For my dad

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“Servants, laborers and workmen of different kinds make up the far greater part of every political society. But what improves the circumstances of the greater part can never be regarded as an inconveniency to the whole. No society can surely be flourishing and happy, of which the far greater part of the members are poor and miserable. It is but equity, besides, that they who feed, clothe and lodge the whole body of the people, should have such a share of the produce of their own labor as to be themselves tolerably well fed, clothed and lodged.”

INTRODUCTION

My father died a few short months after the city of Detroit declared bankruptcy. He was a steel worker, the epitome of the person you likely conjure up when you hear someone described as “working class.” White, male, hard hat and lunch pail, steel-toed boots and a dark blue uniform he’d bring home at the end of every shift and promptly throw in the washing machine. The earthy, sweaty and metallic smell lingering in the laundry room after he closed the lid. He was America’s hero, the brawny backbone of American prosperity and a broad middle class the likes of which the world had never seen. These were the men who soldered, heaved and secured America’s industrial might in the world, and as a result, earned the pride and respect of our nation.

That working class is dead—Detroit’s bankruptcy a blunt symbol of its ultimate demise.

But the working class is not dead.

It’s just different. No longer shuttered away in a factory, today’s working class is interwoven into nearly every aspect of our lives. It’s the black woman in a caretaker’s smock wearing special comfort shoes and a name-tag above her
heart. It’s the white man in a uniform (which he had to pay for) who punches in each day and restocks the shelves of your favorite big box giant. It’s the Latina home health care aide who cares for your mom, the janitor who empties your office wastebasket, the woman who rings up your groceries and the crew who fixes the bumpy freeway you take every day to work.

Yet, despite how interwoven this new working class is in our lives, we don’t really know enough about them. Their concerns don’t shape the national agenda or top the headlines in major newspapers. Their stories aren’t featured in sitcoms, dramas or movies. The words “working class” have been scrubbed from our social and political lexicon, rendering invisible the millions of workers who buttress the middle class at best and straddle poverty at worst.

And yet, attention must be paid to the new working class. Our lives—all of our lives—would grind to a halt if the working class waged a general strike. Their sheer scale in size and diverse demographics will shape the future of American politics. And our nation’s prosperity will be defined by whether we address their declining living standards.

It was in the spring of 2013 that this new working class introduced itself to the world with coordinated walk-outs of fast food workers in major cities across the country. This took place just a few months before the cradle of our once blue-collar nation went bankrupt. But the old blue-collar nation typically paid its workers hourly wages of $17 or more an hour. The fast-food workers—one of the largest jobs in America today—were protesting wages that hover around $8 an hour. What began as a movement among
fast-food workers has since mushroomed into a major worker justice movement known as The Fight for $15, where home workers, airport workers, adjunct professors and fast-food workers all come together to fight for better wages and working conditions. It is the tip of the spear of the Sleeping Giant, staking a claim and fertilizing the seeds of a new working class solidarity.

In just a few short years, The Fight for $15 can claim significant victories, from consciousness-raising to policy changes in red states and blue states. In the 2014 elections, voters in Alaska, Arkansas, Nebraska and South Dakota passed ballot measures to raise their states’ minimum wage.¹ And voters in San Francisco approved a $15 minimum wage increase, matching Seattle’s groundbreaking increase.

For working-class people who aren’t engaged directly in the growing chorus of workers taking to the streets, the movement lifts up their needs and struggles. But as importantly, the movement exclaims the dignity and value of their jobs. I’ve interviewed people all across this country, from the Bible Belt to the East Coast, from the Rust Belt to the Pacific Northwest, and one of the most common grievances expressed by people was the lack of respect they experience in the workplace and in our society more broadly. Whatever their job, the individuals I talked to described their work as meaningful and embedded with purpose, yet they also told me about the disrespect they get on the job by their bosses and in society by politicians.

For LaShawn² and Michelle, who in many ways typify...

