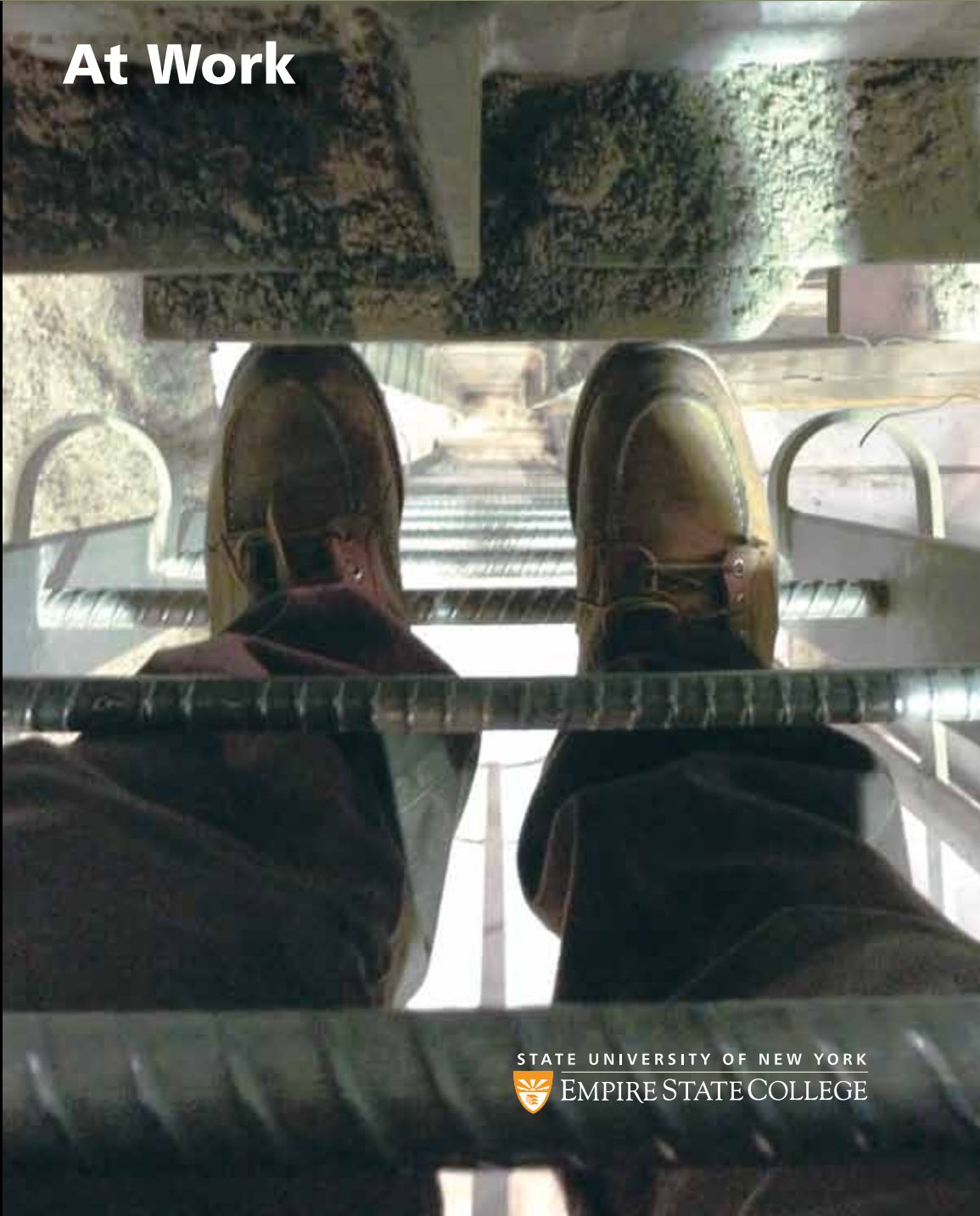


The Harry Van Arsdale Jr. Center for Labor Studies

Labor Writes 2013

At Work



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Labor Writes 2013

At Work

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The Harry Van Arsdale Jr.
Center for Labor Studies
SUNY Empire State College

Foreword

None of the contributions to *Labor Writes* were prepared especially for this volume. On the contrary, they were each originally written in response to a classroom assignment and then recommended to the volume by the instructor.

Nor is that all. All of the pieces recommended were not automatically included in the volume. Each is read again by the *Labor Writes* editorial board, a group that includes both regular and adjunct faculty, which decides whether a particular essay should be published.

I want to thank this year's board, which included Mary Roma, Sophia Mavrogiannis, Sharon Szymanski and Rebecca Fraser, for their work on this issue; also Christina Vallario and Masha Tupitsyn for their assistance in preparing the selected papers for publication; and Barrie Cline, the issue's editor.

Thanks are due as well to the staff in the Office of Communications and Government Relations at the SUNY Empire State College Coordinating Center in Saratoga Springs, N.Y., who see each year's issue through the press.

They do a splendid job on this and other publications of the Van Arsdale Center – not least as evidenced by the prizes their work on these publications has won from their SUNY Council for Univerist Advancement (SUNYCUAD) colleagues the last two years running in a row, and still counting!

It is an honor for me to work with these fine individuals, and with all our students, who together show a level of commitment to learning and to making our world a better place that is a model for us all.

There can be a job, at a living wage, for everyone who wants to work. No one need be denied the education they deserve or the health care they need. No one need go hungry, be without decent clothes to wear, or a warm, safe place to call home. We can have a government of the people, for the people, and by the people.

I believe these things because I have the privilege of working each and every day with the individuals, faculty, staff and students, responsible for this volume.

Read on to find out for yourself!

Michael Merrill
Dean

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Introduction: In Collaboration With ...	v
Rebecca Fraser, for the Editorial Committee	
Cover Art	v
Jaime Lopez, Untitled	

HISTORIES AT WORK

What is the Good Life?	2
Edwin Salomon	
Men Getting Pampered Too What?	5
Michael Green	
Artwork: Pliers and Money	7
Shantar Gibson	
Working	8
Christian Conpanione	
Everyday Items I Carry to Work	10
Terron Spruill	
My New Career	12
Gene Shapiro	
Artwork: Built to Last	15
Jaime Lopez	
Everyone Carries Something	16
Patrick Crockett	
My Path to the Present	18
Jose Castillo	
Reading Autobiography	20
Yosmar Gonzalez	
Things Carried	22
Brian J. Tortora, Jr.	

Artwork: '70s Era Lamp	24
Mike Egielski	
A Rare Opportunity	25
Zizwe Lewis	

MIND AT WORK

Artwork: Self Portrait at Work	28
Hana Georg	
My Blue Collar Skills	29
Karen Hansen	
The Mind at Work	31
Gene Shapiro	
Everyday Hazards	33
Christopher Cordero	
Action, Reflection and Practice as an Electrician	35
Paul Allen	
Artist Statement and Artwork: Conduit Bends	38
Scott Demel	
An Electrician's Work is an Anonymous Signature.....	40
Nicholas Hadnagy	
Artwork: Electric Shop	42
Hana Georg	
Safety is Everyone's Responsibility	43
Luis Hernandez	
Pride in Your Work	45
Patrick Thompson	
The Unlikely Bonds That Unite Us	47
Jesse Dominguez	
The Art of Conduit Bending in the Electrical Industry	50
Vincent Sforza	

HARD TRUTHS AT WORK

Artwork: Untitled	56
Jaime Lopez	

What is to be Done?	57
Jaime Lopez	
Co-Ops: Keep Workers Honest	60
Chris Shaleesh	
Artwork: This Nation was Built by Immigrants	62
Julio Hernandez and Jaime Lopez	
Public Responsibility	63
Bonnie Espinal	
Public Opinion and Immigration.....	64
Salvatore A. Montalbano	
Artwork: I am Working America	67
Jaime Lopez and Julio Hernandez	
Social Structure and Change.....	68
Nello Costanzi	
Indentured Servitude in Colonial America: Cloaked Slavery?	70
Patricia Wickes	
Servitude and Slavery	72
Ron Pizzuti	
The Immigration Debate	74
Hana Georg	
Public Opinion on Immigration	77
Matthew May	
Workplace Health Hazards	79
Navindra Prashad	
Fracking: Is it Safe or Not?.....	81
Vincent Guarnaccio	
Slavery by Any Name.....	83
Zizwe Lewis	

HURRICANE SANDY

Artwork: Nature's Construction 3	86
Shantar Gibson	

What Hurricane Sandy Did to Me	88
John Eamon McGinley	
Superstorm Sandy Reaction	90
Michael Houck	
The Effects of Sandy on Long Island	91
Nathan Calisi	
Mandatory Evacuation.....	92
Michael Venezia	
No Work, No Power	93
Joseph Medina	
Looking Back, Going Forward.....	94
Louis Xepolitos	
Right Out of a Movie.....	95
Cesar Vela	
Counting Trees after Superstorm Sandy	96
Michael J. Fox	
Fishing in the Basement.....	97
Ken Liao	
Storm Clearing	98
Kevin Peterson	
Artwork: Untitled.....	99
Hana Georg	

Introduction: In Collaboration With ...

Rebecca Fraser, for the Editorial Committee

Labor Writes is a collaborative effort – from students to instructors, editors to writing coaches, from the Design Center to the Print Shop – many hands contributed to this edition. In this edition is artwork from instructor Barrie Cline’s project for Workers’ Memorial Day. This project also was a collaborative effort. Project Luz featured the work in their May 2013, 17th Issue. The artwork by Jaime Lopez, Hana Georg, Julio Hernandez and Shantar Gibson in *Labor Writes 2013* are from this publication.

You can read more about the project below, as taken from the frontispiece of Project Luz:

As part of ongoing art projects she does with workers at The Harry Van Arsdale Jr. Center for Labor Studies, Barrie Cline sought a collaboration with artist Sol Aramendi, founder of Project Luz, which works to empower communities through photography. For Workers Memorial Day, union construction workers and day laborers who are members of New Immigrant Community Empowerment (NICE) engaged in a dialogue and an exchange of ideas. In these encounters they shared with each other feelings about the safety and conditions of their labor. This publication reflects the images and texts of what we hope is the beginning of a conversation towards safer conditions for all workers as well as different ways to look at their labor.

This project was initiated in association with The Harry Van Arsdale Jr. Center for Labor Studies, NICE, and assistance from the Social Practice Queens component of Queens College and The Queens Museum of Art. It was funded in part by the Student Activity Fee of the State University of New York and the Spirit of Boz, founded by Julien Friedler, Belgium.

Cover Art

Labor

The identity and culture of the worker is being erased and society has gripped onto hopeless individualism. The history of immigrants, slavery, and the ideas of civil liberties are slowly being robbed and substituted by Fear, War, and a weird social acceptance that everyone is replaceable. The truth is the people that we lose to work deaths will never be replaced. We cannot continue to be influenced by class division and elusive media that sponsors hate. If we cannot expose this attack on the working people; it will not matter if you are an Immigrant, a

Citizen, a Woman, a Man, living abroad or in the U.S., working non-union or union. We will all feel the same pain of helplessness and regret. This Workers Memorial Day on April 28, let's have respect for those we have lost and hope for the consciousness of the future.

– Jaime Lopez

HISTORIES AT WORK

What Is The Good Life?

Edwin Salomon

My story is not like others. I was born on March 23 in 1975 at St. Luke's Roosevelt Hospital for Women. I was born to a 16-year-old Puerto Rican girl and an 18-year-old Puerto Rican boy, both new to the states. He was a bit of a "hibaro" (country boy) and a born hustler, so he was quickly enamored by the speed and action of the city. My mother was like most other girls her age, growing up in El Barrio in the '60s and '70s. Not much was expected of them and, to no surprise, there weren't many who surpassed the low expectations. Glitz and glamour ruled the streets, as disco, fashion, drugs, and fast money were the driving forces of inner city culture at the time. Fashion conscious and running the streets behind her two older sisters, my mother inevitably crossed paths with my father. As the story goes, he was quite charming and ambitious, and they hit it off quickly.

One of the many problems for my people at that time was fighting the seductive allure of the streets and attempting to make the most out of limited opportunities. My father tried but, like many, was unsuccessful. The fragile ego of inner city men makes for poor self-image. This makes us poor mothers and fathers, who, in turn, raise children of poor character who grow up to become poor parents and so on ... It is a common cycle in the ghetto that usually requires a major social/cultural shift to break this vicious cycle.

Like many other unfortunate inner-city youth, I was raised by my mother, while my father's lifestyle soon led him to several tours upstate as a member of the New York State Department of Corrections. Growing up, I was told he was "traveling for work." My mother was fortunate enough to have a support system behind her. She was the third of four children. Her two older sisters, who also had "traveling men" in their lives, raised all their children together. So while I have no biological brothers and sisters, I was never completely alone with my eight cousins always around.

My mother's younger brother on the other hand, having no patriarch of his own, made the choice to live like most other misguided young men in the inner city, and also soon found himself touring Upstate New York as a guest of the state. With the collaborative efforts of my mother and her sisters, they raised eight kids. And as the first-born son of this new generation of Nuyoricans, I was always keenly aware of how much my mother wanted more for me than what the world just outside our door had to offer. I was always told to be the example for my three younger male cousins. Although I was young, this was a role I instinctively took on as the default alpha male in the family. I was burdened with a leadership role that forced me to be much more mature and focused than other kids my age. Combined with an aptitude for math and science, I was soon accepted into the

Talented and Gifted classes. I was fortunate to have teachers who recognized something in me that the other boys around me did not yet exhibit. I was chosen to apply to the ABC (A Better Chance) Program, which is modeled after the more popular Prep for Prep Program. The program was designed for young men who, like me, were looking for an opportunity to break free from the clutches of the inner city life cycle.

The ABC Program was life changing. I lived on the Hamilton College Campus, which is a picturesque Ivy League school, and I attended Clinton Central School, located in Clinton, N.Y., which is a small town outside of the small city of Utica. It was everything I hoped it would be. Great teachers supported by a local community that prided itself on the success of the school and all of its ventures. We were highly ranked in both sports and academics. ABC was everything one could hope for, from great sports and music programs to biannual musicals that brought people from far and wide. I was a good-looking kid, from the Big City, who soon became a good student athlete. This brought me an immediate level of popularity. Along with my preconceived ideas of the all-American high school experience, I was remaking myself and living out the whole high school fantasy, Varsity letters and all.

As I reminisce about my time in high school, I quickly remember the state of mind that I was forced to maintain on a daily basis. While I may have been finding my new surroundings very hospitable, I also was keenly aware that I stuck out like a sore thumb. Even in the eighth grade, I was almost 6 feet tall and a black male, none of which I could hide or minimize. Everywhere I went, I was noticed. If not for being a popular athlete, it may have been much harder to justify the attention from those in town or to move about as freely as I did. I was aware on a daily basis of just how far from home I was and just how fortunate I was to be there. This is when I realized that for those people who lived that beautiful suburban life, that was the good life, and I was just sharing in it.

We all strive for a good life. The challenge lies in your definition of it and how far removed from it you find yourself. This definition will vary based on race, culture, class, and both generational and social expectations. My unique experience has molded my conception of a good life, just as everyone's individual experiences have created what may be their own distinct vision. Our reading assignment was "Nawabdin Electrician" a fictional story by Daniyal Mueenuddin. This is one such vision of a handyman in a small, unnamed town outside of Multan, Pakistan. Nawabdin made a name for himself by becoming the go-to man for whatever object may have broken. Regardless of his ability, Nawab (as he was called) made an effort to fix whatever challenges came his way. He did so with mixed results. Yet his community held him in high regard. One day his employer K.K. Harouni, a wealthy landowner, visited the property that Nawab was hired to tend. Nawab used this opportunity to approach his employer and proposition him for a new motorcycle to help him tend to the vast lands he is responsible for

covering. He made sure to present a good case for the bike, not to mention using his leverage as the man responsible for his comfort. As it turns out, he was very successful in presenting his case. The new bike was cool and functional, and came with the added benefits of an elevated stature and visibility within the community.

As is the case with poor communities around the world, your successes are not always without some added deleterious effect. Nawab's elevated stature made him the target of a gun-wielding thief who intended to remove the bike from his possession. Nawab, with complete disregard for himself, attempts to thwart the thief and save his trophy bike. A struggle ensues and Nawab gets shot, yet continues to pursue the thief. The thief then mercilessly unloads his gun. The shots stir the locals. The thief, now unarmed and unable to restart the bike, has to flee from the neighbors bearing down on him. By sheer luck, a pot shot into the brush lands a slowly fatal blow. At this point in the story we find our protagonist facing one of life's hardest decisions.

Nawab showed no sympathy for the man as he lays asking for forgiveness. Should he have expected any? Did he deserve any? These are the questions we are left with after the story. I for one believe that although I would not wish this fate on anyone, I can understand why in this moment, Nawab chose to curse the man instead of forgive him. I live my life hoping to be judged by my actions not the color of my skin or preconceived notions of what my existence should entail. I live a life free from the decisions that led that Nawab down that fateful road. In this story, Nawab could very well represent a broad base of individuals. The common man is faced with everyday challenges, is flawed and evolving, yet is guided for the most part by a moral compass. It's the same old story of the haves vs. the have-nots. It is one of the most common elements of the human dynamic: attempting to raise our station or become the alpha male, all in an attempt to secure our futures for our continued happiness and prosperity.

Nawab's character rang true for me, so much so that I forgot that "Nawabdin Electrician" is a fictional story. It is a tale of an "everyman" making the most of the opportunities presented, even with what seems like limited resources and talent. Nawab was a true hustler – someone who understood the value of work, family, and security. And like most of us, he endeavored to make this one life as good as it can be.

Work Cited

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27 Aug 2007. Also found at http://www.newyorker.com/fiction/features/2007/08/27/070827fi_fiction_mueenuddin.

Men Getting Pampered Too.... What?

Michael Green

When our class was presented with an assignment that must reveal stereotyping, I was at a loss for ideas. I could not think of anything or something worth writing about, so I went to school early and sat with a writing coach. I expressed that I needed help with brainstorming for an essay on stereotyping. The coach looked at me, stared a little, and asked, “Do you get your eyebrows done?” I replied, “Yes.” The coach responded with, “There you go. You have something to write about. Stereotypically, aren’t women only supposed to do that?”

