown the scene shifts.

EXT. SUBURBAN ROAD - NIGHT
Stein waits outside the house, the cold air raising his tired breath into the sky. He yawns with a carefree attitude.

STEIN
Did he cry?

Stein and Atlas walk away from the house, the moon hitting off their dark cloaks as they continue to walk away from the house. Atlas doesn’t even shed a tear, while Stein has to wipe his eyes clear of them. This job is not easy, and everyone is different. Atlas though, seems to have been drained of all humanity.

ATLAS
They always cry.

STEIN
How do you do it? How do you go through this life?

ATLAS
In our line of work, there is no longer a life.

Stein and Atlas look up into the skyline, the clouds passing them by. They contemplate how they got here, how the world itself had let this happen.

STEIN
I don’t suppose it is too late to want to go back?

ATLAS
And do what? Feel pain, sickness, and death?

STEIN
At least we would feel something, Atlas.

Atlas walks away from Stein, his back towards his pupil. Tears stream down Atlas’s face. He is still human, and with being human, feeling nothing is worse than feeling too much.

ATLAS
We lost that feeling when we created a being that became our God.

I/E. BLACK SCREEN
TITLE CARD: Is being God worth it?

NARRATOR (V.O.)
Is being God worth it?

TITLE CARD: This commercial is sponsored by Algorithmic Justice League

NARRATOR (V.O.)
This commercial is sponsored by Algorithmic Justice League.

TITLE CARD: The Algorithmic Justice League is a company that aims to highlight algorithmic bias through provocative media and interactive exhibitions, provide space for people to voice concerns and experiences with coded discrimination, develop practices for accountability during the design, development, and deployment phases of coded systems.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
The Algorithmic Justice League is a company that aims to highlight algorithmic bias through provocative media and interactive exhibitions, provide space for people to voice concerns and experiences with coded discrimination, develop practices for accountability during the design, development, and deployment phases of coded systems.
We, as a society have a right to understand the rights we have in this global evolution. If we wish to have a better world for ourselves, we must not put power into the wrong hands, otherwise, we might look at a world similar to this. One with no feeling, one with only databases and frameworks.
Daniel Bazarian is a recently-graduated student of English at the University of Massachusetts Lowell and a writer of both creative and journalistic work. You can find recordings of his most recent project, a staged audio play entitled “Close Your Eyes and Look,” online at closeyoureyesandlook.bandcamp.com.”

ECONOMIES OF THE TRAGICALLY HIP:
Reflections on How I Didn’t Get Fired from the Job I Lost

**First Place Award Activist Reflection**

I had worked for three years at Unnamed Hip Location when the Owner (also Unnamed1) came to see me during a shift I worked alone. He proceeded to shout at me like a Junior High School bully. “You piece of shit,” he said, standing in the doorway of the backroom. I didn’t feel physically threatened, but was very aware that there was only one door out of the room I was in. “You motherfucker.”

Before jumping to any conclusions, you should know that I brought this Gen Xer Tantrum upon myself – I had, several minutes earlier, expressed disbelief that Unnamed Owner would instruct me, as he had, not to pay the house band that night on account of their being late. Incidentally, the band had informed me much earlier in the day that they would be late, and I had personally relayed to every customer coming in that night that the show would begin a bit later than usual. This wasn’t the first time this had happened, and it had never previously aroused any ire on either the customer or managerial side. But you can’t blame Unnamed Owner for not knowing all that, I suppose, since he never bothered to ask me about any of it before screaming. If he had, maybe he would have understood my surprise at his demand that I break with our consistent practice of paying the professional musicians who played regularly and reliably at Unnamed Hip Location. We paid them shit, of course, but it had been regularly-dispensed shit for at least two years.

“I can’t just not pay them,” I had said. Later on in the somewhat one-sided “exchange” that ensued, Unnamed Owner asked me what right I had to say that I “wouldn’t” not pay the band, and I found myself in the position of having to correct him. I’d said “can’t,” not “won’t.” In spite of this, he still told my manager later that I had said I “wouldn’t” not pay the band.

