



PROJECT MUSE®

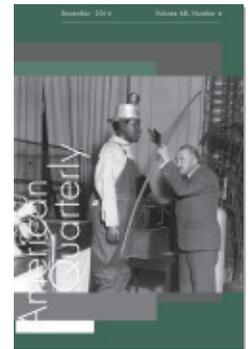
“Parasites of Government”: Racial Antistatism and Representations of Public Employees amid the Great Recession

Daniel Martinez HoSang, Joseph Lowndes

American Quarterly, Volume 68, Number 4, December 2016, pp. 931-954
(Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/aq.2016.0073>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/641467>

"Parasites of Government": Racial Antistatism and Representations of Public Employees amid the Great Recession

Daniel Martinez HoSang and Joseph Lowndes

In early 2010, amid the mounting job losses and growing budget deficits of the Great Recession, the conservative radio commentator Rush Limbaugh took to the air to warn his listeners of a group of "freeloaders . . . [who] live off of your tax payments and they want more. . . . They don't produce anything. They live solely off the output of the private sector."¹ They were, he explained on another show, "parasites of government."² Wisconsin governor Scott Walker described members of the same group as the "haves" and the "taxpayers who foot the bills" as the "have-nots."³ Indiana's governor Mitch Daniels labeled the group's members "a new privileged class in America."⁴

The charges rehearsed by Limbaugh and others draw from an enduring discourse of producerism in US political culture, in which the virtuous, striving, and browbeaten producer struggles to fend off the parasite, a dependent subject that consumes tax dollars and productive labor to subsidize a profligate and excessive lifestyle.⁵ These representations have long been racialized and gendered; subjects marked as "welfare queens" and "illegal aliens," among others, have been similarly condemned as freeloaders and parasites who feed off the labor of hardworking (white) taxpayers.⁶

The focus of Limbaugh's scorn, however, was a group of wage earners rarely represented on the latter side of the producerist–parasite divide: public-sector workers and their unions. While women and people of color constitute a larger proportion of state and municipal workers in comparison with the private sector, 70 percent of this workforce in 2011 was still identified as white, and nearly a third were white men.⁷ Indeed, in Wisconsin, the site of the highest profile attack on public-sector workers, whites are slightly overrepresented in the public-sector workforce compared with the overall population of the state, while Black and Latino workers are slightly underrepresented.⁸ Yet their whiteness did not indemnify significant numbers of public-sector workers

from these attacks. Emergency workers, lifeguards, city and county employees, teachers, and other school employees became increasingly criticized as parasitic—excessive, indulgent, dependent, and a threat to the body politic. As Minnesota governor Tim Pawlenty explained after the election, “Unionized public employees are making more money, receiving more generous benefits, and enjoying greater job security than the working families forced to pay for it with ever-higher taxes, deficits and debt.”⁹ These charges came from across the political spectrum, as Democratic governors including California’s Jerry Brown and New York’s Andrew Cuomo and Republicans such as New Jersey’s Chris Christie and Ohio’s John Kasich all maintained that taxpayers could no longer meet the allegedly insatiable demands of public-sector workers. Proposals to renegotiate or eliminate union contracts and to retract collective bargaining rights suddenly dominated the political debate in many states.¹⁰

How did public-sector workers come so easily to symbolize the cause of the 2008 recession, and thus become the object of widespread political attack? They reflect, we argue, the most recent development of a racialized antistatist politics. The rise of the modern Right in the United States was articulated through an antipathy to state power in which the redistributive state as a whole was stigmatized through its association with racialized dependents.¹¹ With the demobilization of the Black freedom movement in particular and the withering of the welfare state, antistatist projects have sought to extend this logic to white beneficiaries of state action. Thus, in the contemporary age of inequality, commitments to state-sponsored “affirmative action for whites” that were long guaranteed in the postwar era have become vulnerable.¹² The use of racialized antistatist to assail public-sector unions more generally is an example of what we call *racial transposition*: a process through which the meaning, valence, and signification of race can be transferred from one context, group, or setting to another. The concept extends the historian Natalia Molina’s notion of “racial scripts”—the complex of racialized significations ascribed to one group that “can easily be transferred to new groups.”¹³ This is not to say that race is open to any sort of signification on any given body or group. Race is determined, ultimately, by the history from which it emerges and the play of political forces to which it is subject. In the formulation of Stuart Hall, race “floats” as a political signifier, and its meaning is subject to ongoing political struggle.¹⁴ Claims about dependency, autonomy, and freedom in the United States have always been constructed through racialized and gendered meaning and references. The cultural logics of capitalism have always been constituted through race. Thus, even when these claims seek to stigmatize groups of largely white workers, race still performs important political labor.

We demonstrate our argument by analyzing cultural representations of public-sector workers during the Great Recession, including syndicated political cartoons, television shows, political advertisements, and political speeches. These sources demonstrate the quotidian production of political identity and interest—the micropolitical processes that generate political meaning in everyday life—and explicate the cultural logics that make such identities and interests legible.

Race and the Ascendant Criticism of Public-Sector Unions

Political criticism of public-sector workers and labor unions has a long history, particularly among conservative groups and activists. As Steven Fraser and Joshua Freeman contend, this opposition has been premised on a range of arguments, from the alleged threat they posed to principles of sovereign governance (which formed the basis of Franklin Roosevelt's opposition to such unions) to their complicity in extending the reach and scale of the welfare state.¹⁵ Nelson Lichtenstein and Elizabeth Shermer maintain that "hostility to labor unions per se was a crystallizing impulse for the modern American Conservative movement . . . reaching back past the 1970s to the aftermath of the 1886 Haymarket Riot and through the 1920s American Plan, the backlash against Operation Dixie in the 1940s, and the political ascendancy of both Barry Goldwater and Ronald Reagan."¹⁶ Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, conservative policy organizations elaborated the case for policy reforms necessary to undermine the influence of public-sector unions and to shrink public-sector employment more generally, arguing that the "rent-seeking" behavior of such unions came at the expense of taxpayers' interests.¹⁷

Lichtenstein and Shermer explain that historically, it has been the ideological and policy agenda of public-sector unions that conservative forces have rallied against: "social solidarity, employment stability, limits on the workplace power of corporate management, plus a defense of the welfare state, progressive taxation, financial regulation, and a government apparatus energetic enough to supervise the health and safety of millions of American workers and consumers."¹⁸ In these arguments, public-sector unionism threatened a set of abstract principles—freedom of association and choice, government sovereignty, economic competitiveness, and a fear of corruption—viewed as fundamental to a free market economy. Other opponents assailed public-sector unions as narrow interest groups, seeking to unduly influence government policy for their own gain.