Immediately after, the light bulb went off in my head and the ideas started to flow. We discussed culture and gender roles in society and within communities. I grew up in Queens, N.Y. and still live there today. In some sections of Queens, guys like to pamper themselves and take good care of their appearance. Not only will people see girls in nail salons and tanning salons but plenty of guys too. Society perceives women as the ones who pamper themselves regarding their appearance whereas men do it too.

Working on construction sites people deal with a lot of diverse personalities along with some real straight shooters who speak exactly what is on their minds. Guys notice my eyebrows and will automatically ask me, “Are you gay?” That’s the stereotype. If you are a male and go to a salon to get your eyebrows or nails done by someone else and pay to make yourself look fresh, crisp and clean, you must be gay. Well, I’m here to inform others that this is not true.

I surely am not gay – not that I have anything against gay people. I just so happen to be attracted to the opposite sex and I completely pamper myself, which makes me feel good about my appearance. I try to do it every weekend, which is usually on one of my days off. Though it can get kind of expensive, I still get a haircut and shape up my lines, my eyebrows threaded, my nails cleaned up and sometimes I go to the tanning salon. My dad thinks I’m crazy to spend money every week doing all this. He wouldn’t be caught dead in a salon. I’ve tried to tell him to get a pedicure; he thinks I’m out of my mind. He says, “Real men don’t get pedicures.”

My family has a house upstate in the mountains in Cobleskill, N.Y. We use it for hunting, fishing and summer vacations. The men up there are “mountain men” and I don’t think any of these men get their eyebrows waxed, threaded or even plucked with tweezers. They rarely get haircuts or shave. When I go up there, I stand out like a sore thumb. It is written all over me that I’m not a local. After I’ve spent some time up there, I become a little scruffy and it’s time to do some pampering. My dad’s friends assumed that I am not into the mountain stuff and I am a pretty boy, but they soon realized that I could chop wood, dig ditches, hunt

and fish with the best of them. At the same time, I could not help but to clean myself up in the ways that I like; whereas they think a shower every once in a while is good enough.

There are reasons I like to pamper myself and maintain my appearance. First, it has to do with the type of work that I do. I've worked in construction for most of my life and it can get real dirty at times, and I become completely miserable when I'm beat down from a long week of school and work. My hair is a mess, fingernails are dirty, and my hair grows in all types of places where it shouldn't. I guess I can blame it on my roots – I'm half Italian. After I pamper myself and my appearance is back to the clean cut look that I feel comfortable in, I can breathe a sigh of relief.

The next reason is the way my mother raised me. She was always cleaning. If it wasn't my siblings and me as babies, it was the house. I like the feeling when the laundry is done, the house is clean and everything is sparkling. Then I can relax. I have a hunch I might have Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), which definitely has something to do with having anxiety or not feeling comfortable until everything is cleaned, trimmed and pampered. OCD is a whole other story, so we won't get into that, but I love when I am groomed from head to toe.

The moral of my experiences: don't judge a book by its cover. In some of today's communities, guys pamper themselves as much as girls. People should do what makes them feel good, especially after a long week of work. Everyone deserves it.

Pliers and Money

Shantar Gibson (Local 3 Electrician)



The tools and places of my day-to-day work life provide moments that lend themselves to my art. When an opportunity to make art knocks at your door, you can never be too busy, too tired, too young, too old, the wrong race, or the wrong gender...

Working

Christian Conpanione

From the age of 15 until now, I have worked all types of jobs and saved the best for last. My very first job was for a local psychic who required me to hand out flyers for \$10 an hour, which is not too far off from what I'm making now. Back in 1995, \$10 an hour was great pay and could go a long way. Shortly after I was hired, I looked out for a friend and got him a job too, but that did not last long because he was tossing his share of flyers into sewers. Once the owner's son got wind of this, he was fired, and since I was guilty by association, I was let go too.

During high school, I had a new job each year. They included: Foot Locker, Athlete's Foot, Starbucks, Victoria's Secret – yes – Victoria's Secret, which was fun for the obvious reasons. I attended a special high school for performing arts and majored in Drama. The need to choose a career was never an issue because I knew that I wanted to be an actor. I had an agent and would go on auditions, sometimes finding out the day of, which would leave me with no choice but to miss work. This caused me to bounce around from job to job because I would be fired for not showing up. In my eyes, these jobs were just jobs with no hope for advancement, so it seemed like a no-brainer to not take them seriously.

After high school, I found the best job for a struggling actor, which was a busboy at B.B. Kings Blues Club & Grill in Times Square. I originally applied for the server position but due to not having any experience, I had to start out bussing tables and work my way up. Just two months after showing my willingness to work hard and my ability to learn quickly, I was promoted to a server, which was where the real money was. It was perfect. Now, I had a flexible schedule allowing me to go on auditions, and I had the freedom of taking months off at a time to go to Los Angeles. The money was good and fast at B.B. Kings, but I had no health benefits. On a daily basis, I lived and worked hoping that I would not get hurt.

In 2002, I lost my last remaining parent: my father. My acting career was put on hold for a while. As time passed, I felt it was time to get serious since I was officially on my own. Because I was 22 without a “real” career and no health insurance, I decided to contact my friend who worked at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center to find out if they were hiring. He put in a good word for me, and I was hired with virtually no experience. He just so happens to be the same friend who got me fired for discarding his flyers. That was a long time ago and he takes his job very seriously now, so I was determined to not make him look bad.

I held my position at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center for five years. I did patient accounts and had to deal with insurance companies every day. At times, I felt I had to pull teeth and plead with these companies to approve treatments

that would grant patients a few more months to live or even save their lives. The mental strain that came with this career was starting to affect my personal life. I was miserable but I had a “real” job that was defined by having full benefits. I needed a way out but the thought of starting over was terrifying.

Because my father was an electrician and loved what he did, becoming a Local 3 electrician was always in the back of my mind. In addition, I liked the idea of being part of a “brotherhood,” which looks out for their workers and their families. At the age of twenty-seven, I heard Local 3 was accepting applications and on a whim, I decided to give it a shot. The more I thought about it, the more I realized that this is what I wanted to do with my life. This is a career that would send me back to school and learn a trade that required physical and mental strength. At the same time, it would allow me to do something different every day, and I would not be confined to a desk and a computer screen.

As you can see, I've worked in different areas. I've been a salesperson, server, actor, and held a clerical job for quite some time. Yet, the best decision that I've made was joining Local 3. As I mentioned earlier, when I worked for the psychic passing out flyers, I was making \$10 an hour, which is not too far off from what I'm making now. However, when you factor in the education, benefits, and future advancement, it makes it all worth it.

Everyday Items I Carry to Work

Terron Spruill

Sometimes in our lives there are situations or events that happen so fast that we don't have time to prepare and all you are left with is what you have on you and the things you know. This can also be said about our jobs or professions. You should always come to work prepared. As an electrical apprentice, there are many things that I carry to work on a daily basis, both tangible and intangible. The obvious things I carry are tools, such as a screwdriver, pliers, hammer, etc. But some of the things I carry that are not so obvious are bottled water, a fully charged cell phone, a washcloth and extra emergency cash. Along with these physical items, I also carry a sense of humor, courage and common sense. These are some of the essential items I carry with me every single day to work.

Let's start with the bottled water. This is an absolute must-have for me. It is vital to my health that I stay hydrated. Sometimes at work I am constantly lifting loads and loads of heavy material like wire, pipe and machinery. This activity is very strenuous and I always work up a sweat while doing it. So I always keep a bottle of water nearby to replace all the fluids I lost and to re-energize. It's like putting gas in a car; water is my fuel. I carry it wherever I go.

My next essential item is a fully charged cellphone. Today's cellphones have all kinds of extra features and apps that can help you. One of my best features is the contact list. I need this as I cannot remember phone numbers by heart. In a time of crisis this information is critical. I can let loved ones know if I'm okay or headed to the hospital. Also on the flip side, loved ones can keep me informed on any happenings as well. You just never know what to expect in life, so a cellphone is a communication must-have.

Another item I carry on my person at all times is a washcloth. One may wonder why that is? As I mentioned earlier, I sweat a lot. Not only from doing strenuous work, but it's actually in my genes. Even when it is cold or snowing out, I break out in a sweat. This is one trait that I actually hate, but I have come to terms with it and therefore always carry a washcloth.

Last, but definitely not least on my list of tangible items that I carry every day, is extra emergency cash. This is something that I don't tell co-worker, family, or friends about; otherwise they would be hitting me up for a few bucks. I found that it always comes in handy to have extra cash, or it never hurts to have it. For instance, there was one time when I worked overtime and got off late very late and the last bus to my house broke down. The only other way to get home was to take a cab or to walk a very long distance. I was so lucky to have a few extra bucks for a cab. Ever since then, I always carry extra cash just in case.

Along with all the physical items I carry with me every day to work, I also make it my business to carry a sense of humor. In my line of work, you have to have a very thick skin. My coworkers and higher ups are constantly joking around and teasing each other. Some of the jokes can be on very sensitive subjects and you have to learn not to take it personally. Everyone jokes just to make the day go by faster and to not get stressed out. Being that I am the new guy, most of the time, the jokes are at my disposal. At first I was like, "What the hell?" But I adjusted quickly and learned that the guys just like to bust my chops.

Courage is another trait I carry with me at all times on the job. You cannot be afraid on a construction site. If you are, then it is not the job for you. I have to climb 12- foot ladders and work around demolitions and heavy-duty machinery that can hurt you if not handled properly, so courage is a must. Fear is not allowed.

Finally, I always carry common sense with me, no matter where I go. Having and using common sense will almost always keep you safe. It also makes for a more productive worker because it allows you to problem solve. I learned this a long time ago and am glad that I have it, as many people do not.

These are the tangible and intangible things that I carry with me to work every day.

My New Career

Gene Shapiro

There are so many new things to experience whenever one changes a career path or simply switches job locations. My new career as an electrician comes along with something that not everyone gets to have: I like my job. I like doing what I do, in a world where millions of people dread getting out of bed in the morning simply because their next destination is their job. I have traveled down that road, and it makes me appreciate what I have now even more. My new career comes with many actual and transcendent benefits. However, enjoying what I do is the biggest one of them all.

When I was 12, my parents brought my sister and me to the United States from the former Soviet Union. The Soviet Union fell apart three days after we emigrated. My mother always joked that the USSR couldn't handle us leaving and fell apart. The first shocking experience in the United States was seeing a fruit store for the first time. Red, yellow, green and orange pyramids of fruits and vegetables were just standing there with few shoppers lazily strolling between them. We did not arrive from a third world country. We always had something to eat. Our options, however, were limited to what was available in the stores and sadly it often wasn't much. Buying items like meat or cheese, whenever they were available, usually proceeded with a few hours of waiting in line. The rule of thumb was that when you saw a long line, you would jump on it, and then ask what was being sold. With your place in line established, step two involved finding a pay phone and calling your friends and family, advising them of what just became available. Different products were sold in separate departments, and with necessity being the mother of invention, this forced people to master standing in several lines at once. This meant jumping from one line to the next, maintaining your place and hoping that your turn would not arrive at the same time at two different counters. Stores ran out of products all the time considering that only part of the shipment made it to the shelves. Therefore, completing two out of three successful purchases were thought of as an accomplished trip to the store. As I am writing this paragraph, I find it amazing how sometimes I can get irritated having four people in front of me in a supermarket line. Back in "The Old Country," accidentally stumbling on a rare item's availability would lead to its purchase. And very often, the item bought was not intended for the buyer. Because quality products were rarely available, people remembered the dress sizes of their friends and often coworkers. This included shoe and bra sizes for the female population. One cannot let an opportunity go to waste. The one and only positive thing that came out of these social economic conditions was the communal camaraderie that allowed people to cope with difficulties in their daily lives.

I still remember my 12-year-old self, sitting in the back seat of a car, being crushed by a duffle bag, ogling for the first time the land of the free through the rear door window. However, I do not recall what made a bigger impact on me – the abundance and variety of fruits and vegetables bright enough to resemble carnival lights – or the hesitant look of a random customer standing in front of a mountain of bananas, which I incidentally ate only once in my previous 12 years. My second shock came a few days later when I entered a toy store.

Back in the USSR, I had a lot of toys, probably more than an average kid. Here in the states, I did not. I saw my parents and my sister hold themselves back from buying what they wanted and I tried to do the same. At the same time, I did have a wild imagination. So, I took the toys that I had and connected them, took them apart, broke them, fixed them and transformed them into whatever became their purpose for that particular day. I believe that these moments of constructive creativity associated with times of joy became the foundation of my personality and pointed me in the direction I am heading today.

Each Local 3 apprentice has his or her reasons for finding their way into this classroom. We may not have identical reasons for joining, but surely they overlap. We all want to better ourselves and improve the lives of our families. We also know that it is almost futile to try to take on the world by oneself. That is why most of us surround ourselves with family and friends who will help us when we are in need, and that is why we go to their aid when they require our help. Those of us here, however, decided to widen that circle. Had those before us not joined the ranks and fought for the right of the collective, we would still be facing obstacles and hardships. Millions have suffered before trade unionism. Millions have fought in order to attain it. That is why every member of every union is obligated to know the price that someone else paid for the union card in his pocket. I now make less than half of what I used to make. I get up at 5:00 a.m. every weekday and start my two-hour commute to work. I attend school twice a week and arrive home late into the evening. But, it is what I don't do which is important; I don't regret my decision for a moment. I don't let low pay discourage me, as I know of the potential future I can make for myself. And most importantly, I don't have the dread and antipathy of going to work, which I see daily on the faces of my fellow commuters. It appears that, sooner than later, I have found my place.

The world is moving rapidly fast. Technology is growing exponentially. Companies all over the world are spending billions of dollars to take the human element out of their production, so necessary workers are perceived to be complacent and thought of as a resource. If we ever wish not to become easily replaceable cogs inside a giant machine, we need to embrace the idea of unity and hold the ground which was fought for, won, and passed down to us. Education is the key. We need to counter the educated think tanks who wish to turn back the clock on all the victories that the labor movement has achieved. They have

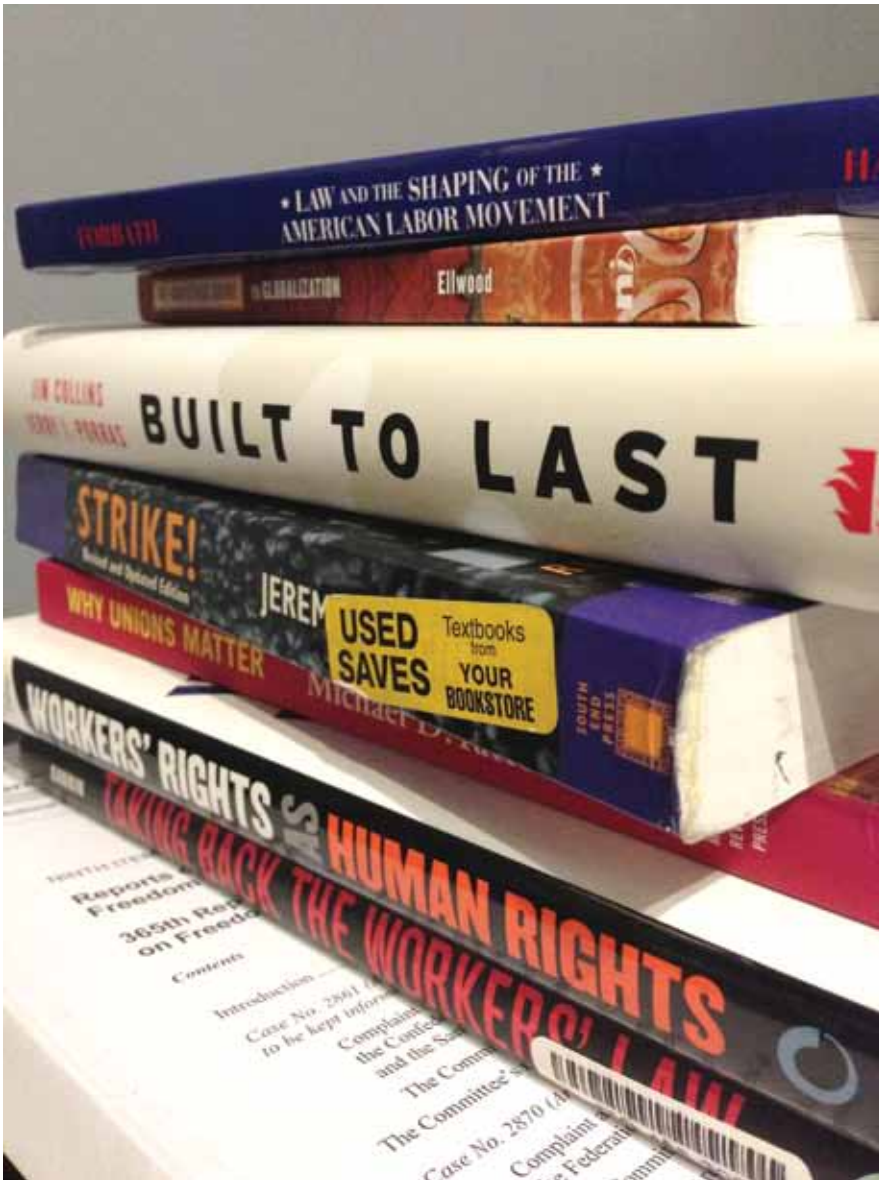
the resources, the finances and political affiliations. We have the numbers and the ideas. In addition, we have occasional leaders who discovered that we could continue to strengthen our ranks and better ourselves. Tony Mazzocchi demonstrated how far he could take his Local 149 by convincing some of its members to pick up a book. He introduced the importance and beauty of education to a bunch of high school dropouts, some who later became leaders themselves.

Education is important for reasons other than political awareness and economic wellbeing. People have an inherent drive for self-actualization. Some have better opportunities to learn than others. However, there are those who limit their growth due to society's opinion of themselves. Society often correlates low paying manual labor with low intelligence. In Mike Rose's book, *The Mind at Work*, he points out how complex and demanding some of these jobs can be as well as the intellect that is required to master these trades. Much of the world seems to be unaware of these facts or chooses to believe otherwise. Sadly, these stereotypes keep a lot of potential people from entering college classrooms and fully developing themselves. Because of many owners' hesitation, which is reinforced by a skewed system of values, much talent is lost. On the other hand, times are changing and the labor movement should keep up with it. With the amount of information thrown at us, we are facing new challenges that require us to be able to filter and process it. Our ability to properly analyze the world around us and act accordingly, is vital to the success of our movement as well as the entire nation. From personal experience, I can honestly state that after taking a few classes at Empire State College, I now watch the news from a different perspective.