1 I’m avoiding using any proper names in this essay. This isn’t a petty attempt at retributive essay-writing, but an attempt to use an experience I’ve had as a jumping-off point for analyzing a wider societal trend.
Quibbles. Anyway. I never worked another shift at Unnamed Hip Location after that night. In fact, I haven’t even been back as a patron since. I was not, however – and I find it pertinent to note this – fired. Because of course not. Fired? Firing? That’s something old people do. That would’ve been, like, way uncool.

And believe you me, this place was cool. Like, farmer’s-market-every-weekend cool. Like, kombucha-on-tap cool. There was this one time that a vegan chili recipe was lunch special of the week, and it was so good that not only did I eat it for five straight days, but it almost convinced a degenerate meat-eater like myself that maybe making that jump to vegetarianism I’d long felt guilty about not considering could be easier than I thought. That’s how cool this place we’re talking about is.

I’m not being facetious. I legitimately thought, for a very long period of time, that Unnamed Hip Location (or UHL as it shall henceforward be referred to – not to be confused, I hope, with the United Hockey League) was just about the coolest place I had ever been, and that I was lucky to be working there. My shifts matched up perfectly with my class schedule, I generally liked my coworkers, and I even got free coffee sometimes. I was naïve, is what I’m trying to say – or, alternatively, I was a student.

Actually, pretty much everyone who worked at UHL was a student, in one form or another. That is, “student” if you use the generous interpretation of the term, which seems to be the one that fits much better in the modern period. “Student” means, of course, somebody taking classes at a college or university, either full- or part-time. That’s the classic definition. But in my experience, it also means somebody who just got their undergraduate degree and never planned on going to grad school, but who can’t seem to get any jobs that aren’t in service right now. “Student” also means somebody who was taking classes last semester and hopes to be taking them next semester (or the one after that), but has to work full-time right now in order to pay for it. It additionally means, or can mean, somebody who will be making the move from a community college to the university that just accepted them, but who can’t quite afford it right now, as well as somebody who had every intention of taking classes this semester but the registration deadline got lost in the shuffle of shifts and rent payments and their advisor never emailed them about it because they’re a transfer and admin must’ve screwed something up with putting them in touch. Occasionally, it can just mean somebody who owns a longboard and took a campus tour once. I’m sure I’m missing a few more.

In other words, if you find yourself in the position of being ages to 19-30, with the possible corollary of living in a college-saturated East Coast state like I do, there is a quality of Perpetual Studenthood in which you are probably living, engendered by a distension of the boundaries of the term “student.” The edges have had to be moved out on either side to accommodate the ballooning cost of college tuition and the shrinking buying power afforded by wage labor, minimum- or otherwise. Perhaps it has something to do with the fact that I go to a state school and not a private university, but I have known vanishingly few people who attended college for eight consecutive semesters, lived in dorm rooms, attended stimulating lectures and/or toga parties every weekend, etc., etc. Most of the people I know have spent some not inconsiderable amount of time in the grayer areas of Perpetual Studenthood.

Myself being one of them – I took a semester off in order to spend a year working full-time at UHL, where every iteration of “student” I’ve mentioned here was represented by at least one of my coworkers.

***

Should I be clearer about what I mean when I say “Hip?” It’s a broad category, and one whose specifics have been debated at least since the mid-aughts. I’m fairly uninterested in rehashing tired complaints about modes of dress and tastes in beer, crafted to assume the superiority of both complainer and audience despite the fact that their respective possession of sufficient leisure time to write, read and become worked up about something so pointless places them in a similar category to the dilettantes onto whom they’re projecting. What I am interested in, however, is the convergence of this designation with a certain type of vaguely progressive politics.