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¹ The names of individuals in this book have been changed. While most people were comfortable using their real name, many of these individuals shared complaints and insights about their workplaces that could make them vulnerable to retaliation by their employer or co-workers. Their race/ethnicity reflects how they self-identified their race/ethnicity during our interview. All names of individuals who work for labor, non-profit or other movement-oriented organizations are real.
the new working class, their work is deeply gratifying. The African American couple, both in their late 30s, have been married for 12 years and live on the outskirts of Atlanta. LaShawn is a commercial sanitation driver, emptying dumpsters at restaurants, apartment complexes and local businesses for $16.10 an hour. Michelle is a certified nursing assistant (CNA), providing care for the elderly in their homes. She recently switched jobs and now works as a supervisor, earning $9 an hour for overseeing a staff of CNAs and ensuring each client receives the best possible care. They both grew up in Atlanta, are now raising their own children there. They both love their jobs, deriving true personal satisfaction and pride from their work. Driving a garbage truck is a childhood dream come true for LaShawn, who always had a passion for trucks and sees his job “as getting to play with this big machine and getting paid for it.” Yet, as we get further in the conversation, it becomes clear that his pride finds little reciprocation from management. In LaShawn’s case, workers are often clocked out by management to avoid paying overtime, even though they’re still working—a practice known as wage theft that is increasingly common in today’s working class jobs. To get close to 40 hours, Michelle used to work 7-days a week, a pace she maintained for three and half years before taking her current position. Paying their monthly bills is a challenge and often credit cards fill in the gap when cash is short. Asked what they’d do if they were paid more, LaShawn said they’d “actually being able to take a check and pay rent and have money set aside to buy groceries. Right now, they way our checks are, you have make a conscious decision…If I don’t pay this bill, I can take that money and
put it toward groceries.” LaShawn also mentioned that he’d like to have the money to also treat his kids and wife to a dinner out, or a night at the movies. But LaShawn doesn’t think our nation’s elected officials are much concerned about his family’s dreams and struggles. “It feels like the working class are the lepers of society. Needed to carry out the economy, to hold it and make it strong, but disregarded when it comes to our needs,” he told me.

As LaShawn and Michelle’s story illustrates, gone are the generous pensions, health insurance coverage and paid vacations that characterized the working class jobs of the industrial era. Today’s service-sector serfs are fighting for the most basic of job perks: a decent paycheck, a stable schedule with enough hours, and paid time-off when they or their children are sick. The new working class has jobs, but those jobs no longer provide a livelihood. Let that sink in. A job no longer provides a livelihood for the working class. No matter how you define working class—as individuals without bachelor’s degrees, as people who get paid by the hour, or as workers who aren’t managers or supervisors—they’re numbers constitute the majority of American workers and even American adults.

Defining the New Working Class

There are three common methods social scientists use to define class—by occupation, income or education—and really no consensus about the “right” way to do it. Michael Zweig, a leading scholar in working class studies, defines the working class as “people who, when they go to work or when they act as citizens, have comparatively little power or authority. They are the people who do their jobs under
more or less close supervision, who have little control over the pace or the content of their work, who aren’t the boss of anyone.” Using occupational data as the defining criteria, Zweig estimated that the working class comprised just over 60 percent of the labor force. The weakness of using occupational data to define class is that most political surveys do not capture the occupation of the respondent, making it impossible to ensure consistency in research drawing upon both economic and political data sets, as I do in this book. The second way of defining class is by income, which has the benefit of being available in both political and economic data sets. Yet, defining the working class by income raises complications due to the wide variation in the cost of living in the United States. An annual income of $45,000 results in a very different standard of living in New York City than it does in Omaha, Nebraska. Incomes are also volatile, subject to changes in employment status or the number of hours worked in the household, making it easy for the same household to move in and out of standard income bands in any given year. The third way to define class is by educational attainment, which is how I’ve defined the working class in this book. Education level has the benefit of being consistently collected in both economic and political data sets, but more importantly, education level is strongly associated with job quality. The reality is that the economic outcomes of individuals who hold bachelor’s degrees and those who don’t have diverged considerably since the late 1970s. While people with bachelor’s degrees experienced real wage growth in the 30 years between 1980 and 2010, incomes among those with only a high school education or some college declined precipitously. Today,
having a college degree is essential (but no guarantee, of course) to securing a spot among the professional middle-class. As unionized manufacturing jobs got sent overseas, the once blurred lines between occupation and class have grown quite sharp. The blue-collar middle class is an endangered species, shrunk to a size that makes it no longer identifiable in national surveys. The downside of using education to define the working class is that education is not a perfect proxy for establishing the power or autonomy one has in the workplace or society—the traditional definition of class. There are definitely well-educated workers who hold menial jobs or jobs that pay low-wages, just as there are less-educated workers who have jobs with great autonomy or power. It is a blunt definition, but in the aggregate it is a reasonably accurate way to distinguish between the working class and the middle class.