The transition from a private sector job into a union has not been a walk in the park. The pay cut certainly took a toll on my standard of living and the commitment to my job and school, which leaves very little time for anything else. As previously mentioned, I do not regret my decision, even for a moment. However, the pleasure I get from work and future opportunities are not the only reasons why I am adamant about my decision. There is another reason that has not previously been stressed upon. Mentioned last, however anything but least, the unity between fellow workers is the most aspiring and appealing reason to be here. People say that it is not what it used to be. It may be different than the "good old days," but it is still there. I see it. The bond between union members is not something you will find in a corporate cutthroat environment. Granted, there are some bad apples, but they can be found everywhere. The good ones though, are found here in great numbers. And it is these great numbers that allow them to remain good.

Built to Last

Jaime Lopez (Local 3 Electrician)



Built to Last, Jaime Lopez (Local 3 Electrician)

We must collaborate and assist each other in creating strength in all workers and a safer workplace through legislation and other forms of activism. So much of this bigger picture begins with educating ourselves and learning our rights.

Everyone Carries Something

Patrick Crockett

What are the things you carry to work? Perhaps it is your lunch bag, tools, backpack, or even your laundry. Everyone carries something to work. Some of the items I carry to work are my umbrella, book bag, a change of clothes, tools, lunch bag, phone and flashlight. I feel like I always need these items but sometimes I think to myself and say, maybe today I don't need this stuff. Some of the items I have listed, I need for work. For example, I need to carry my lunch bag because I need to have lunch every day. I need to carry my tools to work because I need them to do my job. And I need my backpack to carry all of these items. I carry my umbrella in case it rains unexpectedly. I bring a change of clothes in case of an accident...such as ripping my pants during work. Don't laugh; it's happened! I carry my phone to call out or receive phone calls in case of emergencies, and I carry a flashlight in case of a black out.

I know that carrying an umbrella on a sunny day makes no sense, but there were many times I learned my lesson, when it was nice out in the morning and then rainy by afternoon. I don't need my flashlight all of the time I guess. It isn't the most important thing I carry, but I would rather be safe than sorry. I find it interesting that now that I am an apprentice I carry more things than I used to. For example, I never used to carry my flashlight around. Now, I do because I realize you can be in a situation where lights go out on a job site and you can't see. These items affect me in several different ways. If I forget my lunch, I can deal with it, but I need to carry enough money on me to pay for lunch. Carrying these items makes my day go smoothly.

Many of the items I listed are either heavy or light. My book bag is always heavy, no matter what I put in it or take out. My tools are heavy even though I only use a screwdriver, channel locks or pliers. These tools are essential. Every job and every job site demands the use of these tools and every apprentice needs their tools in order to do their jobs. If you forget your tools, it is a real hassle trying to borrow these tools from someone. Guys at work will think you are irresponsible. Think of it this way: it is a lot of standing around when you don't have your tools. Sometimes I carry extra tools in case guys forget theirs. I label all my tools by carving my name into them; that way I get my tools back. Tools are pricey these days.

In addition, I always carry my wallet, keys and phone. These are the three main items in my life. My wallet has all of my important information inside. Without my keys, I will get locked out of my house and stand in the heat or cold like a nut. My phone is important because it allows me to make and receive calls. Come to think about it, sometimes I wish I didn't have a phone due to some of the people who call me – just kidding! Losing and replacing these items is a

hassle. If you lose your wallet, you have to make sure no one steals your identity. If someone steals your keys, you have to make sure no one comes to rob you. If someone steals your phone, you have to make sure no one uses the phone numbers you have inside your phone book. We don't realize how important these little things are. It may seem like nothing, but the moment we lose one of these items, our world turns upside down.

Finally, I mentioned that I carry laundry at the beginning of my essay because sometimes I stop and look at what I am carrying and laugh at myself. Why am I carrying my laundry to work? It is because I often go to the Laundromat after work, or just like to remind myself to do the laundry. People carry the weirdest things around every day.

Some people carry nothing on them and some people carry their whole house with them. I usually carry the same items every day because it is a routine for me. If I have to carry something new – forget it! It throws me off completely since I don't like change. I never thought much about the things I carry until I read the book *The Things They Carried* written by Tim O'Brien. The little things in life make such a difference, no matter if you carry around a Bible, a picture of someone special, or wear a necklace given to you by someone. But you don't actually have to be carrying the objects in a backpack to be important; it might be something like an engagement ring you have been waiting for years to wear on your finger. Everything on a person, from their hat to their shoes, means a lot to that person even if it is not worth much to someone else. These days, every little bit helps to keep us going, and that little bit could be the little things you carry with you every day.

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My Path to the Present

Jose Castillo

I have dreamt about being an electrician ever since I heard of the trade. My dream to become an electrician manifested itself from reading books. When I was an elementary school student, I saw a movie called *Matilda*, based on the book by Roald Dahl. The movie was about a little girl who wasn't loved and appreciated by her family. Her parents used to leave her by herself in the house while they were out either working or just having a good time. Matilda would swiftly leave the house afterward and head straight to the library and read an incredible amount of books. In doing this, she increased her intelligence dramatically and actually became telekinetic. She discovered a passion for herself by reading books.

I took an interest in Matilda's passion for reading by trying it myself. I didn't want to try to obtain supernatural powers or anything of that nature, I just wanted to learn about the world, become smarter, and discover my purpose in life. Matilda inspired me to read books and that allowed me to increase my intelligence, too. During this time, I read a book about Benjamin Franklin and his kite experiment. Afterwards, I followed up on a book about an English physician named William Gilbert, who actually invented the word "electric." Reading these books led me to a chain of other books, and I began to read about the history of electricity and tall tales involving electricity.

However, through my high school years, the information I accumulated from reading books about electricity slowly faded since I was doing so many other things as a teenager. I made an army of new friends. I made the basketball team and became a jock. The material I was absorbing in my classes didn't include anything about electricity. I was just caught up in my life, and I lost myself a bit to fit into the present time. If I had held onto my passion then, I may have been a licensed master electrician by now.

After I completed high school, I graduated and lost my way. I lost sight of where I was headed. I was confused about what my next step was and wasted a lot of time hanging out with friends and working part-time jobs, which I tended to change annually. I was repeating the same steps every year and saw no improvement in my life. After a while, I went to college and majored in liberal arts, which got me nowhere. Again, I became complacent with my environment and didn't put my all into my college experience. Getting kicked out of college for having a grade point average under 2.0 wasn't part of the plan at all. I was actually going backwards because I would have to relocate to another school. I continued my downward spiral to nothingness.

One day I was walking in my neighborhood and I passed by a college center that had a table covered in brochures about jobs, careers, and more colleges. I came across a specific brochure that spoke of a construction program that guaranteed work upon completion and the word “career” was in big, bold letters. The brochure grabbed my attention. I asked about the offer and submitted all the necessary paper work to qualify for the construction program.

Luckily for me, when I finally received a call from the construction school, I was already done with the college semester. I also was working part time, so everything fell smoothly into place for me in terms of my availability for the program. I wasn't going to be able to rest too much, but it was worth it if this was what was going to get me closer to making my dreams a reality. The next steps were to take an entrance exam and then get through tryouts to become a student at the school. I had to wait for another call to see if I made the cut, and to my fortune, I did. Finally I felt like I was headed in the right direction.

The program began in February and it breezed by. It lasted about five months and then I received numerous certifications and licenses for different aspects of the construction trade. The whole time I was in school, I thought to myself, I will use the program to somehow get myself into the electrical trade. Upon completion, the director of the program informed his best students about the electricians' union opening up slots to a handful of individuals. But I would have to pass the Local 3 exam as well as a drug test. I completed both successfully.

My life is beginning to turn around on a good note. It has been a rough road full of obstacles, but I have climbed over them. A retired firefighter from my neighborhood once told me that things get worse before they get better. He said going through ups and downs is normal and you should never give up. I still carry those words with me to this day. I think wisdom like that is to make sure people don't forget their humble beginnings and how they have struggled. Now I have the opportunity to finally get back on my path to successfully making my dreams a reality. It has taken longer than I expected, but now the power is literally in my hands and I will not mess up this opportunity.

Reading Autobiography

Yosmar Gonzalez

As students going to school, we are required to do reports and essays about the books we read. The majority of books I have read in my life I have not liked. Now that I am 22 years old, a lot has changed. I really value the importance of education. Coming back to college with the IBEW apprentice program is very exciting, especially knowing that the college I would be attending is Empire State College. I was nervous at first, but I was correct that I would enjoy what the college provides. The first class was an English class where we read and wrote. I liked the class, especially the books we are reading, like *Working in the Shadows* by Gabriel Thompson. I can only say this about the book: it provides insight into what we already know about illegal immigrants working, but it also comes with the insight into how they live and their work conditions and wages. Also, a very interesting view of the book is how the immigrants look at the American system and how they try to achieve the American dream.

So how was that book to me? That was the question I asked myself while reading it. The answer is both very simple and complicated because there is much more to it than a simple answer. This is why it is very appealing to me. I am first generation to the United States of America. My mother raised me. She is a single mother with no other children, so that means that we are the only thing we have together since we have no family in New York. Growing up, I was basically always alone because my mother would work a lot to provide for the house. I lived what happens in the book, *Working in the Shadows*, in first person perspective. The book reminded me why I am here today, writing this paper. I want a better life not only for me but for my mother too. I have seen her give it all for me and now is the time that I can do the same for her. Throughout the course, I actually read more and I am now involved with reading day-to-day information, like what happened on the East Coast with Hurricane Sandy. I mention this because it leads me to the second book I really liked.

Last Day at the Lobster is a book about a person who is a manager at a Red Lobster restaurant. His name is Manny; he is a hard-working person because he knows the outcome won't always be as we would like it to be like in fairy tales. I will explain this. I live in Brooklyn in Zone A. The apartment is in a basement. I have been working since the age of 13, and the jobs I would work were not always the best or highest paid jobs, but it was always enough for me to live a decent life. I then went into construction which not many people do because it is hard labor. As a dreamer, I started to buy a lot of tools and a nice television for myself. I wanted to open a company and become, with time, a professional at what I did.

Well, in October, when we were getting all those evacuation notices about Hurricane Sandy, I decided not to leave my house. I thought at most, I would get 2 feet of flood water so I worked hard and put the majority of all my valuables at a decent height of 5 feet. But that was not enough for Hurricane Sandy; I got flooded to the top of my ceiling, and once I saw the water keep getting higher, I knew I had to get out but it wasn't easy. I saw everything I worked for all my life go like that in a matter of seconds. In this, I relate to the book; he was a person who gave all his life to the Red Lobster and he knew that the last day at work was here. The restaurant was closing. Many other people would give up and not even go to work, especially given the bad weather. Regardless, he went and did what he had to do like every other day. And he knew that at the end of the day, the story wouldn't finish with "they lived happily ever after," just like how I knew at the end of the day I had lost everything. But it's okay because at the end of the day, we go with pride and honor, as hard workers and even as dreamers. Regardless of the things that happen in our lives, we know we can overcome it and look forward to some more fortunate date.

This is what I have learned in class; it has been a great experience. I have learned more about myself in writing and also I learned that reading isn't as bad as I thought. And now that I am in college, I know this will help me.

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Things Carried

Brian J. Tortora Jr.

As tradesmen, we all carry things with us to work. Some carry extra clothes. Some carry hand tools. Some carry their food and water. I personally carry all of these items and then some. I have a backpack; it is my kit. In it are the contents of a professional. It carries all the supplies and goods I may need to make it through a day on the job. Along with this pack, I carry on my back the responsibility associated with being a man, husband and father.

The backpack I carry may look like something plain and ordinary, possibly even unimportant to the average guy, but to me it's my personal bag of tricks. My very own survival kit. Sure, it looks tattered. But that's because it is. The zipper is broken on one compartment and half-broken on the main. The straps have been ripped off and re-sewn several times. It's covered in pipe compound and Black Swan. It's not all that handsome, but it's totally necessary. Without it, I would probably look like a bag lady on the train, carrying my belongings in an endless collection of plastic bags. Cheap, nylon material covers and protects the contents of my bag. Inside is a change of clothes, a set of protective equipment (safety glasses and a respirator), my basic hand tools and writing utensils.

Possibly the most important items I carry in the cheap black nylon backpack I sling on my shoulders every day, are my essential hand tools. Each tool weighs probably less than a pound, but the amount of usefulness they provide is immeasurable. The stick ruler I carry is not the ordinary six foot ruler. It is a plumber's ruler, which provides its user with the ability to rapidly determine the travel piece for a forty-five degree offset, saving the plumber time – and time is money, after all. There also is a magnetic pocket level, a tool that is absolutely necessary to ensure proper and uniform installation of just about anything. Although not completely necessary, I still choose to carry a pair of “baby-locks.” These are a small pair of channel locks. They are extremely useful and quite handy when you're working on a lift and realize you left your regular size channel locks on the ground. Another simple but adequately useful thing I carry with me is a small array of writing utensils. Working with a variety of materials requires a different writing instrument for each surface. A pencil, which is standard to all trades, and very useful in ours, may not be visible on all pipe. Therefore, I carry a specific writing device for each type of pipe material. For example, a permanent marker is highly visible on copper and P.V.C. I also carry keel and soapstone for working with cast iron. I also keep a ballpoint pen close at hand for material lists and the signing of job-site documents.

Out of all the things I carry with me on a daily basis, the heaviest and most meaningful is something you cannot hold in your hand. It's a mixture of responsibility and pride, a concoction that has been bred into me. It stems from

being a third generation union plumber. As such, I have a great responsibility to provide a good life for my family. To provide not just monetary sums, but to provide health coverage and peace of mind for my family, as my father has always done for me. The other ingredient in this equation is the pride I have in my work. Any average guy can do a good job, but it's pride in my work that allows me to do a great one.

So as I walk to and from my job, and down the corridors and up the ladders of my job site, I carry all these things with me – the tools to help me do my job: the ragged backpack filled with my clothes and safety equipment, pride in my workmanship and responsibility for my family. Some of these things are heavier than the others, some you can't physically touch, but each is an absolute necessity. In our own way, each of us carries things with us daily. A plumber may be a little different than a suit and tie guy. His "tools" may be a little heavier as well. I guess plumbers' backpacks and duffle bags are our version of a briefcase.

'70s Era Lamp

Mike Egielski

Artist Statement

The purpose was to create a lamp that's made entirely of recycled materials from various jobs--ranging from large construction sites to small residential jobs. These pieces, which normally would be discarded were salvaged and repurposed to make something functional. The design of the lamp was inspired by vintage '70s era lamps.

Constructed entirely of scrap and discarded materials which include the following:

- 3/4" EMT pipe pieces that were left over
- Electrical boxes that were removed during a demolition
- Chandelier sockets and 3 way switch that were from a discarded chandelier (new insulators added for safety)
- Porcelain socket that was from a private home remodel
- Wiring that was removed from discarded electronics



'70s Era Lamp, Mike Egielski (Local 3 Electrician)

A Rare Opportunity

Zizwe Lewis

Prior to joining IBEW Local 3, I tried my hand at a variety of jobs and career paths. I've worked in restaurants and fast food chains where I washed dishes, made deliveries, prepared food and sometimes took food orders and ran the cash register. In addition, I've been a picker in a few warehouses, handed out newspapers, and have done other odd jobs to pay the bills. Most recently, I drove a truck for a messenger company. The most rewarding out of all my past employment opportunities was when I worked as a refrigeration helper. Similar to the electrical apprenticeship, I was being paid to help a mechanic who was in fact a licensed independent contractor and I got on the job training. I was even going to college with hopes of obtaining a degree as a HVAC engineer. However, this never materialized due to my dissatisfaction with the school curriculum and my constant layoffs due to limited work. I didn't work long enough to learn much and didn't make enough to live between jobs. Ultimately, I sought out other means of employment. I liked the idea of working with my hands, but I needed something more consistent. After being given an application for Local 3's apprentice program, I filled it out and took the necessary steps to qualify. I was eventually accepted into the union some two years later.

I was granted a rare opportunity to be accepted into a program that actually paid me while I learned a trade that I knew nothing about. Even more incredible was the fact that I would be able to go to college and earn a degree, something I have longed for but thought impossible because of financial reasons. For a person with a rough upbringing, little money or skills, and a future that seemed bleak to say the least, this was a dream come true. So, when I was granted this chance, I fully embraced it. However, during the four years of working in the field, I realized that construction work is not what I want to do for the rest of my life. Despite my love for the job, I would like to at least give myself some options for the future. If later on I decided that I wanted to try my hand at another career, a college education would give me the option to do so.

A liberal arts education gives students an opportunity to explore a variety of academic disciplines rather than follow a specific course that trains them for a career. Effective problem solving requires strong analytical and creative processes. Developing critical thinking skills and being able to comprehend various subjects and perspectives adds to the ability of liberal art's graduates to connect with the world around them. Learning and experiencing different perspectives on how the world works enhances one's ability to communicate with the highly diverse communities we live in. So it's not only what we learn that's valuable, but also

the higher level of thinking and communication skills developed that help us. For example, learning how to adapt to different situations and attain understanding of diverse cultures.

As a proud Local 3 union member, I feel education is important and I am fortunate to have been granted the opportunity to go to college and further my studies. Too many electricians and too many construction workers in general don't value a good education or see the benefits of being what most would consider an educated person, especially if they feel it has nothing to do with their chosen line of work. In my opinion, an educated person is someone who is well informed about the world around them and is abreast of the current events and various social issues of the time. This person is able to think objectively and be open-minded, even when being confronted with resistance or hostility. Despite opposing views, they can still maintain their own personal beliefs and opinions without infringing upon others. In addition, they can clearly express themselves using meaningful and relevant language.

