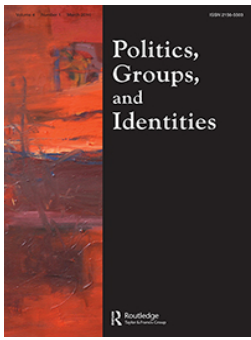

Politics, Groups, and Identities

ISSN: 2156-5503 (Print) 2156-5511 (Online) Journal homepage: http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rpgi20

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To cite this article: Justin Gest (2016) The white working-class minority: a counter-narrative, Politics, Groups, and Identities, 4:1, 126-143, DOI: 10.1080/21565503.2015.1053950

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/21565503.2015.1053950

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Politics, Groups, and Identities, 2016
Vol. 4, No. 1, 126–143, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21565503.2015.1053950

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

DIALOGUE: WORKING CLASS

The white working-class minority: a counter-narrative

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(*Received 10 September 2014; accepted 13 May 2015*)

This article contributes a counter-narrative about white working-class people in the USA and the UK. It argues that the systematic and social disempowerment of white working-class people is creating a new minority group. I begin by clarifying the occasionally nebulous definition of "working-class white" communities. I then describe the concept of "post-traumatic cities" – exurbs and urban communities that lost signature industries in the mid- to late-twentieth Century and now provide the setting of working-class white people's marginalization. Next, I outline the more conventional moral, economic, and demographic narratives that depict the condition of working-class white people. Putting into conversation diverse literatures addressing socioeconomic inequality, minority politics, and political behavior, I then exhibit how (1) systemic, (2) psychological and rhetorical, and (3) political forces compound to institutionalize the marginalized social position of white working-class people in the USA and the UK. In the end, I argue that these forces yield a disempowered social and political status that demands the attention of minority politics scholars and alters the way we conceptualize minorities.

Keywords: comparative; political inequality; identity; minority representation; multiple inequalities

This article contributes a counter-narrative about white working-class people in the post-industrial regions of the USA and the UK. This is not in the interest of re-appropriating victim status or competing with the claims of ethno-cultural minorities. Rather, it is to demonstrate that marginalization and minoritization may be experienced in different ways and simultaneously, by different people. It is to explore how disparate experiences of marginalization are not necessarily mutually exclusive. It is to consider what connects the marginalization of ethno-cultural minority and majority communities. It is to examine the extent to which the white working class can control their fate, and to what extent it is determined by the severity of their circumstances. And it is to reflect about how minoritization as a concept can transcend population distributions and rather suggest a lived experience of social and systemic disempowerment.

The American experience with ethno-racial and religious minorities is derived from immigration one way or another, unlike other states that are composed of multiple native ethnicities such as Belgium, Lebanon, or Spain. While the UK's history is consumed by tensions between multiple native ethnicities, the salience of these national ethnicities has deteriorated, as evidenced by the recent failure of the Scottish independence referendum. Ethnic politics has simply faded in Britain's post-colonial era of immigration. As a result, the politics of minority groups in the

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USA and the UK are now laced with debates over equal rights and treatment, rather than competing claims of native entitlement.

This has meant that the general public has conventionally equated minority status with smaller numbers and persistent legacies of disadvantage, rather than self-assertion (Joppke 2010). Similarly, scholars have followed Wirth's early definition of a minority as

> a group of people who, because of their physical or cultural characteristics, are singled out from the others in the society in which they live for differential and unequal treatment, and who therefore regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination. (Wirth 1940)

These approaches disqualify any claims of minority status by white people, whose physical characteristics have allowed them to evade such discrimination and instead employ it to their advantage. Going one step further, Waters (1990) has since distinguished the claims of European-origin immigrants in the USA as those of an "ethnic group" rather than those of an ethnic minority that has endured the "real and often hurtful" effects of being black, Latino, or Asian.

As a result, the conceptualization of any group of white people in the USA or the UK as a "minority" is questionable, to be modest. Less modestly, such a conceptualization stands in the face of 50 years of progress achieved by civil rights struggles, community cohesion agendas, and affirmative action policies. At their inception, such efforts acknowledged – and indeed were inspired by – the privileged status of white people.