The recent uptick in anti-union sentiment, however, differs in several important ways from previous rounds of anti-union political attacks. Whereas earlier criticisms focused primarily on the structural relationships and interests that public-sector unions allegedly sought to exploit, the current attacks make moral and characterological claims about public-sector workers themselves. This emphasis on the ethical deficiencies of public-sector workers, central to all the examples discussed below, represents a new terrain of political attack and critique. In these accounts, public-sector workers are not only opportunistic political interests but also cultural miscreants—a gluttonous class of people living beyond the rules that apply to others. To take one representative example from California, Steve Greenhut, a widely read columnist in the *Orange County Register*, alleged in “Out of the Way, Peasants” that special license plates afforded to some government workers effectively exempted them from all driving laws: “California has about 1 million citizens who are literally above the law. Members of this group . . . can drive their cars as fast as they choose. They can drink a six-pack of beer at a bar and then get behind the wheel and weave their way home. . . . Chances are they will never have to pay a fine or get a traffic citation.”¹⁹ In *Plunder! How Public Employee Unions Are Raiding Treasuries, Controlling Our Lives, and Bankrupting the Nation*, Greenhut states this claim plainly: “Yes rank has its privileges, and it’s clear that government workers have a rank above the rest of us.”²⁰

The association of public-sector workers with the state is central to these confrontations as well. In Wisconsin in 2011, Governor Walker insisted he had no objections to private-sector unions and said that he would not support proposals that took aim at such workers. It was unionized government workers, he argued, whose wage and benefit gains came at the expense of the taxpayers he was elected to protect.²¹ Limbaugh similarly insisted public-employee unions “are not private sector union people. These are people that live off of your tax payments. And they want more. They want you to have to pay more taxes so that they continue in their freeloader gigs.”²² Thus, the new round of attacks on public-sector unions gained particular purchase by drawing on a broader politics of taxpayers’ rights and critiques of state excess.

These allegations draw on resonant themes in US political culture of antistatism, market-based individualism, and right-wing populism. As Chip Berlet and others have argued, the category of lazy parasites threatening the producerist ethic has almost always been imagined as a racialized class including mothers on welfare, immigrants, the undeserving poor, and other people of color. White workers, especially in public-sector jobs such as firefighters, teachers, and transit workers, have not been represented in these terms.

By closely examining cultural representations about public-sector unions and workers during these debates, we can better understand the logic at work in making attacks on such unions so widely resonant. As we explain, producerism, long associated with whiteness and masculinity, has stood in contrast to parasitism, expressed most visibly through representations of people of color as indulgent, dependent, and excessive. In the cultural representations we examine, opponents of public-sector workers have attempted to transpose the script of parasitism onto workers who have historically been exempt from such charges. Claims that public-sector unions and workers are parasitic on the body politic are only cognizable because of this history of racialized populism.

To be clear, we do not argue that white public-sector workers are losing their whiteness in every sense or that these examples suggest that race is declining in social and political significance. White privilege and white supremacy continue to be powerful, dynamic forces in US political culture, structuring life opportunities, vulnerability to violence and death, and differential access to power.²³ Nor do these confrontations with white workers suggest that long-standing racialized political appeals are subsiding. Governor Walker, for example, built much of his electoral base through such appeals to white suburban and rural areas of Wisconsin.²⁴ We posit instead that the continued upward redistribution of wealth and state power that has accelerated since the Great Recession has lessened the economic guarantees and privileges that many white workers once took for granted, and that racial discourse itself is open to repurposing.

Defining Populist Producerism

The framing of public-sector workers and unions as parasites rests on a long-standing discursive distinction between society's "makers and takers," to borrow a phrase made popular by Mitt Romney's 2012 presidential campaign.²⁵ Its success depends on the premise that populist politics—and the producerist ideology at its heart—flows from identifiable grievances by those who produce society's wealth against those who consume it without giving back. This "producer ethic," as Alexander Saxton calls it, has roots in the Jeffersonian belief that the yeoman farmer, as neither a master nor a slave, was the proper subject of civic virtue, republican liberty, and self-rule. But it first emerged as a broad partisan identity in the antebellum era, where it expressed in the Democratic Party an opposition between white labor and those who would exploit it.²⁶ Producerist ideology posited not an opposition between workers and owners but a masculine, cross-class assemblage connecting factions of the elite with poor whites both in cities and on the frontier in what Senator Thomas Hart

Benton, a Democrat from Missouri, called “the productive and burthen-bearing classes” in opposition to those cast as unproductive and threatening, including bankers and speculators, slaves, and indigenous people.²⁷ As such, producerism provided a template for subsequent political intersections of whiteness, masculinity, and labor that would include different groups and target different foes, but always secured by a logic that described a fundamental division in society between those who create society through their efforts and those who are parasitic on, or destructive of, those efforts.

The division between producer and parasite, it should be stressed, does not correlate with production and nonproduction in any objective sense. The slave owner was a celebrated element of the Jacksonian coalition, for example, while various forms of slave, contract, or dispossessed labor were reviled. In other words, one’s politics do not flow from one’s position as a producer. Rather, the very notion of producerism is generated by politics.

In various iterations, producerism has played a central role in US political history. The People’s Party of the 1890s invoked the moral status of agricultural and industrial labor against Eastern financial elites. The famed anthem of the IWW “Solidarity Forever,” penned by Ralph Chaplin in 1915, includes the line “Is there aught we hold in common with the greedy parasite / Who would lash us into serfdom and would crush us with his might?”²⁸ During the Great Depression, it was the “economic royalists,” as President Roosevelt called them, who were seen to cause the economic crisis, with unions regarded as defenders of the public good.

Since the 1960s, however, it is the political Right that has most often made populist appeals to producerism. Against the perceived racial liberalism of the mid-1960s, Alabama governor George Wallace and others like him forged a politics that expressed populism in terms at once racist and antigovernment, contrasting “pointy-headed bureaucrats” and social engineers to “this man in the textile mill, this man in the steel mill, this beautician” in rants against busing, welfare, crime, and civil rights protest. Soon after, Richard Nixon began using the terms *silent majority*, *forgotten Americans*, and *middle America* to describe an aggrieved white majority squeezed by both the unruly, dependent poor on one side and government elites on the other. Conservatives stoked political identity across the 1970s in blaming both government and the poor for the victimization of taxpayers and the moral decline of the country.²⁹

Numerous liberal writers, including Thomas Edsall and Mary Edsall and Todd Gitlin, have lamented this shift in populism from left to right.³⁰ For them, the natural political identity of workers and farmers expressed in opposition to monopoly capitalists, bankers, and speculators was relinquished

to the Right as the moral language of labor was replaced with excessive concern for identity—be it race, nationality, gender, or sexuality—fragmenting a coherent left identity. Such an understanding fails in two ways, however. First, identity has always been central to populism insofar as it has expressed whiteness and masculinity as central features of who is included in populist rhetoric. Second, a simple story of a rightward shift misses the ways that, from the Jacksonian era forward, producerist politics has always retained elements of racialized demonization, be it the anti-Black and anti-indigenous politics of the Jacksonians, the anti-Chinese campaigns of white labor in the 1880s, the anti-immigrant sentiment in the early twentieth century, and the exclusion of Black workers from New Deal programs.