In this book, “working class” is defined as individuals in the labor force who do not have bachelor’s degrees. This includes high school drop-outs, high school graduates, people with some college and associates degree-holders. It includes the unemployed, who are counted as still in the labor force as long as they are actively looking for work. Because it is increasingly difficult, and some would argue nearly impossible, to reach the middle class without a bachelor’s degree, the middle class is defined in this book as workers with a bachelor’s degree or higher. This both distinguishes the type of work performed by the working class and the middle class, and also reflects a major distinction in how these different classes of workers earn their pay. Nearly 6 out of 10 workers in America are paid hourly wages, as opposed to annual salaries. And the
majority (8 out of every 10) of these hourly workers do not hold bachelor’s degree. As a result of the divergence in economic fates experienced by those with and without bachelor’s degrees, today’s middle class is overwhelmingly a professional class, comprised of workers who get paid annual salaries, work in an office setting and most assuredly do not have to ask permission to take a bathroom break.

The composition of the working class has changed dramatically since 1980:

- The new working class is more racially diverse than it was a generation ago, with more than one-third comprising African Americans (13%), Latinos (20%) and Asian Americans (4%). It’s even more diverse if we look at the youngest members of the working class, those aged 25-to-34, with people of color comprising 47 percent of the younger working class.4

- Unlike a generation ago, two out of three non-college educated women are in the labor force, up from just over half in 1980. Meanwhile non-college educated men are in the labor force at a lower rate than they were in 1980, down from nine out of 10 men to eight out of 10.

- Only 13 percent of the working class holds jobs in the manufacturing sector, down from one-quarter in 1980. Today, one out of five working class employees holds jobs in the behemoth retail sector and another one out of five holds jobs in the catch
all category of professional and related services—a sector that includes the mushrooming health services occupations.\(^5\)

- The median hourly wage of today’s working class is $15.61—a full $1.30 less than in 1980, after adjusting for inflation.\(^6\) Today, more than one-third of full-time workers earn less than $15 an hour, and fully 47 percent of all workers earn less than $15 an hour.\(^7\) Close to half of workers making less than $15 per hour are over the age of 35.\(^8\)

- Only five out of the 30 occupations that will add the most jobs to our economy in the next decade will require a bachelor’s degree.\(^9\)

- The five occupations that employ the largest number of workers includes only one clear middle class job requiring a bachelor’s degree—registered nurses. The rest of America’s biggest job producers are: retail sales people, cashiers, food service and prep, and janitors.\(^10\) Contrary to popular opinion, most of these jobs are not filled by teenagers but by adults who are trying to support themselves and their families with these jobs.

Despite the elites’ fixation with entrepreneurship and knowledge workers, America is powered by wage-earners who punch the clock, wear uniforms and don’t remotely have any power to “lean in” to climb the corporate ladder. For decades now, we’ve been sold the idea that a growing
army of knowledge workers—innovating and ideating in amenity-rich office parks—hold the key to our nation’s prosperity. Column after column penned by the likes of Thomas Friedman and David Brooks argue that the future success of our economy rests on cultivating skills such as creative problem-solving and critical thinking, with a special affinity for fields in science, tech and engineering. What they fail to acknowledge is that those spots in our labor force are miniscule compared to the scads of new jobs being created in home health care, fast food and retail. This elite blind spot continues to distort our economic thinking, and denigrates the majority of work being done in country.

The most profound impact of globalization and technology has been the upheaval experienced by workers without college degrees. With so many factories shuttered, typical “men’s work” steadily eroded and lower-paying service jobs took their place. As their economic contribution to our nation dwindled, millions of these former working class heroes became zeroes in many people’s minds. They seemed to be a dusty anachronism in a sparkling new economy.

Meanwhile, the ranks of women in the workforce grew steadily during the 1980s and 1990s and waves of immigration began to change the ethnic and racial composition of the workforce. Seeking refuge from the economic dislocation, millions of Americans earned bachelor’s and advanced degrees, a process that perversely exacerbated already hardened lines of privilege, with whites earning college degrees at a much greater rate than blacks or Latinos. As a result, today’s working class is more black, Latino and female than it was in the old industrial era. And
that very fact—the diversity of this new working class—is a major reason why its been so easy to ignore, dismiss and marginalize it.