In the USA and Britain, white people benefit from a political and social system of their own creation. They are advantaged by a history of structural discrimination in their favor, a trajectory unfettered by the legacies of slavery or the exploitation of colonialism. They boast an acquaintance with what is widely perceived to be norms of national culture and language, which enable their effortless integration into circles of belonging and recognition. White males in particular assume the "privileged role of universal subject" (Kennedy 1996). They enjoy the intangible sense of affinity with predominantly white leaders in business and politics. They are unhindered by the pressures of adaptation. Some describe the situation in harsher terms: Whites exploit "unearned advantages" as a means to "improve or maintain their social position" (Olson 2002). Earned or unearned, it is assumed that these advantages make white individuals, in short, the incumbents.

And yet, among white working-class people, there is an emerging sense of displacement. This article first sets the stage for this counter-narrative by clarifying the occasionally nebulous definition of "working-class white" communities. I then describe the concept of "post-traumatic cities," exurbs and urban communities that lost signature industries in the mid- to late-twentieth century, and now provide the setting of working-class white people's marginalization. Next, I sketch the more conventional moral, economic, and demographic narratives that depict the condition of white people. Putting into conversation diverse literatures addressing socioeconomic inequality, minority politics, and political behavior, I then exhibit how (1) systemic, (2) psychological and rhetorical, and (3) political forces compound to institutionalize the marginalized social position of white working-class people in the USA and the UK.

In the end, I argue that these circumstances pose two primary challenges for researchers' and commentators' consideration of white working-class politics and social affairs. First, the state of white working-class people's politics and social affairs expands conventional considerations of minority groups. It leads us to question whether minoritization is – alongside socioeconomic disadvantage, histories of disempowerment, sociocultural discrimination, and situated demography – also a matter of race. Second, the objective study of white working-class people demands that the observer suspend her or his own judgment about individuals' self-assertions and self-understandings. Taking these steps, it becomes clear that the systematic and social disempowerment of white working-class people is creating a new minority.

"Backward" and the "heart and soul of this country"

"Working-class" is a term that has been variably employed with pride, humility, and as a rhetorical tool of mobilization and vilification. Recent scholarly understandings of the "working-class" construe this group as an "underclass" characterized by general estrangement on the basis of their common economic deprivation. Dahrendorf (1985) considers the underclass a section of the population excluded from full social citizenship rights and the institutions these rights are embedded in. This definition suggests a heterogeneous category not defined by minority status, nor deviant behavior, but simply by those facing a primarily structural boundary between themselves and the majority of society (Schmitter Heisler 1991). Similarly, Weber (1946, 181, 186) defines classes as those sharing a common market situation. From this perspective the working-class is a recognizable social entity categorized by particular lifestyles, claims to honor, and social intercourse among its members.

Zweig defines classes based on "the degree of authority and independence [employees] typically [have] on the job" (2000, 28). He labels those with the power to "organize and direct production" as capitalists, while the larger group of workers who have "almost no authority" are termed the working class (3). In contemporary times, those facing these relatively disadvantaged conditions have been described as "modernization's losers," a reference to their lack of ability to take advantage of economic development. Even so, there is an inconsistency in whether "working class" refers to those without a university degree (Abramowitz and Teixeira 2009) – a modern construction reflective of an increasingly educated labor market – or more classic understandings of those in manual labor and the manufacturing sectors that once formed the core of Western economies. The problem with each of these conceptions is that purely economic understandings ignore powerful ethno-cultural boundaries of race, religion, age, and regional affinity within the working class, and treat it as a rather undifferentiated whole.

Naturally, working-class status transcends ethno-racial boundaries. Abstractly, black, brown, and white experiences with working-class status should be effectively identical. However, this has simply not been an empirical reality. Rather, social stratification and material welfare have been subject to strong, pervasive biases that lock certain ethno-cultural groups into social, economic, and political disadvantage. Race and ethnic classification has consequently modified class markers because, quite simply, race and ethnicity have factored in individuals' experienced realities.