Populist identity distinguishes itself not just against those seen as exploitive elites above and parasitic dependents below, but also against elements in society depicted as imprudent, excessive, wasteful, and indolent. Nineteenth-century minstrel shows, for instance, portrayed Black people not merely as lazy but as sexually promiscuous, voracious, and frolicsome, with exaggerated eyes and lips. As David Roediger, Eric Lott, and Michael Rogin have all demonstrated, part of minstrelsy's appeal was in identification and desire, as much as in demonization and abjection. White workers under the yoke of industrial discipline and Victorian morality in the nineteenth century were drawn to the stage shows of blacked-up whites performing songs and skits that were playfully erotic, and that lampooned elites, and that celebrated the avoidance of work. Yet blackface resecured the boundaries of white, bourgeois morality by serving as an exaggerated symbol of what had to be rejected by the producerist ethic, while stoking envy and rage against actual people of color.³¹

The deep logic of producerism thus structures representations of its negation, the parasite, which since the 1960s in particular has been constructed in highly racialized and gendered terms—the mother on welfare, an immigrant draining public coffers, the criminal “coddled” by liberal judges, or the undeserving recipient of affirmative action. These scripts animate the attack on public-sector unions and workers, continually contrasting its version of the producer—in this case the taxpayer and private-sector worker—with public unions and workers. As we demonstrate, these workers are depicted as unproductive, wasteful, excessive, and indolent, indulging the envied pleasures of shorter working hours, long vacations, and early retirement. They are cognizable precisely because they invoke a longer genealogy of the discourse of racial parasitism and producerism, and its representation of fiscal burdens. Framed this way, unionized public-sector workers become threats to taxpayers—not merely economically, but socially and psychologically as well.

Key to the successful development of populist antistatism has been its selective racial deployment, avoiding discussion of forms of state authority and distribution that have been enjoyed by most of the white electorate since the New Deal, such as Social Security, Medicare, and government-secured home loans. Attacks on the state from the right were aimed originally at school desegregation after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decisions, and later at busing, fair housing, antidiscrimination law, and affirmative action, and at response programs seen to favor poor people of color, such as AFDC and Medicaid. Conservatives extended this strategy by targeting other figures of racial vulnerability, such as immigrant children in public schools.

At each stage of the development of antistatism, a racialized line separating the deserving from the undeserving was drawn to bolster its claims. Now, the logic of antistatism has become so pervasive, and its success against everything from busing to affirmative action to welfare so thorough, that advocates have begun to turn its logic against new targets. Political elements made vulnerable in class terms can now be attacked via racial logic. The line between the deserving and undeserving has been moved such that a large number of white workers now fall on the latter side of the line as “takers.”³²

This transformation is rooted in a generation of neoliberal economic restructuring, as cuts in income transfer payments and reductions in property, income, and capital gains taxes shifted more of the responsibility for funding public services from corporations and the wealthy onto middle- and low-income workers. Households faced with flattening wages and rising levels of debt increasingly came to demand tax relief of their own as a way to safeguard their income, giving rise to a populist tax revolt. In this context, the public sector itself became stigmatized as a drain on the budgets of ordinary workers rather than as a keystone of social equity and income security and mobility. As a result, a broad range of income transfer programs, including welfare, assistance to immigrants, and other public health, education, and employment initiatives, became defunded, most often by attacking their beneficiaries as undeserving and parasitic.³³

The financial crisis of 2008 represented a culmination of these developments. For many years, revenue-starved states and municipalities that were unable to offer meaningful wage increases to their employees instead promised expanded retirement and health benefits to such workers that were less straining to their budgets in the short run. But as government revenues plummeted after the housing and banking crisis, and with most other income transfer programs already eviscerated, public-sector workers and their benefits became subject to new political scrutiny.

Public-sector employment has historically been an important source of economic mobility for women and people of color. In regions such as New York City with large numbers of unionized public-sector workers, unionization substantially decreases race and gender pay disparities as a whole. Public-sector job losses during the Great Recession thus had a disproportionate impact on women workers and Black workers.³⁴ According to the Economic Policy Institute, from 2007 to 2011, roughly 765,000 jobs were cut in state and local governments. Women held seven in ten of those jobs; African Americans, two in ten.³⁵ The sociologist Jennifer Laird points out that Black women become doubly disadvantaged under these conditions, as they are overrepresented in a shrinking area of the economy while facing higher barriers to finding private-sector employment.³⁶

Nationally, however, Black public-sector workers are unionized at slightly lower rates than non-Black workers. To make public-sector workers the focus of public opprobrium, attacks could not single out workers of color alone, nor could they simply focus on structural or political critiques of unions. Instead, as we explore below, the claims turned on the alleged greed, excess, and moral failures of workers themselves, including white workers. The scripts of parasitism that have long justified the subordination of people of color become available to stigmatize and represent some white workers to justify their exclusion from the social wage.

Parasitism as Gluttony

To fully understand the logic of the attack on public-sector unions, we need to comprehend how the identity of the productive, taxpaying citizen is brought into being and continually defended against threats to its integrity. This integrity, we argue, is economic, moral, and even bodily. Unions and government workers are represented as wasteful, excessive, festive, and grotesque threats to an independent, virtuous, sober, frugal subject.³⁷ These qualities, evoking both envy and disgust, transform public-sector workers from productive citizens into social threats—not merely threats to public budgets, but to the social order itself.

Cultural representations such as the editorial cartoons examined below are important forms of evidence not because they permit claims about causality. Rather, they express the political claims we analyze by casting into sharp relief the charges of parasitism, laziness, gluttony, and destructiveness of the public-sector worker on behalf of the beleaguered host—the taxpaying citizen. Cartoons evoke visceral responses—laughter, disgust, outrage—to a political

point the cartoonist seeks to make. The intended meanings of political cartoons are generally self-evident, which allows the analyst to focus on how the cartoon achieves its intended effect. Cartoons, which can be absorbed and understood quickly by readers, often enjoy broad circulation—particularly those in syndication. They act as snapshots—moments of temporarily fixed understandings of a political phenomenon.

For our argument, cartoons are an especially salient form of evidence. The contemporary attacks on public-sector workers we analyze dispense with claims about the political power of public unions over government functions, or their likelihood of pulling electoral politics leftward, as was the case in conservative attacks on public unions in prior decades. The accusations leveled at these unions today depend less on sophisticated institutional and ideological arguments and more on the visceral description of indolence, on the one hand, and rapacity, on the other, thus extending their appeal across previously established ideological boundaries.

To take one example, anti-union editorial cartoons commonly depict public-sector workers as massive entities—voracious, grotesquely fat, and even cannibalistic in contrast to the diminutive taxpayer, often portrayed as “the little guy” who is threatened, bullied, or simply overmatched. Such depictions demonstrate that it is not enough merely to present unions as politically and economically powerful. Obesity and cannibalism evoke deeper bodily fears and forms of abjection—threatening the very corporeal integrity of the subject. In these portrayals we also see the racial transposition in action. Racialized bodies, which underscore the cultural framing of unions, come to signify for public-sector workers more generally.