When the working class shifted from “making stuff” to “serving people,” it brought with it lots of historical baggage. The longstanding “others” in our society—women and people of color—were a much larger share of the non-college educated work force. And their marginalized status in our society carried over into the working class—making it easier to overlook and devalue their work.

When working-class women punched the clock in ever-greater numbers in the 1980s and 1990s, it was nearly entirely in the absence of a union. Unlike the hard-hat guys, America’s mushrooming “pink collar” workforce lacked the social solidarity that unions had provided for generations of blue-collar workers. And so, working-class women toiled on the margins of political and social awareness while preserving their families’ dignity by bringing home a paycheck. That’s now changing, as women are at the forefront of the new movement for better wages and working conditions, and are now almost as likely as men to belong to unions, closing the long-standing gap in unionization. Yet, today, these workers are rarely referred to as working class but rather as “low-wage workers,” a designation that negates any whiff of political power or social solidarity.

The new rules of how this globalized, technology-enhanced labor market would be structured—who would win, and who would lose—were heavily influenced by the economic interests of America’s business elite. Organized labor had long been on its knees, already caught in the
downward spiral toward extinction. What’s less recognized is how the working class’s loss of economic and political power was the inevitable—and often intentional—outcome of an interconnected web of political and business interests. Beginning in the 1970s, the Republican Party realized it could cynically use race to divide the working class, and in so doing, unravel support for the social contract established in the New Deal. At the same time, big business had set its sights on big labor and big government, killing off the former and buying off the latter.

**The Great Power Shift**

During the three decades stretching from the New Deal to the early 1970s, when incomes at the bottom grew faster or as fast as those at the top, and union strength reached its apex, it was possible to assume that the peace accord between labor and capitol was permanent. Only now are historians and political scientists able to review those years and understand that the accord was never as firm as many believed. We now know that behind the scenes, business was growing weary with pesky regulations concerning safety, clean air and worker’s rights. They were tired of being pushed around by government and by workers. And so, as executives did back then, someone wrote a memo outlining a plan and shared it widely with the business community. That person was Lewis Powell, a prominent corporate lawyer (who’d later become a member of the Supreme Court), and the time was 1971.11

In the Powell memo—as it’s now referred—he asserts that the “American economic system is under broad attack” from all corners of society—the media, the pulpit, politicians and college campuses, to name just a few.12 Powell argued that this attack required political mobilization by organized business.
“Business must learn the lesson…that political power is necessary; that such power must be assiduously cultivated; and that when necessary, it must be used aggressively and with determination—without the embarrassment and without the reluctance which has been so characteristic of American business.”

He then goes on to outline how to achieve this goal, saying that, “strength lies in organization, in careful long-range planning and implementation, in consistency of action over an indefinite period of years, in the scale of financing available only through joint effort, and in the political power available only through united action and national organizations.”

It didn’t take long for Powell’s vision to be implemented: In 1971, only 175 firms had registered lobbyists in Washington. By 1982, nearly 2,500 did. And the number of corporate PACs increased from under 300 in 1976 to over 1,200 by the mid 1980s. And the halls of our nation’s Capitol echo today with the well-heeled shoe leather of 24 business lobbyists for each member of Congress.

As big business was reasserting its right to write the rules of capitalism, it received a major helping hand from the Supreme Court. In 1976, the court ruled that spending money to influence elections is a form of constitutionally protected free speech, striking down portions of a law aimed at curbing outside influence in elections beyond those involving direct contributions to candidates. The premise that money was tantamount to free speech rights created a precedent that the Court has used to continue to unravel common sense limits on how money can be spent in elections. Most recently, in the Citizens United case, the Supreme Court struck down laws limiting the amount corporations could spend in an election—as long as the money was not given directly to
candidates or to the party. Corporations and wealthy individuals can now shovel as much money as they’d like into television ads to support their preferred candidate or lambast their foe. The 2012 Presidential election was the first election in which the new “Super PACs” were legal. Super PACs can engage in unlimited political spending (“independent” of the campaign) with funds raised from individuals, corporations, unions and other groups—all of whom can give as much as they’d like to the Super PAC. And give they did. America’s wealthy poured $635 million into the cause of distorting our democracy. And the majority of that money came from just 159 individuals who gave $1 million or more.

But Aren’t We All Middle Class?