Hochschild argues that the propensity to define the "working class" according to non-racialized structural constraints is characteristic of more "left-wing" definitions (1991, 570–571). In contrast, "right-wing" definitions have increasingly formed around the deviant values and norms of an "underclass," setting them apart by focusing on purported behavioral differences. This is particularly common in depictions of poor racial and ethno-religious minority groups, who are more readily construed as culturally different from white majority populations. Indeed, some scholars have described this specific type of boundary creation as "symbolic" or "modern" racism, contrasting it with "old-fashioned" racism based on formal discrimination and overt racial claims. In the American case, Valentino notes that this "new form of racism … [blends] racial animus with perceptions that blacks violate traditional American values … " (Valentino and Sears, 2005, 674). Drawing on decades of survey data, he finds that "symbolic racism" among whites has increased in all regions of the country since the early 1970s (678). Similarly, Lamont describes the symbolic racism she encounters during personal interviews with white working-class American men. She finds that these individuals tend to draw racial boundaries against the black "other" using moral criteria. Since their lower opinion of the black "other" is (ostensibly) based on the same moral assessment that they apply to whites and all others, these individuals can more easily justify racist views as legitimate (Lamont 2000, 58).

A great deal of work has examined the implications of linking racial or ethnic identity with socioeconomic status (See Dawson 1995; Wilson 1991). Although she does not base her definition of "the estranged poor" on racial grounds, Hochschild similarly focuses largely on poor urban African-Americans, and highlights how journalists' portrayal of the "underclass" in the media can establish misrepresentations (1991, 563). Though cognizant of the ethno-cultural minorities within the working classes, considerations of racialized poverty tend to overlook those whites who share the economic circumstances of minority groups, albeit in a significantly different context. Indeed, in the literature focusing on racial identity in the USA, the spotlight focuses on groups that are numerical minorities (Wong and Cho 2005, 699). This is typically justified by an implicit or explicit acknowledgment of white people's historically advantaged position – one that was less hindered by structural obstacles to their social, economic, and civic advancement. As a result, those few cases that do examine white identity extensively often approach the issue from an antagonistic point of view, painting "whiteness" in a negative light, as something to be ignored, or, in the words of one commentator, a category that must be "abolished" (Olson 2002, 395).

Many social scientists have chosen to examine the causes of racialized disadvantage precisely because of its overtly structural nature. And there has been an undeniable historical association between disadvantage and minority status that still pervades social discourse and is too often substantiated in today's realities. So despite dismissive associations with "backwardness" and stereotypes condemning "unclean" and "lazy benefit-hunting mother[s] of several children" (Jones 2011; Wray 2006), white people are also able to claim a rhetorical high ground as their country's "heart and soul" – the people that spilled blood and perspired for a continuing national existence.

As much as the post-industrial Rust Belts of Western countries have become anachronisms, they remain simultaneously revered as the source of enduring Western values of industriousness, sacrifice, and faith. In this way, white people are subject to the same classist tendencies in society as ethno-cultural minorities but, due to their status as an in-group, exist without widespread acknowledgment of the structural circumstances that entrench their deprivation. The "invisibility" of the white working-class position affects how these individuals make political claims and socially define themselves. As Zweig (2000, 61) argues, "when society fails to acknowledge the existence and experience of working people it robs them of an articulate sense of themselves and their place in society." And unlike ethno-cultural minority members of the working class, poor whites are largely deficient of the local social cohesion and compensatory governance mechanisms that attempt to mitigate the effect of marginality on visible minority groups (Fenton et al. 2010).[1]

Post-traumatic cities

The setting for white working-class disempowerment is not uniform, but it is prominent in what I call "post-traumatic" cities. Post-traumatic cities are exurbs and urban communities that lost signature industries in the mid- to late-twentieth century and never really recovered. Examples include Youngstown, Kenosha, Gary, Michigan City, Flint, Toledo, and Erie in the Rust Belt of the USA, and Hull, Hartlepool, Bolton, Blackburn, Wolverhampton, and East London in the UK. At the peak of Western states' manufacturing economies, particular companies or industries employed enough people for a long enough duration that they could single-handedly support these cities' economies. Today, such cities endure as shells – physical manifestations of disempowerment. They simultaneously taunt inhabitants about how good they once had it, and render false hope that they are one big break from returning to glory.

For example, Youngstown, Ohio, was once known as "Steeltown USA." For years, the foundries and furnaces of about a half dozen companies provided not only jobs, but also housing,

loans, supporting industries, philanthropy, and the sites for political organization and social life. A stretch of mills 30 miles long along the Mahoning River developed throughout the late 1800s and early 1900s. Rapid population growth fueled the city's meteoric industrialization, thanks to the arrival of working-class immigrants from every corner of Europe. By 1930, nearly half the city owned their homes, and by the 1940s, Youngstown's population reached 170,000 – about 90% of whom were white (Buss and Redburn 1983, 2; Linkon and Russo 2002, 38).