It should be relatively unsurprising that Hip Locations would position themselves fuzzily within the arena of what we call “the left” in America. These places don’t occur in a vacuum, after all – they require a consumer base of patrons willing and able to pay somewhat higher prices for goods and services that are possibly niche, usually well-made, and presented in spaces with an elevated design atmosphere. This demographic primarily converges with the demand for eateries and cultural centers like theaters, cinemas and specialty shops in relatively prosperous urban areas.
particularly ones which play host to colleges and universities. These towns especially are havens for Hip Locations, but in order to appeal to the set of people who would be regularly spending money in college towns, businesses need to ensure that their appeal extends to this very politicized portion of the population, the majority of which identify somewhere along the spectrum of left politics in America. This is becoming increasingly necessary as political positions become more and more deeply enmeshed with popular culture and consumption habits.

What we get, then, are businesses which go out of their way to show off their culturally progressive credentials. UHL was certainly one of these places, though I’m going to refrain from pointing to very many specific examples, as I want to avoid seeming like I’m criticizing practices oriented towards greater inclusivity. I should hardly need to state that honest efforts to make spaces more inclusive should be applauded and supported. This practice only becomes a problem when the façade of cultural progressivism is stripped away from its underlying principles – equity, justice, community, etc. – and used as branding, belied by the actual business practices in which these places sometimes engage. The appearance of “woke” language in the Twitter feeds of corporations like McDonald’s and Whole Foods while they still utilize prison labor as a major facet of their business model is one large-scale example of this phenomenon. Really, what we see many of these businesses engaged in is the same flavor of soft-left pandering that the liberal class has been performing since it was essentially evacuated of content towards the end of the twentieth century, and in different ways beforehand as well; the only real distinction in most Hip Locations is the design packaging.

And I don’t want to underplay the importance of that packaging! Anybody who’s ever found themselves a Hip Location (as well as pretty much anyone who’s heard about them from their friends) will understand the vital importance of aesthetic choices to both the business model and general vibe of these places. There are a lot of weeds which can be unconstructively gotten into around the specifics of this aesthetic tendency – as the above-cited n+1 publication states, “all descriptions of hipsters are doomed to disappoint, because they will not be the hipsters you know” – and I want to avoid having this essay operate on a level of empty aesthetic criticism, but I think there are broad enough similarities in the “look” of these places that briefly outlining some of them can be a worthwhile exercise.

There are the obvious indicators. The brick wall, usually only one out of four but occasionally found in full quartets. Pseudo-industrial detailing including-but-not-limited-to exposed ducts and steel girders. The Edison bulbs. (The constant fucking Edison bulbs). My own feeling is that the best way to understand the parameters in which these milieus are operating would be to think of the general feeling of late-period Victorian and Edwardian architectural preferences with a nod towards the Industrial Revolution that occurred during these periods. If you don’t know much about late-period Victorian and Edwardian architecture, that’s even better, because the details borrowed are inexact. It’s an overall feeling, not a well-researched historical reconstruction. One of the main differentiating factors between this style and what is known as Steampunk, which in certain instances it could be mistaken for, is an orientation on the part of Hip Locations towards “Americana.” Practically, this means less brass and more wood grain, as well as the occasional faux-taxidermy wall animal5 and a dedication to the chrome-and-neon flourishes of midcentury design principles. Try to imagine the Platonic ideal of “24-hour diner,” and you’ve pretty much got this understanding of both midcentury design and “Americana” pegged.

A shallow interpretation of this would summon up the specter of the word “vintage,” a very important term for HLs, as an excuse for this mish-mash of markers from bygone eras. But I think this ignores the fact that there is a thread running through what would seem to be an otherwise disparate set of poles around which Hip Locations tend to organize their designs. As a fair-weather historicist, I can’t help but point out that these two periods of time, roughly the 1910s and postwar years, are both times of deep reaction in the American political sphere, particularly against labor. I’m not trying to be conspiracy-minded here – of course there is not some cabal of very cool people rubbing their hands and cackling about periods of capitalist reaction against organized labor. But I also can’t consider it a trifling coincidence how a coworker of mine phrased a complaint once, after we’d briefly joked about unionizing the employee body and going on strike, deciding that if we did so upper management would simply replace all of us with newer and more obedient employees no doubt culled from the local student population.