With the splintering of the working class, issues of economic justice were relegated to the back burner at the very time so many workers found their livelihoods jeopardized by globalization and technological change. Without the countervailing force of a vibrant working class, historically powered by organized labor, the door was propped wide-open for the rise of corporate power and politics dominated by big money. It became easier for Congress to deregulate and loosen worker protections. It became easier for leaders to champion free trade agreements that sold out labor and enriched capital. And it became easier to load up the tax code with benefits for big business and the wealthy.

Where once a steel worker and an accountant could live on the same block, drive the same cars, vacation at the same places and eat at the same restaurants, over the course of the
1980s, 1990s and 2000s, the once blurry boundaries of class crystallized into sharp, distinct lines. As the earnings of non-college educated workers declined significantly under deregulation and anti-worker policies that undermined the minimum wage and degraded working conditions, the trajectories of those with and without bachelor’s degrees diverged significantly—and so did the trajectories of their children. Our social circles constricted and our shared experiences evaporated. This tightening of class hierarchies made it hard for those who shape our public debate—journalists, policymakers, public intellectuals—to relate to the lives and struggles of the majority of their fellow citizens—those without college degrees. For those who make policy and shape the news, their social circle has increasingly become more elite, drawn from privileged families and elite private colleges on the two coasts that bracket the nation.

This homogeneity contributed to a very skewed understanding of working life in America. By the late 1980s, these shapers of our collective understanding had drawn a portrait of the workforce in which professional workers were ubiquitous and a new knowledge-based economy triumphant. In this schematic, America’s class structure slowly morphed into three broad categories—the poor, the middle class, and the rich—their makeup resembles the shape of an hourglass. As Jack Metzgar brilliantly articulates in *The New Working Class Studies*, “The principle problem with this vernacular (of the middle class) is the way it first hides the working class (by including it with in the ubiquitous middle) and then forgets it’s there by assuming that almost everybody is college educated,
professional, and has a reasonably comfortable standard of living.”

Today, the obsession with the “middle class”—defined as college-degreed professionals—continues to distort and divert attention away from the reality that the majority of workers in this country aren’t professionals by any stretch of the definition. They’re laborers, working for hourly wages, often with unpredictable and unstable schedules. They outnumber middle class professionals by a 3-to-1 margin, and there is no evidence indicating that the future jobs in America will alter this ratio. We are a working-class nation, and in reality always have been.

It’s all too common to hear a political pundit say that most Americans identify as middle class. But it isn’t true. Part of the problem is that many polls don’t even include the option of identifying as “working class,” instead offering only upper, middle and lower class as options. It turns out that when polls offer “working class” as an option, just as many people self-identify as working class as middle class. The General Social Survey, a long-running public opinion survey found in 2012 that 44 percent of respondents self-identified as working class; the same percentage who identified themselves as middle class. And interestingly, black and Latino individuals were much more likely than whites to identify as working class.15 More than two-thirds of Latinos consider themselves working class, compared to 50 percent of blacks and 38 percent of whites. In fact, in every year since the early 1970s, the percentage of Americans who identify as working class has ranged between 44 and 50 percent.

Working-class Americans know they’re working class.
It’s elites who want to pretend everybody is middle class. Why? Because “middle class” and “working class” are terms laden with racial, moral and cultural symbolism. Since the massive middle class was built in the decades following the war and the New Deal, “middle class” has worked as a short-cut to conjure up a very American ideal: upstanding, hardworking, traditional, suburban, white families who lived secure and stable lives in tree-lined neighborhoods. On the other hand, “working class” has been imbued with a struggle for power, for recognition, for fair pay. The working class, by nature a notch below the middle class, is vulnerable to judgmental assertions about their economic lot in life. “If only they had gone to college” or “If only they had a stronger work ethic” then they too might have enjoyed the comforts of a middle class life. Of course, people of color were missing from both these cultural constructs, relegated to the dark and foreboding category of the urban poor. It’s much easier to go to battle for “Americans who did all the right things” and got the rug pulled out from under them than it is to stick up for the hard-working, hard-luck, drew-the-short-end-of-the-stick population who too easily remind us that the American dream is more ephemera than enduring reality. And with a working class that is now more black, Latino and female—it’s a battle even harder to wage, let alone win.