Portrayals of unions as voracious destroyers circulated widely during the Chicago Teacher Union’s (CTU) strike in September 2012, directed in particular against union president Karen Lewis. During the nearly two-week strike, Lewis became the CTU’s most visible public figure not only in pressing for improvements in pay, working conditions, and job security but in more broadly resisting the efforts of Mayor Rahm Emanuel to close dozens of schools and to reduce public control over the school system.³⁸ We begin with examination of depictions of Lewis because she is both emblematic of public unions *and* Black. The logic of racial transposition, as we have argued, is that historical forms of anti-Blackness provide the template for attacking largely white targets. We can see how portrayals of Lewis rely on well-worn popular depictions of Black people in general and Black women in particular. Those same tropes appear in treatments of public-sector unions more generally.

Dist. by Wash. Post Writers Group
 Lisa Benson 2/9/12



Figure 1. "What Do We Want? We Want More!!" Lisa Benson Editorial Cartoon, used with the permission of Lisa Benson, the Washington Post Writers Group, and the Cartoonist Group. All rights reserved.

Editorial cartoons during the strike consistently represented Lewis's body as corpulent and insatiable. One cartoon by Lisa Benson syndicated by the *Washington Post*

depicts Lewis shouting through a bullhorn, "WHAT DO WE WANT? WE WANT MORE!!" Lewis is shown standing on the back of a white man in a Cubs baseball cap holding a sign that says "Broke! Please help."³⁹ Here Lewis, signifying the irrational, rapacious demands of the CTU and Chicago public school teachers, is literally breaking the back of a helpless white Chicagoan.

An exemplary depiction was featured on the conservative blogsite *Chicago News Bench*. It is a manipulation of a photo to depict Lewis as extraordinarily obese, holding a plate carrying a baby's head. The caption reads "Chicago Teacher's Union President Karen Lewis wants to eat your children with cheese and bacon."⁴⁰ The accompanying article adds, in part: "This fat pig of a union bully doesn't give a damn about the kids in the Chicago Public Schools (CPS). She doesn't care about their parents, either, many of whom had to scramble today to make arrangements for safety of their children." We discuss the cartoon here less because of the image's circulation—its intended audience is targeted specifically to Chicago-area conservatives—than because it so clearly elucidates the political cultural appeal we describe.

While orality and associations with cannibalism were staples of blackface minstrelsy, they can also be elements of political signification more generally. As the political theorist Anne Norton demonstrates in her work on political identity, “Eating provides names and explanatory metaphors for relations of power.”⁴¹ Oral aggression, associated gluttony, and even cannibalism turn up repeatedly in depictions of public unions, as we see in the case of Lewis and the CTU. The conservative columnist Michelle Malkin referred to Lewis as “Chicago thuggery personified” and a “union fat cat.”⁴² The online news site *Chicago Report*, describing a talk Lewis gave at the Northwest Teaching for Social Justice Conference in Seattle in 2011, said that she was “apparently . . . possessed by the ghost of Moms Mabley” and that it was as if “an evil, comedic spirit had taken control of her mouth,” because of comments she made about Secretary of Education Arne Duncan.⁴³

Comments posted to a YouTube clip of that talk are instructive. One poster, directly making the link between bodily and professional discipline, wrote, “Well it’s tough to take someone seriously when they lack the self-control and discipline to manage their own health. It shows lack of character.” Another post links oral aggression to her role as Teacher’s Union official: “That’s not a woman, that’s a theme park—or a woman that ate a theme park. Her navel’s probably large enough to accomodate [*sic*] another classroom for 20 or more students.” A more explicit post links race hatred, weight, and cannibalism: “na na na na niiiig can you imagine this woman teaching kids. I’d be fearful of her eating them.” Or quite directly: “WHY IS THIS GROTESQUE THE STEWARD OF AMERICA’S CHILDREN?”⁴⁴

Anonymous web postings such as these reveal the affective logic at work, as they allow their authors direct, uncensored expression. Here a representative of a strong public-sector union is described in ways that show us how the producer is constituted as white, hardworking, virtuous, and threatened by the insatiability of public unions.

The associative links between Blackness, excess, and orality demonstrate the substratum of producerist identity in the examples above. But what is peculiar to this historical moment is the mobilization of producerism against political elements not directly associated with people of color. Indeed, the attack on public-sector unions requires a rhetoric that can cast white workers—once the unquestioned subjects of producerism—as parasitic outsiders. Accomplishing this identity shift has required a transformation of unions into grotesques.

Another cartoon from the spring of 2010 by the syndicated cartoonist Sean Delonas, who had previously been accused of racism for a *New York Post* cartoon implying that Obama was a chimpanzee,⁴⁵ appeared in the conservative

City Journal accompanying an article titled "The Beholden State: How Public Unions Broke California." Here, public unions are represented by an enormous pig—an animal symbolically associated with gluttony and filth—consuming pizza, an ice cream cone, and a soda, which tells a skeletal corpse representing the California taxpayer: "You're just going to have to tighten your belt."⁴⁶ In this representation, public unions eat up resources needed to sustain life. It should be noted that what has been starved here is not the people of California but the *individual* taxpayer. In other words, the collective threatens to destroy the individual.

In another cartoon, this one by the popular syndicated cartoonist Mike Lester, the union does not merely devour public funds and thereby starve the taxpayer but engages in direct cannibalism. The illustration depicts a "Gov. union worker" saying, "This is what democra-(urp!!)cy looks like" as he consumes the head of a proportionately miniature taxpayer.⁴⁷ Lester's cartoon, published at the height of the mass demonstrations at the Wisconsin state capital in the winter of 2011, turns democratic contestation into oral aggression.

In both cartoons, eating underscores the fear of the destructive power of unions. In these cartoons, the gluttonous union is a *collective* entity that destroys the *individual* taxpayer. Here, racial transposition occurs through use of the racialized discourse of aggressive parasitism as it is directed against white workers as well as Black. This is achieved affectively through the transfer of racial notions of orality and corpulence to a broader category of workers, white as well as Black.

Parasitism as Idleness

A second important dimension in the discourse of parasitism emphasizes idleness and indolence, traits long used to justify the subordination of Black and brown laboring bodies. These themes are repurposed in recent representations of public-sector workers, who are similarly depicted as antithetical to the virtuous producer. Again, analyzing representations of these themes in popular culture reveals the particular logic through which they are constructed and made legible to wider publics.