In addition to vocational skills in the construction field, a college-level education can only make those in organized labor more marketable. Not only is this a way to exemplify their worth, but to show that not all tradesmen are uneducated brutes and are well deserving of the wages they demand. With the changing dynamics of the economy and workplace, having some leverage against the competition is good, and in today's times, necessary. American building trade unions have historically played a critical and stabilizing role in the nation's construction industry, establishing uniform standards and leveling the competitive playing field. Union members have enjoyed better than average wages and benefits, excelled in training opportunities, and decent job site conditions. In other words, trade unions are the backbone of America's economy and represent the working class. Therefore, by joining Local 3, I have claimed my piece of the American dream and I am helping to keep alive one of the ideals that has made this country great. I plan to take my knowledge of human behavior, labor history and social movements learned over the course of my studies to better myself by not falling prey to ignorance or complacency.

MIND AT WORK

Self Portrait at Work

Hana Georg (Local 3 Electrician)



Self Portrait at Work, Hana Georg (Local 3 Electrician)

We, the rank and file 2013, united by the work that lay ahead,
divided by the fear of losing. Our power is in defying this
tradition.

My Blue Collar Skills

Karen Hansen

3:45; Waking up; Clear morning air; Sweet city daybreak; I reach up to the sky and start my morning yoga routine. It's a practice which not only warms and conditions my body for the coming day, but also centers and tunes my mind to the task at hand, as a daily and ongoing practice.

My family, my son, is asleep as I leave on my bicycle to work. This is another practice which keeps my body and mind focused and prepares me for my work. I am an electrical apprentice.

When I walk onto the job site, in many ways, I enter another world apart from the conveniences most take for granted. Here, when light is needed, we harness the electricity pouring from the depths under the beating heart of the city. We focus it to where it is required, not just by flicking on a switch, but by carefully guiding it into the lighting, power, relay equipment, sensors and motors needed to build and construct.

I start up the men, at the foreman's signal, opening our gang boxes and cages, unlocking the ladders and supplies to facilitate a smooth transition to a productive work day. I listen to my foreman describe our task. Immediately I am engaged. I pull up the filed skills I have acquired and integrate my new vocabulary of hardware, techniques and modalities. Waiting quietly, I absorb the whole task, careful to keep an open mind about how the goal is to be accomplished. My partner/journeyperson/teacher and I walk to the architectural drawings. To an untrained eye, it might seem like colored lines twisting around a maze of boxes and symbols. But, now, I am able to deliberately locate our targeted work on the plans. I calculate the measurements to map the location, deliberately concentrating on a visualization of what the finished product will do, and what it will look like.

Today, we will be engineering a support system for a 16-foot fixture. This system not only needs to safely suspend this lighting over people's heads, but also needs to be mechanically sound, straight, plumb, symmetrical and integrated into the carpenter's work. With the architectural plans in mind, we walk to the work location, thoroughly taking into consideration how the light will be harnessed to the high voltage cables we ran last week, and how it will be perceived by the occupants of the room when finished. Systematically we review the possibilities that might integrate the attachment of this fixture; metal on metal, metal to sheetrock, concrete to metal. Discussing possible scenarios with my partner, we consider feasibility and situational advantages to each method. I comb over the

hardware, tools, manufacturer's supplied parts and manufacturer's directions. How will it hold? Will it be secure? How long will it take to secure? Will it be aesthetically pleasing?

Moving into action, all the parts come together. The movements we make are confident and deliberate. We employ the aid of others. We consult with the other trades. We work as a team, strong and focused. As each fixture piece goes up, we are re-evaluating through sensory perception, and a grading of proficiency based on personal values and integrity is made.

A good day's work, problem solving, using my mind, and carefully honing my physical movements to produce quality work; I am meeting my goals. I am back on the bike. My day is perfect.

In this day, I didn't only move mindlessly from thing to thing as many believe of blue collar workers. I had to combine teamwork, cognitive reasoning, attention to detail, past acquired memory of jobs completed, proficiency of tool handling, special engineering, acquired knowledge of electrical hardware and wiring, tricks of the trade, reflective reasoning, sensory perception, concentration, alternative problem solving, systematic figurative expression, personal integrity, safety for myself and others, and time management. In that every day is a new and unpredictable challenge, I find it hard to understand why the work of a person who uses their mind and their body to the extent that I do would not be considered intelligent. If this kind of intelligence was measured off the paper, I am sure my fellow brothers and sisters would be geniuses.

The Mind at Work

Gene Shapiro

“How difficult can taking orders and bringing food to the table be? You can train a monkey to do it,” utter the snobby customers who I have encountered over the years. For example, there was a time that phrase flew from the lips of a high and mighty customer just because he received his burger a minute later than he expected. Too many people believe in servers’ hands as an onslaught of demands. I’ve seen them fly at me from every direction as others have as well. Since I spent some time in the catering business, I am able to reflect on those experiences and relate to concepts described in Mike Rose’s *The Mind at Work* where he writes about his mother’s profession as a waitress. Though it appears simple from the outside, the difficulties of the job can be hard to understand unless you have performed it.

A cliché analogy of a juggler comes to mind – the only difference with juggling is that the balls do not fall down at the same time – whereas with serving, some orders take longer, quicker, and often many tend to come down at the same time. In *The Mind at Work*, though he interviewed several waitresses, Mike Rose concentrated on his mother’s experiences. With 35 years of experience backing her words, she shared the details of being a waitress, which are not often seen from the other side of the table. Throughout her career, she demonstrated the ability to adapt to a constantly changing environment. For example, unpredictable responsibilities could pop up at any time and she would have to switch from waiting on tables to tending the register, cooking, ordering supplies or hiring help. But, even remaining just a waitress was a challenge within itself. “You have to have one hell of a good memory,” she stated during her interview. Competent waitresses can expand the limits of people’s short-term memories. This is something that can be developed with experience, but there also are tricks of the trade regarding: table layouts, customer features, their placement at a table and even broad social markers and generalizations to aid with memorization.

Delivering food is just a part of the job description. In order to increase their earnings, waiters and waitresses must be able to connect with whom they are serving. Many people enter the diner with physical hunger and a desire for public intimacy. A server has to be able to understand those needs and properly respond to them. It could be in a form of a friendly chat or granting a customer the privacy he requires. Addressing frequent visitors and making them feel like they are regulars also carries a lot of weight in the industry. Being able to properly handle yourself regardless of your mood, can make or break a day’s earnings. This is just another requirement for the servers’ burdened shoulders.

Good servers are often in demand. It is probably due to the fact that not everyone can be a competent server. It is challenging and stressful work that is often unappreciated. Not everyone is capable of suppressing their own feelings, sense of justice and can put up with petty complaints of ungrateful customers. Mike Rose's mother could. Even though she knew that she could always find a job as a waitress, a sense of financial vulnerability would remain during her entire life.

The most interesting phenomenon discussed in the chapter is the claim that servers perform better during busy times rather than slow shifts. One would think that less pressure as well as tasks at hand would provide a more comfortable environment for servers to function; however, that does not seem to be the case. According to Mike Rose, this fact was confirmed in every interview. It appears that pressure keeps the servers on their toes; it sharpens their senses and forces the decisions to be brought out by their professional instinct as opposed to conscious thoughts. It seems that this difficult profession pushes the people involved in it to rely on their developed instinct, and often does not give much room for timely evaluation. Not everyone has the courage to act on instinct alone, but it seems that this merit is not often credited to those engaged in this difficult field of work.

Everyday Hazards

Christopher Cordero

Since I've entered into the construction business, my eyes have been opened to the hazards that exist. My expectations were much different than reality. Since beginning this class, my view of the work I do and the conditions I work in have genuinely changed. After reading about the struggles of some Americans in this day and age, I realize there is a great deal I have taken for granted. Fortunately, I have not been witness to any serious injuries other than my own.

I have only worked in construction a little over two years now. Since I began my career, I have seen for the most part a genuine concern for the safety of the workers by most employers. In a very short period of time, I have been subjected to countless safety meetings. They are quite repetitive but they do help. It is practice among many contractors these days to conduct safety meetings on a daily basis. It is usually common practice to immediately address the concerns of the workers and allow a forum to progress for discussion. I've seen a lot of men complain and think it is overkill, but if they were educated about others and their struggles, might they still feel this way?

I was working in an unfinished office space doing very easy work. When I say easy, I'm speaking in terms of easy for an electrician. We were running wire for lights, outlets and switches. I was very fortunate to be able to do such clean and easy work for a prolonged period of time. It seems that easy work and repetition can lead to injuries because it is easy to lower your guard and fall into a routine. It is very easy to get comfortable when the work is mindless and stress-free. Things were going so well for us. Even though this job wasn't the soundest, we made do with the equipment we had. However, our ladders were not in their prime anymore and not tall enough for the work we were performing, so we made requests for new ones but those requests fell on deaf ears. In turn, I wound up severely injured when I used a ladder that should've been thrown out long ago.

I fell onto concrete and separated my shoulder, broke my clavicle, and tore my labrum in the process. I have been out of work and lost significant income. My shoulder will never be the same, and I probably will never climb a ladder again without thinking of that day. If only my employer had answered our requests for new equipment, I would not be in the position that I am in today. Two new ladders would have cost the company peanuts in the grand scheme of things. Little things like this can go a long way to prevent injuries and safeguard the men. While most companies do sincerely make an attempt, in my case, they did not.

Some men around the country would be lucky if their only concern was the use of rickety ladders. Today, I and my colleagues are fortunate to work for a union where safety is highly regarded and the lives of the men come first. In

some establishments, it seems to be the complete opposite. Some company has repeatedly put the lives of the men and women it employs in danger to increase profit. I never realized the conditions that some people work in existed in the United States. I knew that they were prevalent in undeveloped countries, but not ours. It seems that I was very wrong. There are companies that blatantly disregard their employees' safety. As a result, numerous deaths have been reported.

Since 1970, when President Nixon signed the Occupational Safety and Health Act into law, workplace safety has dramatically improved. Deaths in the workplace and injuries since that time have been reduced more than 65 percent. Still today, many American companies are vigilantes who believe they can circumvent this act and conduct business how they like. What they don't realize is that occupational injuries will cost them more in the long run. Not only are they ruining lives, but they are hurting our economy in the process. Our country still has a way to go to improve the safety of its men and increase awareness in the workplace. We need more businesses like the IBEW to help our country fight for workplace safety.

Action, Reflection and Practice as an Electrician

Paul Allen

I have been an electrical apprentice for about eight months now. During my apprenticeship, I have learned a lot and take great pride in my work. Many aspects that I have learned include various tricks of the trade, how important aesthetics are to me, the interplay between action and reflection, thinking through different scenarios, and how to make judgments.

As an electrical apprentice, it is important to me that my work looks good. Not just because it should, but as a person, I like to do everything to the best of my ability. It gives me satisfaction when I can physically see my work and it looks aesthetically pleasing. Much of the work I do will never be seen by the public or even the boss for that matter. But, I always try to make it look as best as possible. For example, when I am installing receptacles, there are usually three wires to connect to the receptacle. Once they are connected, they are usually stuffed in the electrical box any way they fit, and the receptacle needs to get screwed in. I always make sure that all the wires are trimmed and at an even length. Then, I splice them onto the receptacle and curl them all in a clockwise position, so none of the wires are crossing each other and look neat. This may seem excessive to some. To me, it's important that I do the littlest details to the best of my ability because it makes me feel like a craftsman and gives me a sense that I'm always providing quality. It also give me satisfaction to know if another journeyman opened one of the receptacle boxes, he would immediately know care was taken when it was installed, which makes working on it easier.

Many times there have been small techniques shown to me by journeymen that make certain jobs much easier and faster. These little techniques are often referred to as tricks of the trade. For example, during a wire pull on my first job, my partner and I were having trouble pulling the wire through the bends in the conduit. A wire pull is conducted by pulling a rope through a conduit, and one end is tied around the front end of the wire referred to as the nose. Then, with one guy at each end of the conduit, one pulls the rope while the other feeds the wire in. On this particular pull, I had made the nose so after several attempts of pulling the wire through, my partner pulled out the nose, took one look at it, and knew why it wasn't going through. He told me that I have to stagger the wires so it gradually narrows at the tip, and then showed me how to properly tie the rope around the wire using a half hitch knot, which tightens as you pull it. With these two minor changes, we completed the wire pull with no problem.

Because the majority of the work we do is physical and estimated by eye and feel, much of the work we do is done through action and reflection. As a result, not everything we do comes out perfectly the first time. This is a process that takes place when installing conduit. For example, first, there is the thought of what needs to be done; it may be an order from a supervisor or read off a blueprint. Next, a survey of the work area is done. Then, the materials are gathered, and from here, the real action and reflection process begins. For example, if a light fixture needs to be hung in the center of the room, first we must measure it to the center of the room and mark it. Next, when we install the fixture and make sure it is level, we take a step back to make sure the light is centered. Next, we install the conduit. When bending conduit, there is much action and reflection in itself since conduit is bent often by eye. During this process, the installing point is marked where the bend needs to be made. Then, the angle is estimated; after that, the pipe is placed in the bender and bent to the desired angle. Finally, it is held up to the place to where it needs to be installed to check the fit. This process is repeated until the angle is correct.

A lot of what we do as electricians is not cut and dry. Many times we have to think through many scenarios because construction sites are ever evolving, and unforeseen challenges arise all the time. To deal with this, we have to plan many options with design work. We always have a backup plan if things go wrong. For example, when planning a conduit rack to be installed in the ceiling of a building, we must take into account the height of the rack, how much weight it can support, and make sure there is enough room for future conduit. Also, we have an alternate path in mind in case it conflicts with another trades work such as a plumber's drainpipe.

When working with certain materials and tools, we must judge what we are doing by look and feel. For example, if we are installing support for an electrical box or switch on a wood frame, we have to get a feel of how to hold the drill straight with one hand and the screw in the other. With just the right amount of pressure on the drill and by holding the screw firm enough, this way it can spin but won't fall over. We can't learn something like that by watching someone or reading a book. It takes practice and repetition to become efficient at it. I have heard journeymen say, "If it doesn't look right then it isn't right;" this means we need to develop a trained eye for electrical work, and if something looks off or out of place, it probably is. At the same time, we need to investigate or fix what is catching our eyes. Often times we have to measure material by eye because there is not enough time to measure everything with a ruler. For example, when tying wires into a panel, they are left extra-long at first. Once we figure out which wires go to which circuit breaker, we must estimate and trim the necessary amount of wires to reach the circuit breaker, so we leave enough for the other wires and enough access in case the wire needs to be moved to another circuit breaker.

While these are just some of the aspects of being an electrician, learning tricks of the trade have strengthened my work by making sure the aesthetics of it are good, taking the necessary actions, and thinking through many scenarios by judging the look and feel. These characteristics of the trade are more valuable to me now.

Conduit Bends

Scott Demel

Artist Statement

Man has always stood proud in the sight of his accomplishments. His pride can be shared with his peers and with those with an eye for his cause. The world is slowly becoming a machine--one where people go to work, come home, and repeat. This machine of life isn't life; it is an illusion.

When Robert Moses started tearing down tight communities for his view of his illustrious highways, he started to aid the machine. When he ran his highways out to Long Island so that Levittown could be reached with ease, he aided the machine. When Levittown was created, Henry Levit aided the machine.

But what is this machine, you ask. The machine is the lack of life. It is the idea that working to pay off a mortgage to the bank, the same bank that funded the highways, is life itself.

But that is not all that life is. Life is enjoying every day with your family and enjoying the magic that life can create. Life is not working all day and seeing your family briefly before you must go to bed and repeat this insane cycle to only live on the weekends. Most people are too tired to enjoy the weekends, and others too broke to bring their family to the beach, or a carnival because of their debt to the bank.

However, life always has a way of breaking through the machine. Like the graffiti artist tagging one of the bridges created by Robert Moses--the rebellious nature of the graffiti is a sign of life poking through. Graffiti artists can take pride in the quality and placement of their art. In the eyes of the graffiti artist, the graffiti is a sign to forget your bridges because you cannot take our pride. Even though many neighborhoods were destroyed by the bridges, they are now are canvas to show that your machine will not prevail.

Much like the pride taken from graffiti work is the pride in a good conduit run. On the job site, people always have in mind, when they see some bends perfectly aligned, "Wow that was done well." Most of the time, you don't know who ran the conduit. It as anonymous as graffiti on a bridge, But like graffiti, people have their own ways of running conduit so certain people know who ran it. The one thing I see on the job site is concentric bends. The attention is to detail and precision. The math that is behind excellent concentric bends always gets my attention. The way that I could see eight, 10, even 12 $\frac{3}{4}$ pieces of EMT flow bend after bend, perfectly spaced, gives me hope. Hope that even on the job site, in the heart of the machine, life still prevails. Pride can be taken in something that will be covered up by a wall. Pride is taken in knowing other people will see your

work before it is hidden behind sheetrock and think “wow that’s nice.” This pride is a part of life, which the machine will not take from me or from society as a whole.



Conduit Bends, Scott Demel (Local 3 Electrician)

“An Electrician’s Work is an Anonymous Signature”

Nicholas Hadnagy

There is not just one right way of doing electrical work. Sure, there are some good methods and then there are even better ones, but in the end if an outlet works then who cares right? Wrong. Yes, you can shove wires down a wall and no one will ever see them, but an electrician should take pride in his work. In *The Mind at Work*, Mike Rose uses an example from Mr. Padilla teaching a class of high school students on how to do electrical work. It’s their first day on an actual construction site and they are trying to utilize what they learned in the classroom. They are putting up conduit on the outside of a house. A little trick he told his students is that “We want to show as little evidence of the electrician’s being here as possible.” When putting on straps everything should be centered and look nice. The parts that we can’t hide should be as neat as can be.

Your work is a reflection of who you are and how people see you. If you do neat and accurate work, people will be impressed. Don’t just rush through something, take your time, make sure you do it right and it looks neat. Sometimes things could work just fine, but not look neat and you will have to do it all over again, so rushing doesn’t always pay off. When something does go wrong and doesn’t work, that doesn’t mean that you have to get frustrated. Relax. Look back at your work; troubleshooting can be a great weapon in your arsenal. This is because most people don’t have the patience to retrace their steps to figure out where they went wrong, or they may just not be able to see what is wrong.