4 This is a difficult category to define, especially as the Overton Window of the American political spectrum has drifted further and further right in recent decades. I should additionally specify that nothing here is intended as a critique of leftwing politics – the purpose of this essay is to criticize political positioning (perhaps “posturing” is a better term), not any specific political position.

5 The tendency towards veganism and vegetarianism among the usual patrons of these places would make real taxidermy a liability, despite it generally fitting with the look.
“It’s like the 1800s in here,” they sighed, rolling their eyes.

A fascinating moment: there we were, surrounded by the dehistoricized architectural echoes of exactly the era my coworker was referencing as a gesture towards its anti-labor historical content. Is this what Walter Benjamin meant by “constellation?”6 Certainly, we weren’t dealing with anything in our jobs like the robber barons of the railroad companies. Nothing rose even close to that level of malice, and the existence of labor laws has tempered mightily the capability of employers for such abject cruelty. But there were still numerous infractions, unsavory behaviors and slights on the part of the people who signed our paychecks. Late and incomplete wages weren’t uncommon, and if employees did not specifically address this with Unnamed Owner, an intimidating thing to do considering he had a monopoly over decisions about their future employment at Unnamed Hip Location, these wages would go unpaid. I am also aware of employees who regularly worked over 40 hours a week without benefits or overtime, which is illegal in the state where I live. I think it’s worth considering that part of these businesses’ constant currying favor through the rhetorical gestures towards inclusivity and lefty political positioning is an attempt to shore up some sort of Wages of Wokeness which could be spent as goodwill when the shoddy business practices in which they engage come to light. Our joke about unionizing masked, or expressed in the acceptable couching of irony, a real wish on the part of me and my coworker for greater leverage against management afforded by collective bargaining.

It’s difficult not to think of Karl Marx’s writing, in his piece on the Eighteenth Brumaire, on how the bourgeoisie compulsively cloaks itself in the robes of their outdated antecedents upon reaching the limits of the progressive reforms it can enact without deconstructing its own class privileges:

> The tradition of all the generations of the dead weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just when they seem involved in revolutionizing themselves and things, in creating something that has never before existed… they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow names, battle cries and costumes from them in order to act out the new scene of world history in this time-honoured disguise and this borrowed language.8

6 I’m honestly asking, I still don’t feel like I’ve wrapped my head around that one. But I can tell it’s important. Probably.
7 “I don’t deal with groups, I deal with individuals” was something Unnamed Owner once said when I brought up the possibility of employee body meetings. I guess “dealing with individuals” is what he did the night I wasn’t fired. And sometimes he would wonder aloud why nobody wanted to meet with him when he was always so available for it.

Perhaps this can account, in some way, for the ever-increasing uniformity of the aesthetic projects which Hip Locations across the country, dotting the landscape in a pattern coordinating with the diaspora of the university degreed, seem to be engaged in.

Or, y’know… that and Instagram.

***

I myself make no claim of having been a perfect employee. Or, if I’m honest, even an especially good one. It may surprise you to learn that somebody interested in writing an essay on the relationship between contemporary hip-kid culture and capitalist exploitation would happen to have a pretty miserable head for business, but I stand before you as testament to the incompatibility of these two skill sets. If I had simply been fired from my job for poor performance, I would have understood. But, as illustrated above, that is not what happened, and firing, while unpleasant, is in a very different category from standing in a doorway and shouting insults at a 21-year-old until he feels he cannot reasonably remain in this job anymore and is compelled to quit “of his own accord.”

Beyond this, I need to take some umbrage at the foundation of an argument positing that I deserved what I got on the basis of my failing to live up to Unnamed Owner’s standards of “good employee”:9 That it is somehow incumbent on me to earn decent treatment from the people I work for by meeting the standards they set for me as regards job performance or “professionalism.” This is a particularly nasty development of the last thirty or so years of corporate thinking, and its underlying principle – that human beings are worthy of basic respect only insofar as they fit themselves to the needs and desires of the market – is frankly disgusting and anti-human.