In April 2010 a *Saturday Night Live* skit parodying an award show cast the guest host, Gabourey Sidibe (star of the 2009 film *Precious*), as a St. Louis Department of Motor Vehicles employee named "Markeesha Odom." Odom is the first to be introduced as a finalist for 2010 public employee of the year. As the narrator explains that she has been "twice named Missouri's 'Surliest and Least Cooperative' state employee," Sidibe scowls at the camera, hand

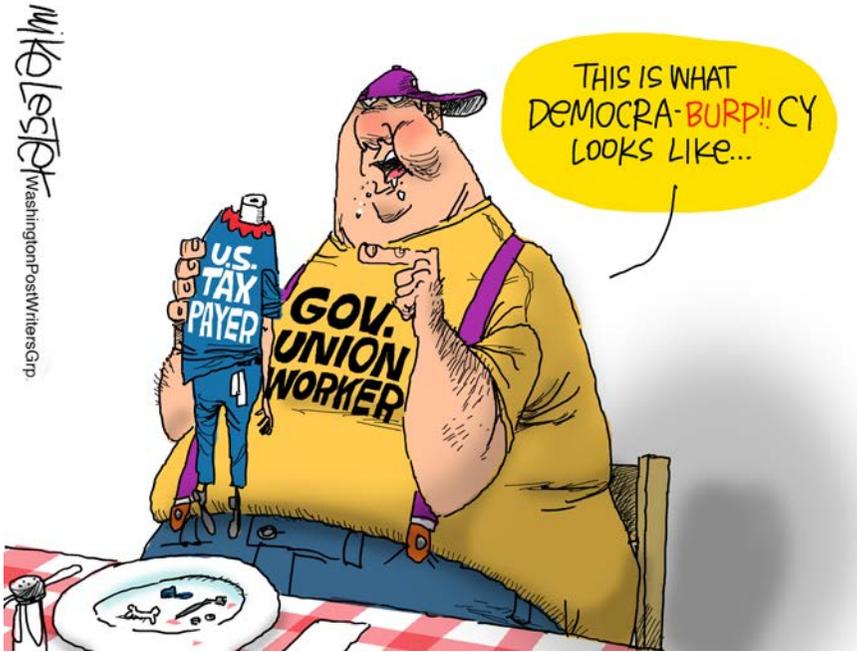


Figure 2. “This Is What Democra-(urp!!)cy Looks Like,” *Mike Lester Editorial Cartoon*, used with permission of Mike Lester, the Washington Post Writers Group. All rights reserved.

on hip, lips pursed. Sidibe is then congratulated for working at a DMV facility with twenty-four employees who “went through an entire day without helping a single customer.” SNL cast thirty-three-year-old Kenan Thompson, one of only two Black ensemble members, to play the award show host, “Desmond McCoy,” an Oakland bus driver and union member who retired on full benefits because of (clearly fraudulent) “job related stress.” Thompson’s character explains, “In these times of anti-tax hysteria and threats of government budget cuts, it’s important to remember that people with government jobs are like workers everywhere. Except for lifetime job security, guaranteed annual raises, early retirement on generous pensions and full medical coverage with no deductibles and office visit fees or co-payments.”⁴⁸

Casting Sidibe’s character in a classic “Sapphire” role, represented in countless popular culture narratives as “evil, bitchy, stubborn and hateful,” frames and performs the producer versus parasite distinction in this context.⁴⁹ Her character rehearses long-standing racist portrayals of Black women as slothful

and belligerent that continue to pervade television and other media forms in the United States.

The two other "finalists" for the award are cast as white men. Both revel in do-nothing government jobs, limitless overtime, and farcical work rules secured by a union contract. Here, the viewers are introduced to the logic of parasitism through a Black woman, then transposed to two white male characters, cognizable in part through their association with Sidibe's character. Indeed, the skit would not function the same way if the men were introduced first.

Americans for Prosperity (AFP), the Tea Party-aligned political advocacy group that has spearheaded the assault on public-sector unions through many of its state and local chapters, has also been on the forefront of attempts to portray public workers as antiproducers, indolent and idle. Their efforts reveal the kinds of labor necessary to put white workers in this category. In 2011 AFP California produced a series of online videos called "'Common Sense': Lifestyles of the Rich and Infamous on Government Pensions" featuring AFP spokesperson David Spady clad in a tuxedo and driving to different locales (sometimes in a stretch limousine) to highlight the allegedly excessive compensation and benefits commanded by specific public-sector workers.⁵⁰

One AFP segment targeted municipal lifeguards in Newport Beach, California, as an example not only of the excessive pay and benefits afforded to public workers at taxpayer expense but also of the self-gratifying and indulgent nature of the workers themselves. AFP California complained that Newport lifeguards were overcompensated through high salaries, excessive pensions, and early retirement plans that impoverished taxpayers. The producerist discourse of recent decades does not easily lend itself to the demonization of white male rescue workers, particularly after the lionization of "first responders" in the wake of September 11. In some cases, the pensions of firefighters and police officers have generated some political controversy, but those criticisms never focused on their personal qualities or professional attributes. But lifeguards are more vulnerable to the logics of both producerism and austerity, occupying a more liminal category and therefore an appealing target.

To make the case compelling, AFP depicts lifeguards as frivolous, vain, and focused on the pleasures of the body, characteristics that are an affront to both the masculinist logic of producerism and the demand for austerity. These elements of producerist discourse, part and parcel of the depictions of women and people of color, now mark off certain white male subjects from others who are more immune from attack.

Attempts at new discursive framings do not necessarily succeed. In this case however, the notion of the lifeguard as a decadent threat to the polity

was understandable enough to cross over to popular media presentation. The syndicated news program *Inside Edition* embraced AFP's framing by running an "investigative" segment on the lifeguards, in which Spady appears as a "whistleblower" who exposes the corrupt practices of the municipal lifeguards, highlighting vanity and sexual pleasure-seeking alongside overcompensation. In an interview on the segment, Spady complains that "the reason lifeguards have some of the most coveted jobs in Southern California is not just because they get to talk to girls in bikinis and work on their suntans" but because of the "incredibly generous packages" they are afforded. To see if taxpayers are "getting their money's worth," *Inside Edition* producers and a reporter secretly followed several lifeguards for several days, filming them playing beach volleyball and running errands, allegedly on work time. A reporter confronted one lifeguard supervisor in his car in a parking lot (after reportedly following him four hundred miles to the San Francisco Bay Area), asking him, "Do you think you owe an explanation to the taxpayers who pay your salary?" Though later in the segment the reporter discloses a seemingly reasonable explanation by the city manager for all the alleged infractions, the underlying contention was clear—preening, hedonistic lifeguards were now fleecing taxpayers, too. A cultural narrative rarely deployed against white workers was easily understood in this context; once framed as parasites, and threats to the producerist public, neither whiteness nor masculinity could indemnify the lifeguards from these charges.⁵¹

The AFP story garnered significant press coverage in Orange County, and in early 2014, the City of Newport announced that it was seeking bids from private contractors to potentially outsource some lifeguarding services, citing the need to control pension and salary costs. While municipal pensions have been an ongoing source of debate in many California cities, it is the particular way in which the cultural logic of parasitism and self-indulgence becomes visible in public debate here that requires our attention.⁵²

Reclaiming the (White) Producerist Subject

To understand why public employee unions quickly became an object of bipartisan opprobrium during the Great Recession, we must attend to the cultural logics and representational strategies that opponents of such unions sought to popularize. Opponents of public-sector unions transposed narratives long used to stigmatize people of color and to discredit state redistributory efforts to improve their conditions onto a largely white workforce, portraying

government workers as decadent and slothful threats to the productive, tax-paying citizenry, legitimating and naturalizing a series of anti-union policy initiatives in several states.

Like all articulatory projects, however, the claims they made and the identities and interests they sought to naturalize are always contingent and incomplete. More particularly, public-sector unions and their supporters have played an active role in challenging representations of public-sector workers as parasitic. But rather than challenge the cultural logic of parasitism, they largely claimed the producerist position for themselves to discredit these attacks.