Sometimes one finally finds out what went wrong, but at this point, he or she is too frustrated and not sure how to fix it. Stop and think. How can this be fixed? Use good judgment when you aren’t quite sure how to ask for help. Most electricians are more than willing to offer help to one another or show some “tricks of the trade;” Mr. Padilla defines them as “embodiments of wiliness, ways that other workers have developed to overcome limits, tight spots or blunders.” For instance, one person’s foolproof method might be someone else’s Achilles’ heel. Say you are bending conduit and you believe that the way you are going is the best or maybe the only way, another might see an easier way and maybe go through a wall instead of trying to bend a bunch of ninety-degree bends. Workers should be open to many different ways and choose what best fits them. They can even mix different methods together.

I can remember a time where my journeyman was showing me how to do something I was learning to do for the first time. I picked it up right away and I even pointed out a way to improve on his work. He was impressed that I had seen that different way of doing it, and he let me do all the other fixtures in

the run. I took a lot of pride in being able to do my own work and that I could impress my journeyman. I made everything as neat as possible and in the end I did a good job.

There also was a time where I was working in a very tight space; I could barely move around. I was struggling to get a box into place to set the outlet. After a good while, my journeyman (who was watching my struggle the whole time), finally tells me what he would do in the situation. I tried his method and it worked great. I asked him why he couldn't tell me that from the beginning. His response was "Then, what would you have learned? Now, you will remember the next time you come across the situation like this one."

I truly believe that people are judged by the quality of their work, so take your time, make things neat and put some pride behind what you are doing. If you take notice and care about your work others will take notice as well.

Electric Shop

Hana Georg (Local 3 Electrician)



Electric Shop, Hana Georg (Local 3 Electrician)

I'd like to see all workers able to hold employers accountable for unsafe conditions and emphasize real safety over insurance mandates.

Safety is Everyone's Responsibility

Luis Hernandez

“Safety is everyone’s responsibility,” is a saying that is often taken for granted. In every industry, especially in the construction industry, an accident is right around the corner and waiting to happen. I’ve had the pleasure of working in the aviation and construction industries; both are equally dangerous in different ways, but share the same end results. I’ve witnessed the death of a man catering an aircraft from a service truck that tipped over because the service man forgot to set his stabilizers. In 2005 and 2006, the construction and transportation industries exceeded all other industries, which shared 40percent of the occupational fatalities in New York state alone. At every job site along with mine, danger comes with the territory of the business. I witnessed a few areas at work where we can use some safety improvements. There are 4-foot trenches, icy rooftops and ladders that make for a dangerous work environment at my job site.

When I first started ADCO, I was sent to work at the WWE with foreman Ed Simm. I could tell by just looking at Ed that he was an intelligent and experienced electrician. From the first day on the job, I quickly learned that the job must get done and corners might get cut along the way. One cold and frigid morning, Ed, along with a mechanic and me, had to run a temporary feed from one side of the building over the roof and into the building on the other side. The icy rooftop and the ladder climb made this a dangerous job. At any given moment anyone can slip on the ice while pulling on one of the nine 350kcm of welder’s cable; we were pulling by the roof’s edge with the possibility of falling to our deaths. I have to admit that the potential of danger was a bit exciting, and knowing that Eddie was there gave me the reassurance that we were safe under the watchful eyes. The task was accomplished with no mishaps and the job moved forward. Having used a body restraint harness and/or waiting for a warmer day so that the ice can melt would have made it safer, but the job must go on.

Our next job was to run 2 1/2 inch EMT from the alternate transfer switch (ATS) to the interrupted parallel service (UPS), and each one was on the opposite side of the building. In order to do the job, we had to work above a dropped ceiling on top of 8-foot and 12-foot ladders. However, one ladder was not tall enough making it hard to reach the path of our pipe run, and the other ladder was too tall. Working on top of the ladders, it is very easy to lose one’s balance, and fall to one’s death or seriously injure oneself. In 2012, fatal falls took the lives of 666 workers, which were about 14 percent of all work-related fatalities. Of those cases at the workplace, 451 came from falls from 10 feet or less. After an observation from our foreman Ed Simm, we got the proper ladders of 10 feet, which made the job easier and safer for us to work from.

Trenches are dug so that workers can lay pipe, run conduit and footings. Each year more than 30 construction workers are killed in trenches. A trench is a confined space where falls, electrocution, falling objects and bad air can kill someone. Many workers take for granted the ground they walk on, especially in today's age of texting or talking on the phone, which have dire consequences. At my job site, the excavators dug a 4-foot trench so we can run our PVC conduit. If not aware or the necessary precautions are not met, a person not paying attention can fall to his/her death or injury. After a long day of working in a muddy trench, we made sure we sealed the area off to prevent pedestrians walking by who may not have been aware of our trench. We placed safety cones, which blocked access to the trench and informed everyone of the danger.

Safety is everyone's responsibility; danger has no prejudice and is always lurking. We, as professionals, must always take the proper precautions to ensure our safe arrival home. There is no room for error; unsafe work habits, like cutting corners to get the job done, should be avoided. I learned as a third year apprentice that there is no substitute for doing the job right and safe, so we always need to keep our eyes open to the dangers of the construction world.

Pride in Your Work

Patrick Thompson

During the past nine months that I have been working with Local 3, I was able to make connections to Mike Rose's *The Mind at Work* because I witnessed how workers can be professionals in the field when they handle each aspect with care and precision. I have been lucky enough to work alongside a very talented conduit-runner. I thought of this mechanic when reading Chapter 5, which introduces Mr. Padilla's class where he points out how one of the fastening straps is out of line in a student's work. The mechanic emphasizes the importance of taking pride in your work and how you have an obligation to the contractor to perform "union-approved" work. My coworker stresses the importance of aesthetics while completing a pipe run. Every strap, coupling, and "mae west" must run in a perfectly level line, with every pipe spaced perfectly. These protocols remain the same whether the conduit run is eye level or 40 feet in the air where most likely no one will see it.

These aesthetics are what provide unions with an upper hand over non-union contractors. A Local 3 electrician will try to make all possible bends within one stick of pipe to the best of his abilities while the non-union adversary will cut up a bunch of pipe, couple pieces together and leave it that way. Each method gets the overall objective completed, but the union way is much easier on the eyes than the non-union way. If it was not for such levels of excellence, contractors would have no reason to hire union electricians.

Another connection that I made between the book and my experiences at my job site is the tricks we pick up from different mechanics along the way. Whether it is locking up reels of wire by taping chain to a threaded rod or using a washer on a hole-saw to prevent the arbor to snap or bend, different tricks of the trade provide different rewards. Some tricks save time; some tricks save energy and money. Although these tricks save time and energy, it all comes down to saving contractor money. I remember one of the first tricks that I learned was how to cut with a band saw when no vice was accessible. This saved my time from looking for a vice to cut, but also saved contractor money on conduit that I may have cut crooked if I hadn't learned to cut without a vice.

In addition, I learned many tricks of the trade in regards to pulling wire. Many factors contribute to getting a good pull going. For example, having a good nose on the harness of wire is important so that it travels easier through the pipe or trough. It is crucial to establish a good feed on the back end of the pull in order to alleviate much of the weight of the wire. All of these techniques help finish the pull quicker. Thus, more pulls throughout the day make the contractor money. Since every mechanic has his or her own way of completing tasks, apprentices are able to see all these different methods and choose which ones work best for

them. I have only been with Local 3 a short period of time but with experience, I hope to have more mentors like my co-worker, learn more tricks of the trade, and decide which ones suit me the best.

The Unlikely Bonds That Unite Us

Jesse Dominguez

While marching in the Labor Day Parade, I was surprised at how many people showed up. I was expecting a few hundred, but I stumbled upon thousands. I walked up one block after another only to find every union and trade I could think of besides my own. I became increasingly disheartened. Due to the large crowds of people, I became lost. I thought, "Was I the only one there from Local 3? No, that's impossible." Then I thought, "Maybe there are so few electricians that I just couldn't find them?" Because I was new to the union, it added to my confusion. At the same time, I had heard many co-workers say that they would be there, but I couldn't find anyone. Finally, I re-checked my directions and realized I had ventured down the wrong block, which is why I got lost in the first place.

While I made my way through dozens of trades on my route, I finally came to the intersection that crossed over to Local 3's muster point. What I saw was overwhelming. The other blocks were heavily populated, but this is where the combination of trades joined to make it so intense. In Local 3's area, an entire Manhattan block was filled end-to-end, side-to-side with the people of my union alone. Maneuvering through the crowd was more exercise than the parade itself, and even the stores along the street were packed like sardine tins.

All of these people and their families came together to be heard as one voice together and to speak against the politicians and corporations that a single voice couldn't sway. On the crowded street, a sea of people engulfed me. The same trades that could barely coexist on the job were all coming together as friends and partners. At first, even after finding my place in the march, I still felt lost in this new experience because I was only on the job for a single week. Despite my feelings, the friendliness, openness and support of everybody around me soon helped me find my place and feel a true part of this brotherhood. Even though I marched as a member of Local 3, this was a far more personal experience for me than a work experience. Up to that point, I barely spoke to anyone at work aside from taking coffee orders. At the parade, the only familiar face who I ran into was a fellow apprentice who seemed equally out of place. For just those few hours, I noticed myself as one gadget of the massive machine that is responsible for running unions. In that moment, I witnessed forceful unison, but not true solidarity.

On the other hand, now having worked in the field for a couple of months, I have given up trying to see camaraderie in the workplace. People steal tools the second your back is turned and constantly fight over company owned equipment that is "theirs," because nobody wants to be the one not working, especially if s/he has no ladder handy, or extension cord for the drill. This behavior pervades

every corner of the job, and I would not see the type of solidarity that unions are capable of until recent safety meetings have shown me that people will still stand together when it benefits them equally.

The meetings were called after a number of injuries and one fatality, which did not take place at my particular site. Our company was scheduled to attend over three days, roughly 50 workers to attend. While the parent company wanted to hear about people throwing away cracked ladders or frayed extension cords, there was only one topic on the minds of the workers: air quality. While working in a subway tunnel 150 feet underground, there isn't anywhere for the air to go except back and forth. With dozens of large diesel burning machines and trucks, masons chopping concrete and cutting cinder blocks and the pollution and waste that trickle down from the inhabited end of where our 7 Line extension start, breathing the dust and fumes is likely as healthy as licking the floor. Yet, this subject is taboo, only whispered about in the shanty away from the ears of supervisors. It is the one thing that these men fear--the one topic that will get them laid off to serve as a silent reminder to everybody else to keep working as per usual. To clean the air would cost money. Someone cutting concrete turns a one-person job into a two-person job. As a partner is needed to vacuum dust or water, fewer machines run, causing delays in work, material delivery and cleanup.

With all of these factors against the worker, the first day's discussion was non-existent, as was the second. On the third and final day though, when the time came, one man brought up the air quality issue, and as feared, he was asked to wait for a private discussion. Immediately after seeing that their co-worker had put his own job on the line for everybody's benefit, the rest of the participants broke out into protest with him, and stood together as one voice that would not be silenced. As a result, the company has taken steps to begin to alleviate the problem thanks to those who stood together at that meeting. Every worker on the job will have a healthier environment to come to every day. Masonry work will be done cleanly and above ground when possible, machines are to be run more organized for efficiency, and air-monitoring equipment are being disbursed to find problem areas.

In many ways, the bonds between co-workers are comparable to those between fellow soldiers. Recalling a passage from Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*, an unlikely union between two soldiers of the same company comes to mind. Being unwillingly drafted into Vietnam, a war which most didn't even understand, many of the soldiers in the novel seem to get along with each other only because they have to. Lee Strunk and Dave Jensen, not quite friends but not quite enemies, end up becoming both within a short period of time. Following a minor argument over a stolen knife, Strunk is left viciously beaten by Jensen, with his nose smashed. A few days later he rejoins the company and makes no threats or ill will toward Jensen. In the coming days, the awkward silence between the two makes

Jensen increasingly paranoid, until he finally attempts to make things right by smashing his own nose in with the butt of a pistol. To the amusement of Strunk, this works, and the two reconcile and become friends in the following months.

Their conflict and subsequent resolution and friendship are only touched upon briefly, though the impact is still strong and while this is a morbid example, it's nonetheless a poignant one. When Jensen inflicted similar pain and disfigurement on himself as an offering of support and redemption to Strunk, it provided them with solidarity. From personal experience, solidarity has been a far more general concept – one that comes from a mass of people acting as one. In life, situations arise that allows a more personal connection, but no matter how few or how many people are involved, the solidarity between people is as strong as their will can make it. When everybody puts differences aside, it is rewarding for all. Looking back, I may have come alone to that march on Labor Day, but still I felt us in numbers.

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By: Vincent Sforza

Importance of Conduit Bending.

When people think about the electrical industry, they almost never consider the conduit runs and the bending aspect. However any electrician knows the importance of conduit bending and many take great pride in their work, very similar to how an artist takes pride in a painting.

Conduit is an important aspect in any and every building. It provides a raceway for the wires to get throughout the building. It protects the wire and protects the building, it is necessary in every job to provide a safe and effective job.



About Conduit Bending.

There is much more to conduit bending than just throwing it into a bender. In order to provide bends you must do calculations. This is especially important when you have more than one bend and you want them to match. This chart below is just one of the many that electricians must know on a daily basis. There are different multipliers and deductions based on the size of the conduit or the degree of the bend.

AMOUNT OF TAKE-UP FOR 90° BENDS (ONE-shot Benders)	
SIZE AND TYPE OF CONDUIT	TAKE-UP
1/2" EMT	5"
3/4" EMT OR 1/2" RIGID*	6"
1" EMT OR 3/4" RIGID*	8"
1 1/4" EMT OR 1" RIGID*	11"
*EMT AND RIGID WILL BE THE SAME	

(CONDUIT)

Conduit Bending Terminology:

Conduit: The word conduit refers to the "pipes" that we use. There are

different types of conduit. There is EMT, INC, Gal, PVC, Aluminum, all of which have different uses and conditions their made for.

Offset: Two equal but opposite bends less than 90 degrees. Often used to get the conduit to fit in the box from the wall. This is often referred to as a "box set."

Saddle: A combination of two complete offsets allowing the conduit to travel over or under an obstruction.

Gain/Loss : Refers to the distance of the conduit that is gained or lost as a result of different degree of bends and different benders.

Types of Benders:

There are several different types of benders, all which are made for different sizes and types of conduit.

Hand Bender: The hand bender is the most common. It's a great tool because you can carry it from location to location. It is typically used for conduit from half-inch to inch-and-a-half.



Mechanical Conduit Benders:

These benders still require manual labor for them to work however the mechanical aspect helps make it much more simple. It typically is used for half-inch to two-inch conduit. This bender in the picture is known as a Chicago bender.



Electric Conduit

Benders: There are several different electric conduit benders. Different benders are made to handle conduits of different sizes and materials.

Cyclone Bender:

The cyclone bender is popular on many jobs and often is used for conduit from half-inch to 2-inch.



Table Bender: Table benders are used for conduit bigger than 2 inches. It is an electric bender that requires a hydraulic pump. Bigger conduit like this is often used for risers for large groups of wires. Risers are the conduit that runs up and down from the top of the building to the basement.



This image above shows a picture of matching bends of 2- to 4-inch conduit. These bends were made by a table bender. This image also shows the importance of matching bends.



Importance of Bends:

Union electricians are often competing with non-union electricians to get jobs. Union electricians are properly taught how to bend our conduit and we pride ourselves on matching bends and the neatness that comes with it in our bends. Conduit is often ran outside of houses and buildings in constant view of everyone so it is especially important that it looks good. The difference in our work is what determines if we get jobs and it helps us fight off the non-union workers. In essence, conduit work plays a large role in the future of our union



The bottom set of conduit in the image above shows 90 degree bends with matching kicks. A kick is usually less than 45 degrees to change direction. The set above it shows a straight run. Both sets are matching and evenly spaced. As an electrician when seeing this we feel pride just like an artist with his work.

The Art of Conduit Bending Summary. It doesn't matter what profession you have you are taught just like an artist to take pride in the work that you do. Union electricians have pride in their work especially their conduit runs. It is sometimes a long and very detailed process often overlooked by someone not in the field. There are many different types of benders that you use to make the conduit go the way you need it to, there are also many calculations and deductions involved in keeping bends smooth, and the same as one another. This is a major aspect of our field and it separates our work from non-union electricians.

HARD TRUTHS AT WORK



Jaime Lopez (Local 3 Electrician)

Day laborers are treated like substandard workers, even if they have the experience with tools and materials of construction as some of the workers I met at NICE (New Immigrant Community Empowerment) have.

What is to be Done?

Jaime Lopez

Humanity is sometimes dark and unforgiving. As individuals, we find ourselves in a place of sadness, confusion and hopelessness. There are so many problems around the world and not many solutions for the things that got us into this situation in the first place. The effects of the wealth disparity diminish moral fiber and united purpose in our society. It leads to distrust in community and distrust in government. Tony Judt's book, *Ill Fares the Land*, not only identifies issues with our country; it supplies unconventional solutions from a man who knew he was soon to pass away. It is a genuine representation of a man with a glimmer of hope for the future. His work helps me to understand how income inequality has become a great burden on the shoulders of Americans because he questions what the basic needs of modern society are. The people of this country are losing many public services that they rely on for their livelihoods, along with the remaining services being run ineffectively, due to privatization. Contending with these difficulties can have serious implications on physical and mental health. It also creates a rise in crime and drug abuse. Judt questions the morality of our actions and how we got so far from where we used to be in a relatively short period of time. Judt tries to provide some interesting solutions going forward and how we can improve our lives without revolution.

The people who are at the bottom of the spectrum are the ones who suffer the most. The last 30 years have proven to us that deregulation and free markets can be devastating to the basic needs of our culture. While the masses are spending all their money on bare necessities, a small percentage of the richest people are collecting the majority of wealth. The cycle of money is blocked from returning into society. For example, in public services, we are seeing an astounding number of schools, after-school programs, fire departments and medical programs being dismantled. In an economy with high unemployment and unfair tax laws, the funds are not as available as they once were. These vital programs, that are very expensive to run, are being sold at a bargain price to private enterprises. Sounds like a great idea to relieve the liability of the taxpayers, even though it is sold at a loss, but there is a catch. These expensive services "cost more to provide and maintain than they could ever hope to attract revenue" (Judt 109). The question then becomes, how, and why would entrepreneurs even want to entertain the idea of these services for profit? The answer, as Judt proposes, is "Moral Hazard;" this method takes on unusual risk to maximize personal profit with the understanding that they will reach a point of failure. Government will then make sure the critical service would not be disrupted and cover any deficits.