These circumstances were abruptly interrupted with the swift collapse of Youngstown's steel industry in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In a matter of six years, Ohio State Employment Services estimates that 50,000 jobs were lost in basic steel and related industries, costing Youngstown's working class $1.3 billion in annual manufacturing wages. Unemployment climbed to a staggering 24.9% in 1983 and a wave of personal bankruptcies and foreclosures resulted (Linkon and Russo 2002, 38; Buss and Redburn 1983, 2). The city spiraled into a tailspin characterized by skyrocketing rates of domestic abuse, substance abuse, divorce, suicide, murder, and, ultimately, the mass departure of its population. Today, Youngstown has barely a third of its 1970 population, and about half of its citizens are now black or Latino.

East London was a "Garden City" anchored by major manufacturers that lured white working-class East Enders away from London's congested inner city, which was growing more crowded with the influx of Eastern European Jews and later South Asians. In 1922, May & Baker's chemical plant relocated to Dagenham from Wandsworth. In 1925, the Barking Power House electric station was established in Creekmouth. And in 1931, the Ford Motor Company built a factory on several square miles of Dagenham's riverfront that Edsel Ford (Henry's son) had purchased for £167,700 in 1924 (Hudson 2009). These employers provided dependable jobs for the residents of the new estate, particularly Ford. The population of Dagenham soared from 9000 to 90,000 between 1921 and 1931, and the combined populations of Barking and Dagenham increased another 50% before 1951.

After the mid-1970s, East London's economy went the way of the Ford factory, which endured massive downsizings. As that market declined, unions weakened, labor laws liberalized, and industrial jobs followed a more global move offshore. Britain's post-industrial economy had little use for Barking and Dagenham's white working-class tradesmen, as it shifted to high technology and a broader service sector.

Alongside the economic changes, the borough's demographics also altered. A new generation of residents moved in to take advantage of mortgages and rentals that were a fraction of those in Inner London. While some purchased the homes, many new immigrants were assigned to Council-owned row houses and tower blocks. There were sub-Saharan Africans, Lithuanians, Bosnians, Poles, and South Asian Muslims in each of the borough's wards. By the 2000s, these immigrant groups composed about half the population of East London as an extension of London's globalizing metropolis.

Youngstown and East London are but two examples of a class of cities that have experienced this trauma of a simultaneous economic, social, and political collapse and transformation. There and elsewhere, the white working-class populations I consider are consumed by a destructive nostalgia that expresses bitter resentment toward the big companies that abandoned their city, a government that did little to stop them, and a growing share of African-Americans or immigrants who are altering their neighborhoods' complexion.

Multiple narratives of decline

Multiple rhetorical and scholarly narratives depict the plight of working-class white people in the post-industrial settings of the USA and the UK.

An economic narrative

According to an *economic narrative*, Western re-orientation toward a more service-oriented, high technology, globalized economy since the Second World War required the outsourcing of light manufacturing and basic services to developing nations with minimal labor standards. This economic transformation undermined the social and political strength of white working-class communities by diminishing their ranks, loosening associational life, and jettisoning welfare state support systems which had been in place for the post-World War II decades. The white working-class individuals who adapted to these changes have since joined a reconsolidated social majority of white people and ethnically diverse immigrants comprising globalization's winners (and losers who are at least acquiescent).

Those slower to adapt are commonly understood as the dispersed, unorganized holdouts of an earlier era without access to the benefits of a globalized economy. Over the course of the twentieth century in the UK, the proportion of the working population employed as "manual workers" fell from 75% to 38%, while the proportion of professionals and managers rose from 8% to 34% (Sveinsson 2009). According to Abramowitz and Teixeira's consideration of the USA (2009, 394–395), in 1940, 74% of employed workers were white without professional or managerial jobs. By 2006, that percentage plummeted to 43%. In 1940, 86% of adults 25 years old and over were white and without a four-year college degree. By 2007, that percentage declined to 48% (Abramowitz and Teixeira 2009). In 1947, 86% of American families were white families with less than $60,000 in income (in 2005 dollars). In contrast, that percentage declined to 33% by 2005 (Abramowitz and Teixeira 2009).