I think it likely that my irritation with this line of reasoning will resonate with other people around my age (18-30-ish, a category which aligns neatly with the previously-discussed Perpetual Studenthood), who, as denizens of what is called “the gig economy,” have lived our whole lives in a world where this conception of “professionalism” has run rampant. Need I rehash the exponential rise in the percentage of average income which goes towards the bare necessities

9 No straw men were harmed in the making of this rhetorical flourish. Or, well, maybe one or two.
of personal sustenance these days? I don’t think so. Nor need I return to the subject of the inex-
orbable increase of tuition fees which leave most of my peers in the sort of debt that necessitates their entry into this “gig economy,” and thereby their subjection to the shifting goalposts of “professionalism” consistently levied against them as an excuse for poor treatment and low wages. The decimation of the social safety net that has formed the core of America’s national legislative project since the 1970s should be proof enough on its own that somehow our cultural conception of who is and is not deserving of empathy and basic human care has been hopelessly colonized by the global market.

None of us are laboring under the delusion that the current economy has any especial desire for our services, let alone any need, and I’m thus attempting to avoid didacticism at least in part because of the obviousness of this circumstance. Also, though, because the sort of up-punching snark I’ve tried to pepper this essay with is much more fun for us to read and write than quantitative analyses of our situation and possible futures, all of which would essentially amount to something along the lines of “shit’s bad, yo. Will that be cash or card?”

By way of closing, I think it’s probably a good idea for me to sketch out a few conclusions that I feel comfortable drawing from my experience and from having recounted parts of it here. I understand it’s generally advisable to give the audience a sense of closure or uplift before ushering them out through the gift shop, so I’ll do my best to be positive. Or something.

I should apologize for the fact that the conclusions I’ve drawn aren’t especially unique, but much of what I’ve attempted to do here is to untangle obfuscations, both intentional and otherwise, towards seeing that Hip Locations are still businesses and often still home to the shittier patterns inherent in businesses, no matter what their politics, advertising, and/or patron makeup would suggest. In fact, the rhetoric of small business, whether in its classic “American sticktoitiveness” form or the newer “not just an office” language of startup culture, can often be deployed as a way of deflecting worker criticism. In this way, it is not unlike the language of “professionalism.”

Small details, like the use of the term “team” instead of “employees” is a manifestation of this. Unnamed Owner assured us, on more than one occasion, that our efforts at UHL were deeply appreciated, as we were all contributing to “building something together.” The fact of its newness, of its relatively unestablished nature, was the reason why he could not remunerate us in a fashion that reflected the level of appreciation he so deeply felt for our contribution to this project. Once, he even went so far as to pull out the hackneyed language of the workers, managers and himself constituting not just a workplace, but – wait for it – a family. This was stated in response to complaints against the behavior of one of the managers towards the employees, which he would not have known about had I not complained about it. That manager, unlike me, still works at UHL.

While most workers would, of course, like to work in a place where they have good relations with their coworkers and bosses, workers need to be paid for the work they do, preferably paid decently. This is why they are workers. It’s putting the cart before the horse somewhat to place the former before the latter, no matter how well-intentioned the reasons for doing so are.

This is pretty much how the situation has stood since feudalism ended.

In other words, much of what I’ve outlined here is the proverbial lipstick on a very, very old pig, though putting it this way is probably insulting to pigs, towards whom I bear no ill will. Despite all of its affectations to the contrary, there is very little new under the sun when it comes to worker-owner relationships in the realm of small businesses and Hip Locations. Sadly, the increased proximity of owners to workers afforded by smaller numbers does not always result in the greater understanding and better treatment that we would like to think it should. This is not intended as a universal indictment of small businesses, or even of Hip Locations, many of which are well-run and treat their employees decently. There are many I frequent myself, not that I should be held up as any paragon of virtue. It is, however, a reminder that the worker-owner relationship is always lopsided, and the possibility for it to become oppressive is a constant. It is impossible to amend this dynamic and move towards a happier, more cohesive style of workplace relations of the sort that Unnamed Owner continually claimed to want without addressing that power imbalance specifically. The most obvious method of addressing it is through the unionization of the employee body for the purposes of collective bargaining.