In some ways, many of the effects of income inequality are correlated. Losing medical coverage has seriously hindered the ability for a family to live a healthy lifestyle, especially in the world of processed foods, pesticides and preservatives. Necessary medications are unaffordable and out of reach for the majority of Americans. These stressful conditions, among others, lead to an increase in mental illnesses in our society. Mental stability is an important attribute for people to have, but when their lives are so fragile because they are destined for a life of suffering, we can only wonder why society has led us to be where we are today. Judt states, “Economic disadvantage for the overwhelming majority translates into ill health, missed educational opportunity and – increasingly – the familiar symptoms of depression: alcoholism, obesity, gambling and minor criminality.” Economic disparity affects the possibility for people to prosper while it destroys the trust and unity of a nation. How can a country claim prosperity if the very nature of its growth is tainted with blood and suffering from its most important entity, its own people? In all areas of life, we can see a world of survival of the fittest, a paradigm of trusting no one.

There is a rise in popularity of gated communities because of the lack of trust people have in others of different economic status. This type of separation of people does not only create resentment, it dissolves unity, making it impossible to create and accomplish goals collectively. Judt writes,

“While thousands of us may come together for a rally or march, we are bound together on such occasions by a single shared interest. Any effort to convert such interests into collective goals is usually undermined by the fragmented individualism of our concerns We are united by nothing more than the expression of emotion.” (134)

We lack the bond that could help us overcome our differences and create an equal and just society that would benefit all. The rallies may only satisfy our need as humans to relieve ourselves of the frustrations that we confine inside our souls. We have lost an internal drive. The internal voice that guides us with morality is unclear and full of static. Witnessing the material prosperity of the wealthy creates a mental status of inferiority. The emotional frustration behind constant competition has a great deal of negative results. For example, society places blame on symptoms, as Judt suggests, like “depression: alcoholism, obesity, gambling, and minor criminality” to contend with the external causes of our capitalistic culture.

From a very young age, we are taught that competition is necessary and that the fiercest competitors will be better off in the end. At the same time, we are too busy looking at the prize and often fail to realize how we are destroying everything in our path to achievement. Judt questions our society:

“How was a liberal society to respond to poverty, overcrowding, dirt, malnutrition and ill health of the new industrial cities? How were the working masses to be brought into the community – as voters, as citizens, as participants – without upheaval, protest and even revolution? What should be done to alleviate the suffering and injustices to which the urban working were now exposed and how was the ruling elite of the day to be brought to see the need for change?” (174)

These same questions were asked one century ago. While they have clear alignments with current times, they embody the true social issues that still need answers. These questions call for people with integrity to answer them and stand their ground while under attack from the powers of media. Judt writes, “The moral courage required to hold a different view and press it upon irritated readers or unsympathetic listeners remains everywhere in short supply” (160). To stand up for what is fair is far more difficult than being a part of public opinion, especially when the people with the most economic persuasion commonly control the rhetoric of social justice.

Our government should be at the forefront of the fight for the people as elected representatives. They should be creating policies that protect people’s rights and allow for the majority to prosper. As it stands now, “Politicians talk and we respond with our votes” (172). We need to revisit government and how the people interact with it. There needs to be a more substantial dialogue, so there is no doubt who the politicians represent while voting and bringing new laws to the table. Even though there will always be conflicting ideas on certain legislations, we need to find a way to convey our common goals by using a new type of language. As Judt reveals, “humans need a language to express their moral instincts” (180). The stern language of law and government does not allow for expressions like virtue, emotion and truth. The basic good for humanity is constantly shut off by efficiency and productivity, which is why it is important for historians like Tony Judt to introduce new types of discussions that address the morality of our lives as a fundamental step to develop a better future. *Ill Fares the Land* is an emotional jumpstart for a society that has drifted away from the ideas that once made it the best country in the world. We need to curb inequality and provide society with the services it needs to live healthy and prosperous lives. Using morality and virtue as principle measures of character for our future leaders will help alleviate corruption, spread mindfulness to the negative effects of modern economics, and involve more people in community discussions. If we fall into deeper economic inequality, we will not be able to afford the consequences. This is why we must use knowledge bestowed upon us and create a just world that we have longed for.

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Co-Ops: Keep Workers Honest

Chris Shaleesh

While owners have infinite motivation to obtain and maintain productivity and efficiency, what drives employees to do the same? What is pushing employees to work hard? When a CEO makes 380 times a worker's salary, what incentive does a middle of the pack employee have to finish a project when they can spend the last few hours of their Friday afternoon checking their fantasy football lineup? The answers to these questions and situations can all be solved by basing business models off of the co-op theory created by Mondragon¹.

Imagine a business in which the employees are not just employees, for there is much more at stake. In Mondragon's co-op business model, employees are not just workers; they are the owners, investors and board of governors members. With this model, suddenly the idea of the unmotivated worker no longer exists. All employees in a Mondragon modeled business strive for excellence. Productivity, frugality, and a team atmosphere are evoked. Every employee is working towards the same goals as upper management.

As far as salaries are concerned, there will always be the lesser compensated and the higher-paid employees. However, the disparities in this co-op model are far less. A Mondragon CEO makes only six to eight times more than its lowest paid workers as opposed to standard business in the U.S., in which CEO's make up to 380 times more than the average worker. In a Mondragon model, in which all employees strive for efficiency, these outrageous salaries could never exist. Petty cash and three martini lunches on the company card are most likely forbidden, or at least kept to a minimum.

Companies that are governed in this style are set for success, or at least a solid effort at such. From the janitor to the CEO, everyone has a say in such a model. Quite frankly, in a Mondragon type business, by looking out for yourself you are also looking out for every single one of your employees. What is good for the business is good for the individual, and what is good for the individual is good for the business.

"Mondragon" is the name given to worker-owned businesses located in the Basque region of Spain. This effort, which was started in 1956, is based on democratic methods for organizing work. These cooperatives are very successful and provide more than 83,000 jobs in the areas of finance, industry, retail and knowledge. It's the seventh largest business group in Spain. (See: www.mondragon-corporation.com)

The co-op business type is quite the recipe for success. The motivations of a co-op's employees will never wane, and the decision making will be well thought out and reviewed. All workers will give an honest effort 100 percent of the time due to their stake in the company. This model sets the stage for a work environment in which everyone cares. And in this day and age, this is an unfortunate rarity.

This Nation was Built by Immigrants

Julio Hernandez and Jaime Lopez (Local 3 Electricians)



Julio Hernandez and Jaime Lopez (Local 3 Electricians)

This nation was built by immigrants. Our perspectives need to be broadened. My union assists us in furthering our education, so my own view is indeed being affected.

Public Responsibility

Bonnie Espinal

The government has a responsibility toward immigrant workers and people in need. In a perfect world, the government should make sure everyone is fed, has medical insurance, and is able to receive an education. It should protect civil rights and make sure everyone has the opportunity to provide for themselves and their families. Unfortunately, we do not live in a perfect world. I believe this is an ethical issue.

Though the government has many programs in effect to provide people with financial, medical and civil rights assistance, having these programs doesn't mean that they actually work. I often notice that people always speak of the government as if it were a single person, especially when it fails us. It's easy to say that the government should do this or that, but people rarely discuss logical, realistic ways that these issues can be resolved. When they do offer solutions, they are based on their personal experiences or opinions, and these solutions usually just apply to people who are similar to them. Similarly, when I do hear the opinions of people who think of others and not just in their own class, their ideals are great, but often the things they suggest are easier said than done. Their solutions lack strategy.

Something that is an even larger issue than the government's responsibility to people in need is our responsibility to the government. What I mean by that is it's our responsibility to make sure that our government operates effectively and ethically. Perhaps I am naïve to believe that this can even be done in this current day and age, but I believe it just the same. "The Government" that we so often refer to as a single entity is supposed to be "of the people, by the people, for the people." Sadly, we don't take an active enough role in making sure that government officials do the right thing by the public and enforce the fact that their job is to serve the people, not themselves. People are more concerned with making things look and sound right, rather than making sure things are right.

Ultimately, I'm not sure if the question should really be about the government's responsibility to those in need or the public's responsibility to make sure that government (and its officials) are held properly accountable for not meeting and following through with their obligations to people in need and the overall general public.

Public Opinion and Immigration

Salvatore A. Montalbano

Public opinion can change, depending upon the state and location of individuals. As we learned from our class review of the state of Alabama, fear, instead of economics, altered state policy. Many of the residents in Alabama pressed for stronger immigration laws that would force illegal aliens to move out of state. The residents felt that the migrants were taking over local jobs. As a result, Alabama passed a tough law in 2011. They were fed up with the government's failure to control immigration and pressed for action. The new law required each person to carry proof of legal immigration and status. This was the big plan to deport illegal aliens and make life unbearable. Many other states followed in Alabama's path and enacted similar laws. The law, known as HB567, caused an exodus of migrants from Alabama. They thought this would increase employment in the state, but what they didn't understand, or want to admit, was that no one wanted these low paying because they were dangerous. For example, one of the biggest employers of undocumented immigrant workers was the poultry industry. However, as a result of this dramatic enactment, the poultry industry suffered a major financial setback and the state suffered economically.

Thus, a reverse effect has happened with the passing of the new law. Instead of having an increase in employment in Alabama, there has actually been a decrease. On top of that, the reputation of Alabama is tarnished and American Hispanics are being harassed and mistreated. This state was clearly threatened by migration but did not think through what would actually happen when they passed this unfair bill.

During this time, major foreign car companies were considering opening plants in Alabama. If Alabama could have had car companies build plants, this would have helped the U.S. automobile industry as well as increase employment numbers. Additionally, this also would be a plus for unions, as union membership would have increased. The poultry industry is a billion dollar industry. Organized labor would protect the rights of the employees, fight for fair wages and benefits, and large numbers would produce a strong lobbying effect for legislation. However, due to the way this bill was implemented, none of this came to fruition. If some of the legal migrants were able to organize, they might have had a vote before HB56 was passed and a representative could have conveyed the repercussions of the bill. I think fear, not being informed, a lack of education, and propaganda helped pass this bill. This is not the way we should be pushing forward on immigration reform.

Texans are a different breed of people. Texas is often used for border crossings. Some of the residents are migrants themselves and understand the need to make a living. Past programs allowed seasonal migrants to work farms and return

home. This created a pattern for Mexicans. When this program ceased, the need for workers was still there and migrants continued to cross the border. With the influx of drug trafficking and criminal activity, many U.S. citizens want to stop the violence and keep the criminals out. Mule trafficking and smuggling is something they don't want, but it is apparent that all the walls and fences that are built will not stop people from crossing. Texans are not afraid that the migrants will take their jobs. Rather, they are against criminal activities. Arizona has similar issues with migrants and is not migrant friendly. In the North, many have accepted immigrants. We have seen an influx of immigrants from all over the world. New Yorkers are used to seeing immigrant workers in kitchens, in landscape businesses, and if they are not on our worksites, they are working behind the scenes. Immigrants have long been an acceptable invisible workforce. Either way, immigrants will still come. Citizens also are afraid that migrants and immigrants will take jobs away from citizens, but the reality is these types of workers fill the demand of jobs not being filled by workers due to low wages, no benefits and dangerous working conditions.

Migration is part of a normal life cycle and has a long history. Our past shows us that the legal or illegal movement of humans for the purpose of mass labor as well as the dream of greener pastures has encouraged people to move. Firstly, if there were enough farmland and produce in Mexico, the migration of farm workers would be minimal. In class, we learned about the economics of corn and how the farmers were out-priced and, therefore, couldn't afford to produce maize. As the population of towns dwindled due to a migration to the states, so did the prospect of making a decent living in some of these Mexican towns. NAFTA priced out Mexican farmers. Since the implementation of NAFTA, changes within Mexico have caused migration to the U.S. Moreover, slow economic growth caused new migrants to flow from areas that had no previous history of migration due to the supply of good jobs in Mexico. But there also is a different type of migrant who may be educated and forced to leave due to low wages. Instead of just seasonal farm workers, Mexicans have settled in major cities to provide non-agricultural employment.

How scary must it be to cross a desert, a mountain, and travel below a freight car? How must it feel to work under an assumed alias and pay into a Social Security system that you will not benefit from? The amount of Mexicans who live in a country in the U.S. without medical assistance and benefits are plenty. These are poor people who only want to provide for their families. Mexicans are by and large decent, religious people who want to help, not drain, the U.S. economy. The story of how they helped the church instead of asking for help moved me; they did not come here for a handout, they came to work. They perform work that we don't want to do, in conditions we would not tolerate. They provide services that Americans don't want to provide. They provide manual labor. Some are skilled in their own country and bring their skills here.

It is evident that we cannot control immigration even though we spent \$17.9 billion in enforcement and \$1.6 billion in labor enforcement. There is no labor police force and I find it interesting that there are minimal immigration officers within the inner cities tracking migrants. With these low labor enforcement statistics, employers will continue to abuse migrant workers. There is no enforcement of safety or the minimum wage. Overtime wages are unheard of. This is where federal funding should go. Some of the funds used in enforcement should be directed towards health and welfare benefits for immigrants and the unions should push to organize legal migrants.

There are many workers who crossed the border and have told tales of their lives. How men leave their families and wives and live away from home for many years. How wives are sometimes left behind to become serfs for abusive in-laws. How they love their God and family but never get to see them or spend milestones with them. How pride requires them to send remittances to help the town and share with the townspeople in celebrations.

Their towns are empty without people to buy their own goods and the lands become barren without produce. Migrants who return home often have to have multiple jobs just to survive. Even if a migrant wanted to settle in their own hometown, the probability of them being able to carve out a living is unlikely. After being in America for so long, this is the life they know, and if we were willing to find a way to let someone who has been here for many years stay and pay into our government system and reap the benefits, everyone would win. Taxes would be paid on entry and exits and humanitarian factors on dangerous trips would lessen. Federal funds could be used towards something else. But without knowing the facts, it is easy to generalize and stereotype. After hearing these stories, and learning more about these issues, my personal opinion has softened and I have become more inclusive in my thinking.

I Am Working America

Jaime Lopez and Julio Hernandez (Local 3 Electrician)



Photo by Jaime Lopez and Julio Hernandez (Local 3 Electrician)

I think workers should unite to get better safety conditions. I am – and we are – all working America.

Social Structure and Change

Nello Costanzi

In the book, *More Than Just Race*, William Julius Wilson discusses the existence of racial inequalities in our society and the factors that create and reinforce them. The argument Wilson immediately raises is that there are issues inherent in the way two main facets of life in the United States are interpreted, and he calls for a re-examination of those forces: social structure and culture.

Before we can begin to discuss how social structure and culture influence inequality, I'll define them according to Wilson. A social structure is the arrangement of a social hierarchy based on one's position, role and networks. "A social structure could be a labor market ... or a 'role' associated with a particular social position in an organization" (Wilson 4). Wilson says that there are two main types of structural forces that influence racial inequality: social acts and social processes. Social acts are stereotypes, stigmatization and general acts of discrimination. Social processes are laws and practices that promote ongoing racial group outcomes. Examples of these are voting restrictions, racial profiling by police, and redlining by banks.

One of the social processes undermining the African-American workforce is the onset of technology and the subsequent elimination of manufacturing jobs in the United States. Essentially, because of the new skill set desired in a technology based workforce, many less educated and lower skilled workers are facing job displacement and reduced wages. This is a serious problem for African Americans who have many more workers in low-skilled jobs than other nationalities.

Many African-Americans also have trouble finding work because they are isolated in an inner-city ghetto. Places like Detroit and Philadelphia lack access to areas of high employment growth such as the suburbs where two-thirds of employment growth in metropolitan areas occurs. Often, there is no suitable form of public transportation for people to use to get to work. In Boston, only 14 percent of entry level jobs in the metropolitan area can be accessed through public transit in less than an hour.

Aside from these practical issues found in the structural forces of the United States, there are many cultural forces creating racial inequality as well. A cultural force refers to the shared outlook of a group of people that share social networks or similar place-based circumstances such as living in the same neighborhood. The two types of cultural forces that Wilson examines are national views and beliefs on race and cultural traits.

The first and most prevalent feature of American culture that hurts African Americans is racism. Wilson argues that though the more “categorical forms of racist ideology have declined,” they can still be found inherent in institutional norms and practices (Wilson 15).

One example, school tracking, which is the separating of pupils by academic ability into groups for all subjects or certain classes and curriculum within a school, can often segregate African-American students and even place them in lower-level classes when they have the learning skills required to compete with kids in higher-level classes.

People who grow up in racially segregated neighborhoods can develop behavior patterns characteristic of different culture frames. Culture frames are shared visions of human behavior such as “acting white” or “acting black”. Elijah Anderson’s research, which is cited by Wilson on page 17, discusses the development of “street smarts” in people living in an unsafe neighborhood. This mind-set leads people to approach other situations with a sense of mistrust or skepticism and thus could be construed as antisocial and rude in the wrong setting. African-Americans that find themselves in these living situations may consequentially face limited social mobility because their cultural frames make it difficult to assimilate into the professional world.

In my opinion, there is a lot of merit in Wilson’s definitions of cultural and social structures and especially in his discussions of their effect on racial inequality in America. I believe that his argument is something that many people can identify with and that his struggle, and the struggle of African-Americans, also is the struggle of the working middle class in this country. The issues he discusses affect all of us and his definitions of social and cultural forces and their effects on inequality impact everyone that is being systematically stifled by a system designed to keep poor uneducated people poor and uneducated.

I think this book is on the reading list because it talks a lot about social and political policies that are having a negative impact on minorities and working-class individuals in this country. I think that this book casts a unique light on racial inequality because it isn’t talking about white versus black. This book is talking about racial inequality and racism as institutions of society and culture that are inherent and constant in everyday life. People aren’t “categorically racist” anymore; instead we live with a system that makes it harder for African-Americans and other minorities to elevate themselves socially and professionally.

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Indentured Servitude in Colonial America: Cloaked Slavery?