This strategy can be witnessed most visibly in the successful 2011 campaign by public-sector workers in Ohio to reverse the passage of Senate Bill (SB) 5, a law backed by Republican governor John Kasich that dramatically curtailed the rights and power of the state's 360,000 public workers. SB 5 banned strikes by all public-sector workers, restricted collective bargaining to a handful of issues, eliminated binding arbitration, banned unions from collecting "fair share" fees to cover the costs of representing employees covered under the collective bargaining agreement who elected not to pay membership dues, restricted other pay and benefits, and increased the minimum employee contributions to health care benefits.⁵³ Unlike the Wisconsin legislation, the bill also restricted the rights and authority of police and firefighters. After Kasich signed the legislation into law on March 30, 2011, a coalition of public-sector unions and their supporters organized under the entity "We Are Ohio" (the campaign name itself signifying its populist and producerist commitments) and qualified a statewide referendum on the measure for the fall 2011 ballot, which became known as Issue 2.

In the public debate over the measure, supporters of SB 5 mobilized familiar arguments about union members as parasites. As one television ad in favor of the anti-union measure had it, "Enough is enough." Public-sector workers opposed the legislation, the ad claimed, "because they want even more from us. Better pay and benefits than us. Better job security than us. Better retirement than us. All paid for by us." A Republican state legislator, Jim Buchy, explained that SB 5 was needed because "we want to create more taxpayers and fewer tax users."⁵⁴ In an interview with the Toledo news station WUPW in late September, Kasich argued Ohio voters were tired of "paying twice" for their own benefits and those of public-sector workers, pointing to the example of a "single mother with a couple of kids, it's hard for her to get her health care, she probably has no pension or maybe a 401(k), and we're asking her—it's very tough to support her own family—also to support somebody else's [family]."⁵⁵

The campaign to defeat SB 5 raised more than \$40 million, more than three times as much as its opposition, and the money permitted the We Are Ohio coalition to invest heavily in television advertisements.⁵⁶ The framing of these ads is instructive, for it reveals how the unions countered claims of parasitism through racialized and gendered representational strategies. Most of the ads featured firefighters, police officers, and nurses amid life-threatening emergencies, invoking an iconography of white heroism and sacrifice, and within recognizably gendered occupations.

We Are Ohio's credibility with voters depended on the celebrated cultural status of firefighters, police, and nurses as "first responders" rather than as public service workers defending the public good. For example, one mailer used in the direct mail campaign to voters featured an image of two mask-clad firefighters entering a building enveloped in fire and smoke. The accompanying text read "Fire. Crimes. Rescue. They keep our communities safe." Inside, the text read "TAKE IT FROM THOSE ON THE FRONT LINES: Issue 2 makes it harder for our fire, police, and emergency forces to protect us and our families." Unions argued that by restricting collective bargaining to wages and benefits alone, firefighters, nurses and similar workers would not be able to bargain for adequate staffing levels necessary to respond to emergencies.

The statewide television advertising campaign similarly featured rescue workers responding to emergencies. A widely run ad titled "Zoey" showed a photo of firefighters rescuing a young girl (Zoey) from the upper levels of a burning building, while her great-grandmother explained in a voice-over, "if not for the firefighters, we wouldn't have our Zoey today. . . . That's why it is so important to vote no on Issue 2." Another ad, titled "Emergency," showed firefighters rushing out of the station and fighting a house fire, with a fireman explaining, "Issue 2 makes it harder for us to do our jobs, and that's not safe for us, or the neighborhoods we serve." The ad was rolled out during press conferences at several firehouses around the state, with a largely white and all-male group of firefighters gathered behind the podium.⁵⁷ Other ads, titled "Everyday Heroes," "Nurse," and "Sacrifice," included similar images of heroic public safety workers, nurses, and (in one instance) teachers.⁵⁸

We Are Ohio also launched a significant field organizing campaign that involved many thousands of public-sector union members and their supporters contacting voters at their homes and by phone. On Election Day, Issue 2 lost in a landslide; more than 61 percent of voters rejected the anti-union measure. SB 5 was never implemented, handing Governor Kasich a significant defeat.

To be sure, the campaign strategy pursued by We Are Ohio to defeat Issue 2 was highly persuasive with voters. The decision to feature rescue workers

and raise the specter of threats to public safety seemingly resonated with undecided voters, who may not have otherwise been supportive of unions or collective bargaining rights. By all accounts, the campaign was well executed and represented a critical victory for organized labor and their allies in the wake of Governor Walker's anti-union attacks in Wisconsin earlier in the year.

For our analysis, what is instructive about these ads and the broader campaign strategy is the terrain on which unions had to make their claims to the public. In the face of charges of parasitism, they had to quite literally perform their white producerist commitments for the electorate, in effect to counter the process of racial transposition.⁵⁹ To refute accusations that they were burdens to the taxpayer and dependent on other workers, they had to appear as the negation of the parasite, the indispensable and heroic protectors of public safety, affirmed by their whiteness in traditional gender roles. That is, they had to reproduce the long-standing producer–parasite divide (positioning themselves firmly on the side of the former) to legitimate their standing before the electorate.

This strategy was likely necessary to win the election in November. But in the long term, it forces public-sector workers in general to operate in an extremely constricted political framework. Many public employee unions have long been ambivalent about championing the public sector and government more broadly as a way to secure widespread social mobility and justice, choosing more often to serve primarily as bargaining agents to secure better wages and working conditions for their members.⁶⁰ In this sense, the emphasis on valorizing white heroism rather than making claims for the public good are not surprising.

But there are tens of thousands of public-sector workers—clerks, accountants, social workers, data analysts, custodians, and many others—who can never be represented in such heroic terms. How do they make their claim to collective bargaining rights, fair wage standards, and health and retirement benefits? If future attacks on public-sector unions are more selective and exempt public safety workers, on what grounds can other public-sector employees defend themselves? The producer-hero framework may legitimate the claim that only subjects who can perform and document their productive contributions are worthy of public remuneration and benefits, narrowing the terrain on which others can make claims to the public wage. By defending public workers on such terms, it naturalizes and reproduces the producer–parasite distinction.

Conclusion

In the wake of the defeat of Issue 2 in Ohio and the considerable political backlash against Wisconsin governor Walker, many of the attacks on public-sector unions moved to the legal arena, including several Supreme Court cases to determine whether workers covered by collective bargaining agreements can be compelled to pay fees to cover the cost of their representation.⁶¹ By 2012 the contention that unionized public-sector workers were one of the primary culprits of the Great Recession seemed to have less resonance. In November 2012 voters decisively rejected a measure to weaken the political power of unions in California. “Right-to Work” initiatives failed to qualify for the ballot in Ohio and Oregon the same year. While organized conservative interests continue to press their case against public-sector workers, and many states and municipalities continue to debate pension funding in particular, cultural representations of public-sector workers as parasitic have lessened.⁶²

The rapid waxing and waning of these representations demonstrate the contingency and fluidity of the process that marks certain political subjects as either productive or parasitic. While populist charges of parasitism have historically been made against groups marked racially as nonwhite, we have demonstrated that white workers can also be subject to the logic of this framework through racial transposition. Though the fiscal crises engendered by the Great Recession undoubtedly made attacks on the public sector more resonant, their sudden emergence cannot be attributed simply to economic conditions. Instead, the discourse of parasitism, so historically significant in US political culture, allowed these attacks to be read as reasonable, prudent responses to a population thriving off the labor of others.