---

10 Even further than it already was, which is saying something.
How exactly small business employees would unionize is unclear to me, as it was to everyone I worked with, and how they would do so with any efficacy considering the ease with which they can be replaced by owners is a sizable complication. But the need cannot be denied. Any owners of small businesses who are actually committed to the progressive values they say they are will not only allow for, but actively encourage the unionization of the employee body to address this power imbalance. Of course, as anyone with reasoning abilities will tell you, the owner class cannot be relied on to encourage a process which would directly lessen their authority over employees, no matter how well-intentioned they seem to be.

The task of discovering effective unionization measures in our atomized economy must fall to employees, as will the rebuilding of a culture of worker solidarity in direct reaction to the sort of sadistic cultural turn that the globalizing market has precipitated. This must be a cross-industry project, regardless of the type of work being done and the income level of the workers. While many of the employees at Unnamed Hip Location came from backgrounds affluent enough that their quality of life would not be directly affected by the actions of management, there were sufficient number who would be that effective, democratic unionization could possibly make a real change in their lives. Beyond this, the unionization of workers anywhere strengthens union culture everywhere, and after decades of crushing attacks on organized labor, the necessity not only of rebuilding unions but of remaking them with more equitable and democratic principles is urgent. Both those footnoted Amazon office and warehouse workers should be able to bargain collectively, as they both have to contend with the same mega-corporate adversary, and their strength, which is in their numbers, cannot afford to be fragmented. As an article published not too long ago on precisely this subject (which I cannot recommend highly enough) quotes an iron worker participating in the recent graduate worker’s strike at Columbia University as saying, “every worker needs a union.”


BIBLIOGRAPHY


LABOR STUDIES ACADEMIC OFFERINGS AT UMASS CAMPUSES

UMass Amherst
UMass Amherst offers a unique multi-disciplinary program leading toward an MS degree in labor studies. We offer a two-year residential master’s program as well as a limited-residency format for trade union officers, staff, and activists. Scholarships are available. To learn more about our program, please visit our website at www.umass.edu/lrrc.

UMass Boston
The Labor Resource Center at UMassBoston is home to two undergraduate academic programs: the major (BA) and minor in Labor Studies, and the Labor Studies Certificate. These interdisciplinary programs examine the diversity of work and working-class experience, the changing nature of the workplace, and the past, present, and future of labor organizations, movements, and conflicts. The major and the minor require students to take a set of labor studies courses, but they also allow students to fill out their requirements with related courses in various College of Liberal Arts departments. The Professional Certificate in Labor Leadership is a valuable credential for emerging leaders in the labor movement. Students may enroll in the certificate program as either a pre-baccalaureate or post-baccalaureate option. For more details about our classes or our programs, visit our website: umb.edu/lrc.

UMass Dartmouth
At UMass Dartmouth, we are reaching deeper to work with students through creating credit internships and offering career opportunities for students in the labor movement. We are also continuing to participate in classes as guest speakers and we are now working to create service learning projects connecting students to organized labor and low-income workers. For more information, visit www.umassd.edu/labored/workwithstudents. To participate, call Camilo Viveiros, at 508-910-7108.

UMass Lowell
UMass Lowell offers an interdisciplinary minor in Labor Studies. The core course of the Labor Studies Minor, Introduction to Labor Studies, is offered each spring semester. It features a service learning model in which students partner with local labor and community organizations. In 2019, we will launch the Labor Education internships, with students placed with the Labor Education Program for paid or for-credit internships. Learn more at www.uml.edu/fahss/labor-studies.
SUBMIT TO THE JOURNAL

The UMass Undergraduate Journal on Work, Labor and Social Movements is accepting original submissions from undergraduate students currently enrolled at any University of Massachusetts campus. The journal brings together undergraduate work that displays academic excellence and offers critical insights on the experience of working people and their organizations. The journal encourages submissions that foster an exchange of ideas across disciplines and that deepen our understanding of the ways in which varying axes of oppression, including gender, race/ethnicity, country of origin, language and sexual orientation, shape the lives of workers.