Patricia Wickes

Webster's American Dictionary defines indentured servitude as, “n: bondage; v: to work through or perform a contracted service for a specified amount of time.” It also defines slavery as, “n: a person owned and forced into slavery by another; wearisome drudgery; enslavement.” However, the similarities between the two are much more significant than mere definitions would have us believe. This paper will examine, in part, those similarities and further the contrasts (however limited) between the two.

When Colonial America was basically in its infancy (in 1617, approximately ten years after the settlement of Jamestown, Va.), the powers that were in Britain realized the significant windfall the fertile farming soil of the New World could have on their economy. “The timing of the Virginia Colony was ideal. The Thirty Years’ War had left Europe’s economy depressed, and many skilled and unskilled laborers were without work. A new life in the New World offered a glimmer of hope; this explains how one-half to two-thirds of the immigrants who came to the American colonies arrived as indentured servants” (History Detectives, PBS). Since Britain’s climate was not conducive to farming, it traditionally had to import all of its produce and most of its goods (hemp for rope, cotton for clothing, etc.). Agricultural revenue could conceivably fund the entire construction of the new nation while expanding Britain’s rule. It was a win-win for the British Empire. The only obstacle was a large infusion of cheap labor. And how would that problem be solved? Through those individuals who were mired in poverty. Debt, hunger and the prospect of earning a wage have traditionally been great motivating factors in gaining the cooperation of the masses. In light of these conditions, the economically disadvantaged populaces of Britain were the best candidates for the wave of indentured servants to the New World.

These individuals contracted themselves to work, without pay, for a specified amount of time (usually four to seven years). In return for their labor, these servants were given passage to America, room and board, and promised a small tract of land upon completion of service. Although agreed upon in writing, it was in the practical application of these conditions that the lines became blurred. For instance, if a woman gave birth during her servitude, additional time was tacked onto her service. If an individual were injured or maimed (and thus unable to be as physically productive as before), their contract was voided and they became essentially slaves due to the fact that the land owner now had to maintain their cost of living. Statistically only about 40 percent of indentured servants had their contracts honored and even those individuals were given the least profitable

lands. Conditions like these (coupled with the fact that there was no real authority to complain to when servants were beaten or contracts were violated) amounted to slavery for those who had freely entered into the arrangement initially. While indentured servants were not legally owned by their employers, once the contract was voided by either party, they were essentially slaves.

In 1676, some lower class citizens (mostly ex-indentured servants) who were exasperated with their circumstances began to rebel against these practices, resulting in what is known as “Bacon’s Rebellion.” The small revolt effectively ended the practice of indentured servitude. The vacuum left in its place prompted the landowners to resort to outright slavery. While indentured servants had cost them very little, and were afforded only the most basic of human rights, the land barons would not make the same mistake twice. They wanted only the initial investment (the actual cost of a slave) while ensuring that the labor force could not rise up against them at any time in the future.

While the life of an indentured servant was often harsh and restrictive, it was not technically enslavement. Slavery was the actual, legal ownership of human beings. In the eyes of the law (however limited in the colonies), slaves were considered real property or chattel. The major contrast between slavery and indentured servitude is that slavery was for life while there was an understanding that servants would one day be free. Other differences were living conditions; quality of life (i.e., the fact that a slave’s life could be taken without any legal or moral repercussions whatsoever); working conditions; and the fact that slaves could be bought, sold, exchanged or left as an inheritance in a will.

From any perspective, despite the similarities and difference between indentured servitude and slavery during the genesis of the great experiment that would become the United States, one thing is certain: both practices are a shameful chapter in our nation’s history. The lesson that we should all learn from it is that we cannot use/abuse those of us who are of lessor fortune, the economically or socially disadvantaged among us. If we do, we run the risk of history repeating itself and like Bacon’s Rebellion, having the nation turn on itself, a nation dividing its people in a violent manner. Only this time it will be cataclysmic in that we are a nation of millions with far greater destructive capabilities.

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Servitude and Slavery

Ron Pizzuti

Early American history is full of brave and determined characters working hard and fighting valiantly to build a great nation. The idealism and structure of this nation was forged by the great minds we know as the founding fathers, while the physical task of building this country fell squarely on the shoulders of the more common working-class farmers and industrialists. Unfortunately, the history of that labor in this country (while incredible and inspiring) is littered with the immoral practices of that time period, such as slavery.

It is important to note that there were two types of “forced” labor occurring at this time. The first is indentured servitude. In the 17th through the 19th centuries there was an increasing need for labor in the colonies. The country that would become America was now just a rapidly growing group of colonies. At the same time, in Europe there were an increasing number of people in need of a new start, be it because of religious or criminal persecution, extreme poverty, or any number of other factors. These two needs could be fulfilled by one another. In exchange for free passage to America, and room and board upon arrival, these immigrants would be contractually obligated to serve as workers for a specified amount of time on the farms and plantations of the New World. The second form of forced labor is the more familiar slavery. Slavery was the outright ownership of persons, who were almost exclusively of African descent, to work forever, and for generations, under often-cruel circumstances.

The similarities between the two practices are not insignificant. Both were held in low regard, both working feverishly with little or no rights at all, both not enjoying the products of their labor. Indentured servants and slaves were considered personal property, as were their descendants, to be sold and inherited like any other property. The differences were more profound, however. By the middle of the 1600s, the colonial laws began to differentiate the two. The term “duration of natural life” began to define slavery, whereas indentured servants, at least in theory if not in practice, had a light at the end of their tunnel. That light, of course, is the end of their contractual obligations. These laws also began to differentiate between the races, clearly indicating and identifying the slaves as African.

By 1810, only about 30 years after becoming an independent nation, international slave trading was outlawed by the United States. Fifty years later, the Civil War was fought to free the slaves that were still toiling in the south. I mention this because whenever slavery is discussed, we seem to forget the good that America did in its abolition of slavery. We spend a lot of time demonizing early Americans for taking part in what was (and still is in some parts of the

world), a brutal and despicable practice. However, we fail to put into perspective the fact that slavery was not an uncommon practice during this era. Instead, maybe we should focus on the way Americans fought and died to right a wrong.

In conclusion, there was an insatiable demand for labor in the New World during the colonial times; that need was met by utilizing cheap and sometimes brutal labor practices. The indentured servitude in its purest form was a voluntary agreement entered into by two willing participants. Slavery, contrarily, was a vicious and immoral forced labor practice that makes modern-day Americans cringe. Both served their purpose, both fulfilled a need. Although it would be nice to eliminate slavery from our history, the fact remains, it played a vital role in building the nation that would become a global power; a power that fought to end the practice here and continues to fight for the rights of oppressed people around the world.

The Immigration Debate

Hana Georg

The fact that books like Judith Hellman's *The World of Mexican Migrants: The Rock and The Hard Place* and Nigel Harris' *Thinking the Unthinkable* exist is a strong suggestion in itself that the state of U.S. public opinion regarding immigration is on the whole skeptical, if not downright opposed. We live in a time and a place where illegal immigrants are so easily dehumanized to justify (the illusions of) economic gain and national security, and where opening borders to people is actually unthinkable – despite the lack of regulation on capital at these same borders – while those who see immigration as a threat in some way, seem to comprise the heavier end of the spectrum. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge those who are advocates and supporters of immigration. The proponents range in motive, from those who struggle for human rights, to those whose goal is ultimately a bloated supply of cheap labor. Clearly, this is a complicated topic that stirs emotion one way or another in most Americans.

In order to better understand the politics of immigration control, our class was introduced to a chart from Daniel Tichenor's book, *Dividing Lines: The Politics of Immigration Control in America*, that specified two categories – admissions and rights – each of which could be arguably expanded or restricted, and these points can be combined in a number of ways. The resulting four combinations from Tichenor's chart highlight the way that most Americans somehow fit into the immigration debate as Cosmopolitans, National Egalitarians, Free Market Expansionists or Classic Exclusionists. I would argue that U.S. public opinion has been overtaken currently and throughout many points in history by Classic Exclusionists (those against immigration and immigrant rights). The xenophobia that Harris describes in his book, as well as the irrational fear of the illegal immigrant that is perpetuated and fueled by politicians and talking heads alike, are all very present here in America where particularly the working and middle-class view immigrants as the enemy or the competition. This comes from the deep belief that America is a superior and alluring place where everyone would surely come if they could, to steal our homes and economic resources. While Harris spends most of his book proving this exact point wrong, it is still a dominant opinion and one of the driving forces behind public demand for highly secured borders.

Today, it seems that organized labor has moved away from its more traditional Classic Exclusionist stance and into a more Nationalist Egalitarian one – those who might halt new immigration but are invested in fighting for more expansive rights for illegal immigrants that are here already. This was a logical shift when one considers information such as presented by Daniel Costa in his article and accompanying chart titled, "Huge Disparity in Funding for Immigration

Enforcement vs. Labor Standards.” Here it is clear that if labor standards were expanded and enforced properly and big business regulated, then the demand for expendable and exploitable labor would be gone. This would be a good thing for all workers and that is exactly what organized labor has done; it has begun to push past racism and xenophobia and unite on the basis of class, as workers. Unions are powerful when there are people behind them, and the time has finally come to include all people and stop allowing working people to be pitted against one another.

While I think this is a long overdue and yet powerful stance for organized labor to take, it is my opinion that large unions as a whole have not adequately prioritized political education and immigration right’s education with the membership bases. This at least has been my own observation on various job sites and talking to other trades people and union members. This means that while organized labor might have developed a more progressive stance on immigration, these views are not trickling down and are not often reflective of the masses they represent. It feels then like more of a strategic political move with less actual inclination to raise awareness and build alliances.

While I do see the potential benefits of building a Nationalist Egalitarians movement, I would say that I have always been more of a Cosmopolitan; the kind who thinks that all borders are tools of control and subordination, and that the fight for immigrants’ rights is important and precisely in line with all the other struggles against institutions of oppression. Harris highlights this idea. He states that, “increasing international movements of workers collides with the attempts to control movement, to, as it were, immobilize the bulk of the world’s populations. The attempt to control entry to their countries leads the governments of the developed nations to seek to control the world at large” (19). It is this brand of power and control that also is behind sexism and homophobia. These things to me feel so tightly connected, and being free from any of them requires fighting for freedoms within all of them.

While the class materials seemed mostly to reinforce my own immigration politic, there are many things that I have continued to learn through our class materials. Many of the economic facts and statistics – aspects of that argument I had never prioritized before – have most shaped the way I approach the immigration debate. I am much more aware of the details of specific arguments and counter arguments. I currently feel much more adequately equipped to debate the issue with those who oppose immigration.

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Public Opinion on Immigration

Matthew May

There seems to be no way to determine the true public opinion on immigration in the United States. When people watch television they see a lot of anger and hostility toward immigrants, but when they speak to others in person, the majority of them appear to be pro-immigration or indifferent to the issue altogether.

For example, watching cable news offers the most dramatic depiction of the way Americans feel about immigration in the United States, especially illegal immigration. You hear the term “freeloaders” and we are told how illegal immigrants are bleeding the American system dry. There also are many stories about how Americans are “fighting back” and setting up their own border militias to curtail the crossing of immigrants into the United States. You’ll also hear stories about how countless Americans who own land on the U.S./Mexican border have to deal with these immigrants constantly destroying their land.

The only guarantee Americans have when watching the news is that they will never get a balanced picture of the true effect immigration has on the United States. For example, the Sept. 29, 2012 issue of *The Economist* provides insight into the benefits of having pro-immigration policies:

America used to have one of the most business-friendly immigration policies. Fully 18 percent of the Fortune 500 list as of 2010 were founded by immigrants (among them AT&T, DuPont, eBay, Google, Kraft, Heinz and Procter and Gamble). Include the children of immigrants and the figure is 40 percent. Immigrants founded a quarter of successful high-tech and engineering companies between 1995 and 2005. They obtain patents at twice the rate of American-born people with the same educational credentials ... Why endure America’s visa obstacle course when other countries are laying out the red carpet?

The odds of Americans obtaining true information like this on television are slim to none, and unfortunately, the vast majority of Americans get their “news” from television. With this being the case, I think most Americans view immigration in a negative light, especially in tough economic times. Many Americans think illegal immigrants benefit from a lot of the services the United States offers, yet many do not realize these same immigrants are contributing to a Social Security system that they will never receive funds from. These negative views are the same views many union workers have, especially older ones, and, because of this, they fail to realize how much unions could benefit from immigrants.

People's typical complaints about immigrant union workers are that they are undercutting the union wages. Therefore, they think that they are responsible for turning union work into nonunion work. It's not as if immigrants want to work for less money, they just don't have a choice. If these immigrants weren't afraid of getting deported, they would certainly be a great asset to any union, wages would at least remain at current levels, and there would be a much larger union with much more work. The worst case scenario if immigrant workers were organized into unions, is they could become bigger and stronger. Thus, current union workers would not see a drop in union work. Like other unionized workers, I would not have thought this to be true before learning how difficult it is for immigrants to actually survive in the United States.

As I enter adulthood, I appreciate how immigrants, especially the Mexicans I worked with at odd jobs growing up, worked so hard. I always thought success meant having a life just a little bit better than your parents. While looking back on my former Mexican coworkers washing dishes, bussing tables and breaking rocks, I realize that every working-class American or non-American family has that one person who needs to sacrifice a ton for their family to succeed in this country. Reading about how many of these immigrants have to live really drives home at this idea. Everything from driving with the fear of being pulled over to going to work not knowing the guys who hired you for the day aren't just going to drive you to a remote place and beat you.

Like others, I once assumed that immigrants only wanted to come to the United States for a better life. Yet, many come here to work and save for a better life back home. The interesting part is seeing how much of a negative impact migration has had on the "sending" towns of Mexico. For example, one immigrant worked in the United States for so many years to save enough money to start a business back home in Mexico, only to learn that his town is so depopulated from migration that his business would never be a success there. The ways in which Americans are attaining news coverage regarding immigration in this country is misleading, which is why the goals on each side of the spectrum do not match and people assume their hostile or indifferent positions.

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Workplace Health Hazards

Navindra Prashad

There are many jobs that are more dangerous than the building trades. Many people do not even realize that sometimes just by working in an office you can be injured on the job. People believe that blue-collar workers are more prone to getting injured on the job, but that is not necessarily true. In Lisa Cullen's novel, *A Job to Die For*, she illustrates jobs that are more hazardous than the building trade.

Cullen describes how Sue, a nurse in her 30s, suddenly snaps her neck from moving a patient from her bed to a wheelchair. She is at risk of eventually becoming paralyzed from the neck down. Most people would think that nurses do not get injured easily, and they would think that a construction worker has a better chance of being injured, but in reality, nurses put in strenuous labor as they help patients move and constantly tend to them. Movement is one factor while surroundings play a role as well. For example, office buildings are at a very high risk to make workers ill. Molds and chemicals that are found in an office can also be found on a building job site, but unlike the building trade, they are more unrecognizable in office spaces.

Most people do not realize that sitting behind a desk all day can have negative health factors. Although office jobs are less hazardous than working in the building trades, there is less of a chance of being physically hurt right away. However, there are many office workers who become ill. Sarah, a 34-year old marketing consultant, was diagnosed with fibromyalgia. She never put it together that she got it from her job, but later found offices like hers are the cause due to not undergoing procedure health inspections. Most companies do not even have a safety staff to investigate these types of problems. There are many hazardous chemicals within office walls that most people do not know a thing about. For instance, Michelle, a computer technician, became ill from working in a poisonous environment due to the chemicals found in the chips. She still suffers from a lung condition. Even customer service representatives are at risk. Some reported getting carpal tunnel syndrome. This can affect people so badly that they cannot write or operate a car. Although a job such as typing can hardly seem dangerous, in fact it is. When people are using some part of their bodies, like their hands, all day from morning until night, it can take a toll on their bodies. This type of job can almost be more hazardous than the building trades. In a building trade although they are overworking your body, it is not always monotonous because you are not always using the same part of your body.

In my opinion, some of these workplaces' health hazards are a lot more dangerous than the building trades. Many of these work-related injuries that Cullen discusses are from hazardous chemicals found in offices. In addition, it

was reported last year that people who work retail get attacked more than police officers. For instance, people who work white-collar jobs are believed to have more knowledge because they have been in school longer, but this cannot help them when they are dealing with day-to-day hazards that they have not learned.

Of course, on a daily basis, it is somewhat easier to be injured in a building trade because of the risk you put on your physical body. In an office job or any position outside of the building trade, there are slimmer chances of getting injured whereas in the building trade, there is a much greater risk. You also can have a work injury from physical labor that you can feel, but often do not know where it came from. If one gets injured on a construction site, it is often harder to recover because that kind of injury can be as serious as a leg amputation. The building trades also are more risky because if you get injured physically, it can sometimes be almost impossible to return to work while it leaves you unemployed. At the same time, all fields of work are important to have safety regulations, so that unsafe situations can be prevented.

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Fracking, Is It Safe or Not?

Vincent Guarnaccia

In today's society fracking has become a controversy. Hydraulic fracturing or fracking is a method used to extract natural gas that is below the earth's surface. It is an extremely water-intensive process where water, sand and other chemicals are injected underground at a high pressure to fracture the surrounding rocks and extract oil or gas that is released. Fracking has become a two-sided argument today and it is unsure where it will lead.

As a communications director in organized labor, it is my job to speak publicly about topics like this. The use of fracking is something that can be very beneficial to the economy. The fact that the U.S. has so much of this natural gas below the earth can have a big impact on the economy of the country. Instead of having to rely on other countries for oil and gas, America would be able to self-supply it and also be able to put many Americans to work. Many people, mostly higher-class people, are in favor of fracking and want it to continue, other people, mostly average Americans trying to make a living, are not in favor of it. This causes a serious controversy and brings out many questions. Is fracking safe? Is the government being truthful about this process? Is it worth the side effects?

I strongly believe that fracking should not be enforced. Given the potential for the country and the amount of jobs that could be provided, yes, it sounds like a great idea but the reality is it is not safe. Many of these people that are in favor of it and want it to take place are not seeing firsthand what the results are. Many families have been greatly affected by this. Families all along the areas where fracking was done already have had their water and land poisoned. Through this process many harmful chemicals have contaminated land, streams and main water supplies.