Critical race scholars have long asserted that “race” is a social and political construct. To take that claim seriously means not simply to mark the ways racial discourse travels along well-trod paths of ascription. Insofar as race is the product of power, we should attend to how race can be mobilized to surprising ends, pressed into service to shore up or extend hierarchy and domination. Thus we should expect the discourse of parasitism to continue to incorporate new subjects, interests, and political projects in the future, particularly in the absence of more fundamental challenges to its logic. As long as this framework remains resonant, all workers are vulnerable to its imperatives.

Notes

- Portions of this essay were presented at the 2011 Social Science History Association Conference, the 2012 Western Political Science Association, and a 2013 seminar on Race and the State at the University of Michigan School of Law. We also thank Sandra Morgen and Joe Henry for helpful comments on an earlier draft.
1. Rush Limbaugh, "Union Thugs: 'Raise My Taxes!,'" *The Rush Limbaugh Show*, April 22, 2010, www.rushlimbaugh.com/daily/2010/04/22/union_thugs_raise_my_taxes_2.
 2. Rush Limbaugh, "We've Reached the Tipping Point," *The Rush Limbaugh Show*, February 18, 2011, www.rushlimbaugh.com/daily/2011/02/18/we_ve_reached_the_tipping_point.
 3. Steven Greenhouse, "Strained States Turning to Laws to Curb Labor Unions," *New York Times*, January 3, 2011.
 4. Ben Smith and Maggie Haberman, "Pols Turn on Labor Unions," *Politico*, June 6, 2010, www.politico.com/story/2010/06/pols-turn-on-labor-unions-038183. See also Joseph McCartin, "Convenient Scapegoat: Public Workers under Assault," *Dissent*, Spring 2011, www.dissentmagazine.org/article/convenient-scapegoat-public-workers-under-assault.
 5. Chip Berlet and Matthew Lyons, *Right-Wing Populism in America: Too Close for Comfort* (New York: Guilford, 2000); Linda Gordon and Nancy Fraser, "A Genealogy of Dependency: Tracing a Keyword of the U.S. Welfare State," *Signs* 19.2 (1994): 309–36.
 6. Jill Quadagno, *The Color of Welfare: How Racism Undermined the War on Poverty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Ange-Marie Hancock, *The Politics of Disgust: The Public Identity of the Welfare Queen* (New York: New York University Press, 2004); Elena R. Gutiérrez, *Fertile Matters: The Politics of Mexican-Origin Women's Reproduction* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008).
 7. David Cooper, Mark Gable, and Algernon Austin, "The Public-Sector Jobs Crisis," in *EPI Briefing Paper* (Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute, 2012), 1–22.
 8. Hannah Walker and Dylan Bennett, "The Whiteness of Wisconsin's Wages: Racial Geography and the Defeat of Public Sector Labor Unions in Wisconsin," *New Political Science* 37.2 (2015): 191.
 9. Tim Pawlenty, "Government Unions vs. Taxpayers," *Wall Street Journal*, December 13, 2010.
 10. After the 2010 elections, the National Conference of State Legislatures reported a significant increase in legislative proposals at the state level seeking to restrict collective bargaining rights and weaken unions. See Peter Rachleff, "The Right to Work Offensive: Tracking the Spread of the Anti-Union Virus," *New Labor Forum* 21.1 (2012): 22–29; and Richard B. Freeman and Eunice Han, "The War against Public Sector Collective Bargaining in the US," *Journal of Industrial Relations* 54.3 (2012): 393.
 11. We build on the work of other scholars who have demonstrated that there have never been separate systems of race and class in the United States, and that indeed capitalism and racial domination have been historically coterminous. See, for instance, Edward Baptist, *The Half That Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2014); Robin D. G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists during the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); Adolph Reed, "Unraveling the Relation of Race and Class in American Politics," in *Political Power and Social Theory*, vol. 15, ed. Diane E. Davis (Amsterdam: Elsevier Science Limited, 2005), 265–74; Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, 2nd ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).
 12. Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Norton, 2005).2005 See also Jonathan Cohn, "Why Public Employees Are the New Welfare Queens," *New Republic*, 2010, newrepublic.com/article/76884/why-your-fireman-has-better-pension-you.
 13. Natalia Molina, *How Race Is Made in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 6. If Molina's racial scripts describe the content or substance of particular racializations, racial transposition refers to the process by which elements of those scripts move from one group to another.
 14. Stuart Hall, "Race Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance," in *Sociological Theories: Race and Colonialism* (Paris: UNESCO, 1980).
 15. Steve Fraser and Joshua B. Freeman, "In the Rearview Mirror: A Brief History of Opposition to Public Sector Unionism," *New Labor Forum* 20.3 (2011): 93–96.
 16. Nelson Lichtenstein and Elizabeth Tandy Shermer, introduction to *The Right and Labor in America: Politics, Ideology, and Imagination*, ed. Nelson Lichtenstein and Elizabeth Tandy Shermer (Philadel-

- phia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 8. See also Joseph McCartin and Jean-Christian Vinel, "Compulsory Unionism: Sylvester Petro and the Career of an Anti-Union Idea," in Lichtenstein and Shermer, *Right and Labor in America*.
17. See, e.g., Don Bellante and James Long, "The Political Economy of the Rent-Seeking Society: The Case of Public Employees and Their Unions," *Journal of Labor Research* 2.1 (1981): 1–13; and James Long, "Are Government Workers Overpaid? Additional Evidence," *Journal of Human Resources* 17 (Winter 1982): 123–31.
 18. Lichtenstein and Shermer, *Right and Labor in America*, 3–4.
 19. Steve Greenhut, "Out of the Way, Peasants," *Orange County Register*, April 20, 2008.
 20. Steven Greenhut, *Plunder! How Public Employee Unions Are Raiding Treasuries, Controlling Our Lives, and Bankrupting the Nation* (Santa Ana, CA: Forum, 2009), 3. Other conservative critiques of public-sector unions include Daniel DiSalvo, *Government Unions and the Bankrupting of America* (New York: Encounter Books, 2011); and Mallory Factor, *Shadowbosses: Government Unions Control America and Rob Taxpayers Blind* (New York: Center Street, 2012).
 21. Four years after signing Act 10, the 2011 legislation that weakened public-sector unions, Walker signed a much broader "right to work" legislation that affected both public- and private-sector unions. See Craig Gilbert, "Walker's Support of Right to Work Could Alter Union Equation," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, March 4, 2015. <http://www.jsonline.com/blogs/news/295067921.html>
 22. Limbaugh, "Union Thugs."
 23. Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).
 24. Walker and Bennett, "Whiteness of Wisconsin's Wages"; Dan Kaufman, "Scott Walker and the Fate of the Union," *New York Times Magazine*, June 14, 2015.
 25. David Corn, "Romney Tells Millionaire Donors What He Really Thinks of Obama Voters," *Mother Jones*, September 17, 2012, www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/09/watch-full-secret-video-private-romney-fundraiser.
 26. Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (London: Verso, 1990); Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).
 27. Thomas Hart Benton, "Mr. Benton's Letter to Maj. Gen. Davis: Of the State of Mississippi, Declining the Nomination of Mr. Van Buren for the Presidency; and Recommending Harmony, Concert, and Union, to the Democratic Party of the United States" (Washington, DC: Blair and Rives, January 1, 1835), 13.
 28. Ralph Chaplin, *Wobbly* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 167–68.
 29. Dan Carter, *From George Wallace to Newt Gingrich: Race in the Conservative Counterrevolution, 1963–1994* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996); Joseph E. Lowndes, *From the New Deal to the New Right: Race and the Southern Origins of Modern Conservatism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008).
 30. Thomas Byrne Edsall and Mary D. Edsall, *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics* (New York: Norton, 1992); Todd Gitlin, *The Twilight of Common Dreams* (New York: Holt, 1996).
 31. David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1999); Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Michael Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).
 32. For a genealogy of racial antistatistism, see Lowndes, *From the New Deal to the New Right*. For its contemporary effects, see Ian Haney-Lopez, *Dog Whistle Politics: How Coded Racial Appeals Have Reinvented Racism and Wrecked the Middle Class* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
 33. On the populist tax revolt in California and its relationship to tax cuts for corporations and the wealthy, see Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*. See also Clarence Y. H. Lo, *Small Property versus Big Government: Social Origins of the Property Tax Revolt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Isaac Martin, *The*