Submissions will be accepted in three categories: Research, Creative and Activist Reflection. In addition to being included in the publication, the top three pieces in each submission category will be eligible to receive a cash prize.

In each category, First Place submissions will receive a $200 award; Second Place will receive $150; and Third Place will receive $75.

Submissions are accepted on a rolling calendar. Please send submissions to the Editorial Board member on your campus:

**Amherst**: Clare Hammonds, chammonds@soc.umass.edu

**Boston**: Annetta Argyres, Annetta.Argyres@umb.edu

**Dartmouth**: Camilo Viveiros, cviveiros@umassd.edu

**Lowell**: Elizabeth Pellerito, elizabeth_pellerito@uml.edu

Submission Guidelines

Who Can Submit?

Undergraduates enrolled at any University of Massachusetts are encouraged to submit. Those who are graduates may submit an undergraduate work within the first twelve months after graduation. Submissions may be co-authored with other undergraduate students. We will accept co-authored work with faculty in which the undergraduate student is the lead author.

General Submission Rules and Formatting Guidelines

Submitted articles cannot have been previously published elsewhere. Submitted text files should be 12 pt Times New Roman Font, double spaced with 1-inch margins. All submitted files should be in Microsoft Word Format (.doc or .docx). Any images or figures may be submitted at .jpg or .pdf format. Please include a list of all figures, images or graphics submitted. All submissions should also follow the *Chicago Manual of Style*, including footnotes with page numbers and a bibliography. Upon acceptance, it will be the responsibility of the author to format the finalized version so that it adheres to the Author Guidelines.

For each submitted article, we ask that the other also prepare an abstract of approximately 150-250 words that should be submitted electronically in a Microsoft word document. Each submitted document should include the author(s) full name(s), University, major, expected graduation date, and email address.

Submission Categories

**Research**

Research articles report original research and assess its contribution to our understanding of labor and work. The undergraduate student should be the primary author on the article. If the article was completed in collaboration with a faculty member, please be sure to note that contribution. Research submissions should not exceed 7,000 words, approximately 16 pages, including footnotes. Please consult the 16th edition of the *Chicago Manual of Style* for proper manuscript form and footnote citation style.

**Creative**

The journal is interested in various types of art and written creative expression that offer critical insights into issues of work, labor and social movements. We currently welcome all forms of written expression including, but not limited to poetry and short fiction in all forms. Because of space constraints we are unable to publish pieces that run longer than 15 pages or about 5,500 words.

Artists may submit a single piece or a series. A series may not be longer than 4 pages, however exceptions may be considered on a case-by-case basis. The artwork may be in any medium, but all works must be able to be reproduced in print. The piece should be submitted electronically as we are not able to accept physical copies of any artwork. Images must have a vertical orientation and a resolution of 77ppi. An artist statement should accompany each submission. These statements should be approximately two pages long and are expected to provide context and analysis for the work.

**Activist Reflection**

We welcome critical reflection pieces that draw on students’ engagement in a service learning project, or on a work or activist experience. These pieces should describe the experience and offer general reflections on work and labor. Please limit the length to 5,500 words or less.
Selection and Review Process

The University of Massachusetts Labor Extension program reviews all submissions and makes final selections for publication. Not all submissions will be accepted for publication. Papers selected for publication will meet the following criteria:

- Significance to the journal’s mission of promoting an interdisciplinary dialogue on labor and work
- Well-developed research design and methodology (where applicable)
- Well-written and developed presentation

This project is funded by the Future of Work initiative from the University of Massachusetts President’s office.

The Future of Work is a joint research project of the Labor Centers at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, Boston, Dartmouth, and Lowell, funded by the University of Massachusetts’ President’s Office with monies provided by the Massachusetts legislature. The project encompasses diverse research efforts to describe, analyze, and document the rapid transformation that work is undergoing in Massachusetts, including the introduction of new technologies and new forms of work organization, and what that means for workers and their unions.