The Sleeping Giant Will Rise

But there is a battle taking place. A battle of ideas over the fundamental rules of our economy and society. The moneyed and the connected have won the last few rounds. The social contract born of the New Deal is in tatters.
Organized labor is limping and the large majority of Americans are struggling mightily to make ends meet and build better lives for their children. Unless the majority of Americans—a Sleeping Giant, if there ever was one—reclaim their moral and political authority, there is little reason to believe the status quo will change. Thankfully, the Sleeping Giant is beginning to stir.

The Fight for $15 campaign brings together retail, fast food, home care and federal contract workers to demand a higher wage and the right to a union. This new labor unrest has rattled some spare change out of the pockets of our most recognizable brands. In 2014 and 2015, Walmart, The Gap, Target and McDonalds all voluntarily announced plans to slowly raise their bottom wage rungs to $9 per hour. McDonald’s limits their modest pay raise only to those stores it directly controls, not at its franchisees where the overwhelming majority of its workers are employed. In New York City, Governor Cuomo established a wage board to examine wages in the fast food industry. In 2015, the wage board voted to approve a $15 minimum wage for fast food workers at chain restaurants, a policy that will boost the pay of roughly 200,000 workers in the state. While the spokespeople of these companies won’t credit the protestors, the voluntary across-the-board raising of their lowest wage is without precedent. And these are the wins racked up outside the arena of elections, which as mentioned earlier, saw voters approve minimum wage increases in multiple states and big cities in 2014. As America heads into the 2016 Presidential campaign, it remains to be seen whether the working class will finally have a champion. As I argue throughout the book, a working-class agenda
is vital for repairing the destruction caused by decades of misguided policies that have fueled inequality at the top and eviscerated living standards at the bottom. But it’s also really good politics. Sleeping Giant provides the complete analytical framework for understanding the new working class, covering its central role in our economy and its latent political power in our democracy.

The first two chapters of Sleeping Giant provide a rich examination of the jobs of the new working class and how the proliferation of underpaid work has transformed our labor market into a Bargain Basement Economy, where the largest numbers of people are, and will continue to be, employed in occupations paying less than $12 an hour. The second chapter goes even deeper into this bargain basement economy, chronicling the working conditions faced by the new working class under the deregulation of labor rights and protections. You’ll hear from truck drivers, home care workers, retail workers, fast food workers and general laborers about the pride they feel in their work, but also about the often demeaning and degrading environment of their workplace. Throughout the book, I share the stories of many individuals and have chosen to protect their identity by changing their names. Other than that, all other information is factual and based on interviews conducted between August 2014 and August 2015. In Chapter 3, the book switches from the economic lives of the new working class to their politics, chronicling a surprising and consistent populism even among today’s white working class. Throughout the chapter, I compare the political beliefs and ideology of the working class and the middle class, revealing divergences that are important for policymakers,
activists and candidates to understand. The two middle chapters provide an historical analysis of how working class political power has shifted over the last generation. Chapter 4 tells the story of the great power shift from the working class to corporate interests that occurred during the 1970s and 1980s, and how the capture of both political parties fueled the policies that hurt both working- and middle-class Americans. In Chapter 5, I explore how history shows up in the wallets of the new working class by examining the still profound implications of the legacy of marginalization and exclusion of women and people of color by our politics and our policies. The next chapter delves into the role inequality and social distance plays in how working class experiences and needs are often overlooked by our nation’s elites, particularly the media and Congress. This chapter also discusses the potential for a new alignment among the working and middle class and the major barriers to each group finding common cause with one another. As I’ll argue throughout the book, the Sleeping Giant is beginning to stir, and much of its rumbling is happening at the city and state level. In Chapter 7, I explore the burgeoning working class activism with non-profit and labor leaders across the country who are pioneering new strategies to build political power and win policies that are improving the lives of the new working class. Finally, the last chapter articulates the importance of a revived working class politics, and provides a framework for ensuring the next generation is given a better deal than their parents.

A revived and new working class is critical for repairing our nation’s social and economic divides. But there are major challenges to ushering in this countervailing power—
Supreme Court decisions that have hamstrung the ability to reign in corporate and individual political spending as well as a spate of state laws that have aggressively curtailed the ability for workers to form unions. The reality is that the working class has had a boot on its neck for three decades—but while they’ve shouldered the brunt of the right-wing assault on worker’s rights, all of America has suffered as a result. Empowering today’s working class, which we depend on more than ever before, is our best chance to return to the shared values of economic opportunity and widely shared prosperity.
Endnotes

15. Author’s analysis of General Social Survey data.