We sent out a team to investigate and results were terrifying. Many of these homes became severely damaged as a result of fracking. Water that once was able to be used to drink and cook with had become flammable. Animals began to lose their fur and get sick. People in the area are scared for their health; rivers and streams that once were full of fish have become contaminated and animals are dying. Is all this worth it? Why would the government allow this to happen? Why is no one helping these families and they are left stranded alone to deal with this. There are all questions that need to be answered before fracking continues. I, for one, am not in favor of fracking, I believe it will cause harm to people that live near the area as well as the workers that will be working to extract it. I believe that there should be no place for this in organized labor and that the resource is not worth the effects it can have on our workers, families around these areas and

the environment that will be affected. In the end the average family will not get any advantage from this. The rich will just become richer and more powerful, and average families will just become negatively affected from it.

Slavery By Any Name

Zizwe Lewis

In 1886, Henry Grady, editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*, declared the creation of a “New South.” It was described as different from the “Old South” because industrialism would replace agriculture and the conflicts of region and race that had paralyzed the nation for more than 25 years. There was a general consensus that the average white citizen, the national leadership of the Republican Party, and the federal government on every level were arriving at the conclusion that African-Americans did not merit citizenship and that their freedom was not valuable enough to justify the conflicts they caused among whites.

What was important to them was that the U.S. economy was surging with life, which was thanks to a booming demand for the South’s coal and iron ore. Overnight, Birmingham became a national center for making iron and steel, and their demand was higher than the supply of available labor to harvest it. This sudden rise in work required a steady workforce. However, the southern economy was heavily reliant upon slave labor to function and turn a profit. Without former slaves and their expertise in the field, the white south was virtually crippled. The Civil War meant an end to the free ride whites had come to expect by using blacks to do their bidding. Thus, a new slavery had to be created to retain their status. While the 13th Amendment to the Constitution, adopted in 1865, formally abolished slavery, it specifically permitted involuntary servitude as a punishment for “duly convicted” criminals.

Southern whites found their saving grace in this loophole that allowed them to reclaim a “new slavery” system through convict leasing. Shortly after, a Mississippi law required African-American workers to enter into labor contracts with white farmers by January first of every year or risk arrest. Even more absurd was that Alabama, North Carolina and Florida all passed laws in the 1880s making it a criminal act for a black man to change employers without permission. To the dismay of recently freed blacks, it was quickly found out that the law was still not on their side.

By 1883, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the Civil Rights Act of 1875, which forced whites to comply with the 14th and 15th Amendments that awarded voting and equal rights to blacks, could only be enforced under the rarest circumstances. Simply put, the federal government could not force states to comply with the constitutional requirement of the equal treatment of blacks. This decision single-handedly removed any protections that shielded African-Americans from open discrimination and legally undid the progress that many had fought and died for.

The timing and nature of crimes with which blacks were charged coincided with the demand for cheap labor needed for fueling the South's thriving economy. Blacks were being criminalized for even the minutest of offenses such as: vagrancy, abusive language in front of a (white) female, gambling and bastardy. Among the "felons" sold to the Pratt Mines in 1890, seven men were there under the charge of bigamy, four for homosexuality and six for miscegenation – an offense almost solely prosecuted against black men who engaged in sex with white women. Hundreds of men charged with petty crimes were sent off to complete their sentences in slave camps where they lived in subhuman conditions, were worked to death, and basically buried wherever they fell. Blacks found themselves on edge because incurring the displeasure of white employers or officials could land them in the penal system on superficial charges.

Sentences were handed down by provincial judges, local mayors and justices of the peace. Often times, these men also were employed by successful business owners who relied on the forced labor of recently convicted men. Defendants charged with crimes were usually sentenced to jail time if unable to pay the substantial court fees that being processed incurred. If not able to pay said fees, newly convicted men were charged with additional penalties, adding more time to their sentences. With no money, most agreed to work for a white businessman willing to pay the fines on their behalf.

In exchange for covering their costs, states such as Alabama began selling off its black prisoners in large numbers to companies who leased them as laborers. This also was a way for the state to save money by cutting the costs of housing and feeding prisoners itself. Nearly all the penal functions of government were turned over to the companies purchasing convicts. The money derived from selling inmates was placed in a "Fine and Forfeiture Fund," which was used to pay fees to judges, sheriffs, other court officials and witnesses who helped convict defendants. Officials were now incentivized to prosecute as many men as possible, regardless of guilt, so as to supply businesses willing to pay for additional workers. In addition to the fees they received levied from defendants, sheriffs also kept any amount left over from daily feeding fees paid for each prisoner.

As slaves, African-Americans were considered a valuable investment, so it was in their owners' best interest to keep them somewhat healthy to continue to reap the benefits of their "investment." But, convict leasing saw prisoners as being valuable only as long as their sentences lasted. As a result, convicts were overworked and underfed to maximize profits. Another benefit of prison labor was that it provided a defense for companies against unions attempting to organize free workers. Coal mines, timber camps and farms manned by imprisoned workers couldn't be shut down by strikers nor could wages be negotiated or driven up. Black inmates were the perfect scabs.

Blacks were the universal scapegoat for blame as to why others didn't have a better life and were further excluded from the progress that others seemed to be fighting for and collectively obtaining. Laws were passed solely to intimidate blacks away from political participation and further demanding equal rights. Free blacks realized that they could only be secure by accepting second-class citizenship status and coming under the protection of a white employer. This continued a cycle of degradation and inequality that has had lasting effects on the status and mentality of those affected.

Nature's Construction 3

Shantar Gibson (Local 3 Electrician)



Nature's Construction 3, Shantar Gibson (Local 3 Electrician)

HURRICANE SANDY

What Hurricane Sandy Did to Me

John Eamon McGinley

Hurricane Sandy has devastated the eastern coast of the United States including many parts of New York City. Beach-front communities like Gerritsen Beach in Brooklyn and Far Rockaway in Queens were flooded, lost power and suffered fires. A tiny area of Queens, called Breezy Point was especially hit hard. Breezy Point is a small area on the end of the same peninsula as Far Rockaway. Technically, it is a part of Queens, but it is a world away. It's a beach community. It's a very casual place; the people in Breezy Point are the kind of people who wear shorts and flip flops to weddings on the beach. That's where I was living when Hurricane Sandy hit New York City. Hurricane Sandy ruined my community, my house and my car. It will take Breezy Point years to recover. I hope to bounce back sooner.

Sandy started to show her strength in New York City on Saturday, Oct. 27, 2012. While I was in Breezy Point, I walked down to the ocean in the late afternoon to see for myself the changes in the water. The waves were very high and very rough, but I did see it like this before. At the time, it didn't really cause me much concern. I even played catch with my brother and my dog. I didn't think Sandy would be any worse than any other hurricane. When the evacuation order was given, I stayed. I never thought I was in any danger. It was windy but hardly even raining. My night was completely uneventful. When I woke up on Sunday, October 28, it wasn't much worse. I felt the wind picking up and gusting a bit stronger. When it rained, still not a lot, it seemed harder. I figured that it was as bad as it was going to get so I decided to stay put. When I woke on Monday morning, October 29, I knew I had to reconsider staying. The winds were ferocious. The telephone line was down. The ocean was getting closer and closer to the house. I had numerous text messages from my mother begging me to leave. I was walking to my car when I saw the water. The parking lot was filling up with ocean water. The ocean is usually 1,000 feet from the house but thanks to Hurricane Sandy, it was now up close and personal. I waded through a foot of water just to get to my car. By some miracle, I managed to start it. I don't think I even looked back.

On Tuesday, October 30, at about 4 a.m., the text messages started coming in from friends and family. "Was I OK? Did I get out? Did I know about the fires? Is the house OK? Was the house in the fire? Is the house flooded? Is the house standing?" I couldn't answer. I had no idea. It would take days to find out what really happened. One hundred and ten houses burned to the ground, including my grandmother's. The Atlantic Ocean and bay rose to fill the streets with 8 to 10 feet of water covering all of Breezy Point. If you weren't in the fire, you were flooded, or your house was swept away into the ocean or knocked down

by the wind and water, like my neighbors. There is not a single house in Breezy Point that wasn't affected. It is one month later and most of Breezy doesn't have electric, gas or water.

My house was knocked off of its foundation and flooded. The water and wind caused the two houses in front of mine to have a domino effect. The water came up and filled the house about 1 foot deep. It's only a one-story beach bungalow so everything in it was destroyed. My house has been condemned by the buildings department. I am staying with my parents. On Monday, November 5, I had to get back to work. I borrowed my mother's car. I figured my car was dead. Thousands of cars were destroyed by Hurricane Sandy. I assumed mine was, too. While I went to work every day, my mom vacuumed the water out of my car. She opened the windows every day to air out the car. After about a week, the car was dry. It started. I thought it would stall as soon as I got it out of the driveway. It didn't. It doesn't drive like it used to, and I'm sure its lifespan has been shortened. I worry it will die every day, but it has been getting me to work for three weeks now.

New York City is recovering and healing. People are back to work and kids are back to school. Breezy Point is committed to rebuilding. Every day progress is made – some days a little – and some days a lot. New gas lines are now being installed and some people have electricity back. Basements and first floors have been pumped dry and ripped out. My family and I are also committed to rebuilding and planning our return to Breezy Point. My mother met with an architect and a builder this week. It will take a while but I'll be back, too.

Super Storm Sandy Reactions

Michael Houck

The storm did not directly affect me, but it did affect my friends and family. I lost power briefly – it went out and came back about a half a minute later. I got a phone call from my mother panicking that the aluminum siding on their home started peeling off. I rushed there to help out as soon as the winds died down.

The entire side of the house was peeled back; the only thing that kept it attached was the chimney. The front and back of the house was swaying, so I climbed on a ladder and secured it back on with a hammer and nails. Then, I climbed onto the side of the chimney and carefully cut the siding so that I could control where it fell, and my parents and dog would not be in danger whenever they went in their backyard.

My best friend growing up called me. He lives in a basement apartment in Howard Beach. The water entered his apartment and consumed it. In the pictures he has, you can see sand lines a few inches from the ceiling. His car was outside, totaled from water damage. He had no power, so I picked him up and let him sleep over at my place.

Global warming definitely has had an effect on our extreme climates. This storm was bad and left a lot of people devastated. But it could have been worse. I think we need to face that as a society and carefully choose what to rebuild and how. My friend's grandparents own a house in Breezy Point right by the water. They just finished renovating it from Hurricane Irene. The house is totally destroyed again, and it makes me wonder if there is a point to rebuilding knowing this probably wasn't the last or even the worst storm we are going to see.

The Effects of Sandy on Long Island

Nathan Calisi

Hurricane Sandy was the worst storm I have ever experienced in my life. I did not think the storm would be this horrific. Sometimes I don't believe the news reports because they are not always 100 percent correct.

Hurricane Sandy was so strong that it knocked over a couple of trees in my neighborhood. The only good outcome of this was that only one tree fell down in my backyard. The only thing that got damaged was my fence. When that tree came down, my brother and I went out there to take down our fence and move it away from our pool just in case it would hit the pool with another strong gust of wind.

This storm also knocked out the power in my neighborhood for three days. I was able to get a generator the day before the storm. I hooked up my refrigerator and my water heater to the generator. The generator that I bought only takes gas.

On Long Island, there was a shortage of gas because of the storm. I had to limit myself on how to use my gas wisely. The gas shortage lasted for a week. When I needed gas I had to wait on line for a half-hour.

I hope I will never have to experience a storm like this again in my lifetime. If it ever does happen again, I will be more prepared for it.

Mandatory Evacuation

Michael Venezia

When the hurricane hit, it was a crazy experience for me. I live in Bellmore, Long Island, right on the water. My family and I had gotten the call for a mandatory evacuation the day before it hit. When we got that call, I went out on my dock and saw the water level was already higher than my jet-ski lift. I knew right then, before the storm was even here, that the area I was in was going to get hammered.

As the night got going and the storm started to hover, my luck just kept running out. I was out on my stoop with my father and sister, and I smelled gasoline. So I asked my dad where our gas cans were for when the power would go out. He had left them outside my garage. In order to get them, we had to go through the garage because there was already about 2 feet of water flooded in the street.

When we opened the door to the garage, we saw some water seeping in. I told my dad to just let it be and leave it how it was. He didn't listen. He opened the garage door and that's when a wave of water started gushing in. It flooded the whole basement up to 2 feet.

The whole past week, I had to gut out the basement. The storm also totaled two of my father's cars. After hearing people lost their entire houses and some lost their lives, I'm thanking God I am alive.

No Work, No Power

Joseph Medina

Hurricane Sandy was a devastating natural disaster that hurt many people's normal ways of living. I was affected directly by the hurricane in many ways. Not only could I not work, but I also lost power in my house when it went out in my neighborhood.

I live in Yonkers, and Westchester itself was hit by the hurricane winds and there were many power outages. My block was out of power for a week and a half. Even though it took so long to get our power back on, there are, three weeks later, many people who still suffer from power loss.

I work down at Wall Street, so I also could not go to work for two reasons. The whole of the lower Manhattan area was flooded, so many of the buildings in that area also were out of power and flooded. And then, because of area flooding, the train service was greatly affected and suspended for a week or so. It was impossible for me to go to work that whole week.

Looking Back, Going Forward

Louis Xepolitos

I remember Sunday night going to pick up my girlfriend to stay at my house for the storm because she lives by the water in Sheepshead Bay in Brooklyn. The winds were starting to pick up Sunday night. Monday morning the winds were so bad things were blowing around in the streets. I never lost power in my house, but I felt stranded there. For a week, the trains weren't running and I couldn't get gas.

My house in Pennsylvania had no power for almost two weeks. My father had to go up to the house to run the generator so the pipes wouldn't freeze from the cold temperature at night. After about two weeks of being inside, my father brought gas down from Pennsylvania for my car. My girl and I went outside and drove around. There was a sense of silence around. There were so many damaged trees on cars, and roads were blocked from the trees down. I'm thankful that nothing happened to my family. I feel that we are going to see a lot more storms like this in the near future. We must rebuild in ways that we can prevent certain damage and have places for people to go in case their homes get destroyed again. I think a lot more people will question whether or not to live by the water after this.

Right Out of a Movie

Cesar Vela

In my lifetime, I have never expected something as horrible as Super Storm Sandy to hit New York. The devastation that came with the storm brought out the best and worst in people.

I've heard stories of looting and violence in the days following the storm. One of the stories that caught my attention the most was the gas shortages. In one situation a person pulled out a gun.

I remember watching a movie some years back called Earth 2100. This movie provided information about how the world is on a path to many problems. It talked about global warming and the dependency on gasoline. Scenes depicted gas lines miles long, and the violence that would breakout.

Another part of the film showed the future New York City and the innovations it undertook to stay, as some would say, the capitol of the world. One problem that posed the highest difficulty was to keep the city from flooding. What interested me the most about this is that it relates directly to the situation that is happening today. The film spoke of rising sea levels and the possibility of storms like Sandy and the devastation they could bring.

Counting Trees after Super Storm Sandy

Michael J. Fox

That Sunday before Hurricane Sandy hit, my family and I were prepping for my grandmother's memorial service. As we drove to the Bronx, my phone put out a screeching alert: "Emergency Service Alert" Zone A, Mandatory Evacuation.

Five minutes after the alert, I got a phone call from my foreman telling me there would be no work on Monday. I told him, "OK, see you Tuesday morning."

"We'll see," he responded. That Sunday afternoon you could feel the wind pick up and the chill in the air. I could tell the storm would be serious. Monday came and went, but Monday night was when the storm started touching land. With the news channel on and my face glued to it, listening to what the reporter and meteorologist had to say, I could tell immediately there would be no work the rest of the week.

That Monday night I slept well, not a sound of the hurricane to break my sleep, but I can't say the same for others.

Tuesday morning, I woke up to see how devastated Staten Island, lower Manhattan, Queens, Long Island and New Jersey were, but I can't say the same for my area, Electchester. As I took a stroll for my morning cigarette I could take in the view of the damage in my area. At first it did not seem bad until the tree counting started – 1, 2, 10, 15, 25 trees down in a two-block radius. Cars were crushed, playgrounds destroyed and danger overhead due to still falling branches caught in the trees. My area did not get flooded or lose electricity, but we were still hit hard.

Fishing in the Basement

Ken Liao

Everyone knew that it was coming. Everybody saw that it was coming. Now, everyone knows the impact was that bad! It was Hurricane Sandy!

Today is Nov. 19, 2012, and Sandy left us almost three weeks ago, but in the shanty, we are still talking about it. A laborer showed me a photo of them catching a fish in someone's basement! One mechanic said that he was working yesterday as an electrical inspector in Staten Island. And they formed a group of people called, "First Response Team." There is one plumber, one laborer and one electrician. Their duty is to inspect all the houses in that area and report the damages. Ready! The mechanic said that by Dec. 1, 2012, they have to finish the whole operation and the total number homes they need to inspect is 16,000! Remember, that is just the inspecting.

We've always thought that we dominated this planet. We locked up the animals in the cages for us to watch. We cut down all the trees for us to use. We drank all the milk of our Mother Nature to keep us moving around.

My 8-year-old son said, "You did all the bad things, now this is what you get!"

Storm Clearing

Kevin Peterson

During Super Storm Sandy, I could not believe what I was seeing. I was driving around Queens and Roosevelt Island, and I saw a lot of devastation. Trees and power lines were down, water from the East River was pouring onto the streets and emergency service crews were everywhere. This experience felt like something out of a movie. The wind was whipping around violently. At some point when it was raining, I couldn't see the road.

I had heard about prior storms that caused damage in the New York City area but not like this. The subway was closed, along with major highways, railways and airports. The city that never sleeps was at a complete standstill.

I do believe that this storm is a sign of things to come. In the past few years, the weather has changed and not for the better. It looks like New York and neighboring states are now larger potential targets for severe weather.

Above all the devastation, this storm did two "good" things. It created jobs across the board for carpenters, electricians, plumbers, and so on. The storm also showed people in the Northeast that our flood prevention systems are weak. Sandy was only a Category 1 hurricane, and the damage from the storm surge alone was terrible. So if a Category 2, 3, 4 or 5 were to hit, areas near water stand no chance against flooding and washouts.

Untitled

Hana Georg



Hana Georg (Local 3 Electrician)

The thought of workers united as workers – apart from even being divided by immigration status – is threatening in any country because of the power we might have.

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