- Permanent Tax Revolt: How the Property Tax Transformed American Politics* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008); Kitty Calavita, "The New Politics of Immigration: 'Balanced Budget Conservatism' and the Symbolism of Proposition 187," *Social Problems* 43.3 (1996): 284–305.
34. Stephanie Luce and Ruth Milkman, "The State of the Unions 2015: A Profile of Organized Labor in New York City, New York State and the United States" (New York: Joseph S. Murphy Institute for Worker Education and Labor Studies, 2015), www.gc.cuny.edu/CUNY_GC/media/CUNY-Graduate-Center/PDF/Communications/1509_Union_Density2015_RGB.pdf.
 35. Cooper, Gable, and Austin, "Public-Sector Jobs Crisis."
 36. Jennifer Laird, "Still an Equal Opportunity Employer? Public Sector Employment Inequality after the Great Recession" (Seattle: University of Washington, 2015).
 37. Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (London: Methuen, 1986).
 38. Micah Uetricht, *Strike for America: Chicago Teachers against Austerity* (New York: Verso, 2014).
 39. Lisa Benson, "What Do We Want? We Want More," 2012, townhall.com/political-cartoons/lisabenson/2012/09/12/103371.
 40. "Chicago Teacher's Union President Karen Lewis Wants to Eat Your Children," *Chicago News Bench*, 2012, rogersparkbench.blogspot.com/2012/09/chicago-teachers-union-president-karen.html.
 41. Ann Norton, *Republic of Signs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).
 42. Michelle Malkin, "Chicago Thuggery Personified: Meet Chicago Teachers' Union President Karen Lewis," *michellemalkin.com*, September 10, 2012, michellemalkin.com/2012/09/10/chicago-thuggery-personified-meet-chicago-teachers-union-president-karen-lewis/.
 43. "Embarrassing Video: Chicago Teacher's Union President Karen Lewis Attacks Arne Duncan's 'Lisp,' Jokes about Using Drugs," *Chicago News Report*, November 14, 2011.
 44. "Comments from YouTube video, 'EAGnews.org: CTU President Karen Lewis Uncensored—NSFW,'" 2011, www.youtube.com/all_comments?v=A1YXOSaMZzs.
 45. Sewell Chan and Jeremy W. Peters, "Chimp-Stimulus Cartoon Raises Racism Concern City Blog," *New York Times*, February 19, 2009, cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/02/18/chimp-stimulus-cartoon-raises-racism-concerns/?_r=0.
 46. Sean Delonas, "You're Just Going to Have to Tighten Your Belt," 2010, *City Journal*, city-journal.org/2010/20_2_california-unions.html.
 47. Mike Lester, "This Is What Democra-(urp!!)cy Looks Like," 2011, www.rn-t.com/view/full_story/12168612/article-Mike-Lester-s-Cartoon--03-06-11.
 48. The skit aired on April 24, 2010 (*Saturday Night Live*, season 35, episode 20).
 49. Marilyn V. Yarbrough and Crystal Bennett, "Cassandra and the 'Sistahs': The Peculiar Treatment of African American Women in the Myth of Women as Liars," *Journal of Gender, Race, and Justice* 3.2 (2000): 634–55.
 50. AFP California, "'Common Sense': Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous on Government Pensions," 2010, www.youtube.com/watch?v=JsVGpJTup9U.
 51. AFP California, "Lifeguards Make \$200,000 / Retire at Age Fifty Exposed on Inside Edition with David Spady," 2012, www.youtube.com/watch?v=MkCVNn-fqjk.
 52. Emily Foxhall and Jeremiah Dobruck, "Newport Beach Considers Outsourcing Lifeguard Services to Cut Costs," *Los Angeles Times*, January 6, 2014.
 53. Michael Scott, "Issue 2 Defeated: Million Votes Are in and 63 Percent Say No, AP Says," *Plain Dealer* (Cleveland), November 8, 2011.
 54. Konrad Yakabuski, "Battle Rages over Ohio's Union-Limiting Law," *Globe and Mail* (Canada), October 29, 2011.
 55. Fox WUPW, "John Kasich discusses Issue 2," September 29, 2011.
 56. Joe Vardon, "Group Raised \$42.2 Million in Campaign against Issue 2," *Columbus Dispatch*, December 16, 2011.
 57. WDTN TV, "Ohio Firefighters Release Ad about Issue 2," 2011.
 58. The ads, titled "Loophole," "Zoey," "Nurse," "Promise," and "Emergency," are archived at www.youtube.com/user/WeAreOhio/videos.
 59. For theoretical and methodological considerations relevant to the visual culture and union strategy, see Janis Bailey and Di McAttee, "The Politics and Poetics of Union Transgression: The Role of Visual Methods in Analyzing Union Protest Strategy," *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice* 47.3 (2003): 27–45.

60. See Staughton Lynd, *Solidarity Unionism: Rebuilding the Labor Movement from Below* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2015); Thomas Geoghegan, *Only One Thing Can Save Us: Why America Needs a New Kind of Labor Movement* (New York: New Press, 2014).
61. The cases include *Harris v. Quinn*, 573 U.S. ____ (2014) and *Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association*, 136 S.Ct. 1083 (2016).
62. Critics of Walker and other anti-union figures pointed to the many tax breaks and subsidies given to wealthy individuals and corporations that increased state and local budget deficits and the tax burdens of middle and low-income households (Kaufman, “Scott Walker and the Fate of the Union”).