The post-industrial middle classes have therefore swelled with heterogeneous white communities and upwardly mobile immigrant-origin peoples who are increasingly integrating into a largely inclusive capitalist meritocracy that has elevated standards of living and altered social solidarities. This transformation not only shrunk the community of those understanding themselves as "white working class;" it also splintered the broader working class into an aspirational immigrant stratum and the enduring remainder of poor white natives.

A moral narrative

A *moral narrative* characterizes poor white people as antagonists clinging to the unfair advantages of an earlier time. Resistant to progressive change in order to maintain power over ethno-cultural minorities, poor white people are conventionally portrayed as the last vestige of the most forgettable era in twentieth century social history – what Usherwood (2007) described as the

> amoral and apolitical section in society who are neither deserving nor poor. It is a group that is against learning, anti-intellectual, and comprised of individuals who – in the words of one commentator – "despise browns and blacks (especially if they are making something of their lives) and also education, enlightenment and internationalism." (Alibhai-Brown 2007)

Accordingly, poor white people represent an antagonist to the often equally poor ethno-cultural minority groups – groups that have worked to gain equal footing through efforts like the continuing civil rights movement. More subtly, white aristocrats, whose antecedents may have once supported policies of exclusion and rose to elite status through prejudiced systems of education and promotion, vilified poor whites (See Jones 2011; Wray 2006). In the drive to counterbalance historical discrimination, both minority groups and white elites have thereby separated themselves from poor white people to account for misdeeds in which working-class white people had a lesser hand.

Specifically, white members of the "underclass" have been singled out as behaviorally or morally inferior. Murray (2012) describes the white underclass, and its deviant norms: "In the years after 1960, America developed something new: a white lower class that did not consist of a fringe, but of a substantial part of what was formerly the working-class population." Murray goes on to describe the deviant characteristics of this new white underclass at length. First, he contends that the members of this white underclass violate the traditional American norm of industriousness. A higher and higher percentage of these white individuals are claiming disability benefits or are employed in "less-than-full-time work," and Murray notes that this is especially true among less-educated white males (Murray 2012, 171, 176).

Furthermore, the labor force participation rate has decreased considerably in the white underclass, again with less-educated white males leaving the labor force in much greater numbers (Murray 2012, 172–173). According to Murray, these trends cannot simply be explained away by citing macroeconomic conditions, since the overall economy grew well enough throughout most of the period in question (1960-present) (179–180). Instead, Murray argues that these trends are a sign that the American norm of industriousness "has softened" in the white underclass: "White males of the 2000s were less industrious than they had been twenty, thirty, or fifty years ago," he writes, "and … the decay in the industriousness occurred overwhelmingly [among the least educated]" (181).

Beyond work habits, Murray cites the deterioration of American norms with regards to religiosity and marriage. He writes that

> White America as a whole became more secular between 1960 and 2010, especially from the beginning of the 1990s. Despite the common belief that the working class is the most religious group in white American society, the drift from religiosity was far greater in [working class America] … . (200; see Wilcox 2010, 48–49 for further supporting evidence)

Since church-going is a major source of social capital, the decline in religiosity directly impacts the environmental tools available to members of the white underclass, and therefore has serious implications for individual prospects in social mobility. Similarly, Murray and others point to a deterioration of the institution of marriage within the white underclass. Lower status whites are much more likely to get divorced within 10 years of marriage, have children out of wedlock, and report unhappiness with their current marriage (See Douthat and Salam 2008; Wilcox 2010). To put the scale of these trends into perspective, the extra-marital birth rate among white American mothers with a college degree has remained nearly constant at 5% since the 1960s. Meanwhile, the rate of extra-marital births among white American mothers without a high school diploma is now 60% (Murray 2012, 161–162; also, see Douthat and Salam 2008, 134).

Scholars and other commentators who have highlighted the deviant norms of lower status whites may do so primarily as a way to draw boundaries that are meant to justify working-class whites' lower social position. And yet, at the same time, other accounts focus on deteriorating mores in an attempt to signal a brewing crisis within the white working class itself. It is often difficult to distinguish between these two agendas. Independent of the underlying objective, however, it is consequential that more attention is being paid to the norms of a white underclass (Jones 2011; Murray 2012), in a manner similar to treatment of poor racial and ethno-religious minority groups.

A demographic narrative

This dichotomous moral narrative obscures an important *demographic narrative*. Before the Second World War, many industrialized societies were largely racially homogenous, and

mainstream social divisions were grounded in differences of religious sect or white ethnicity (native nationals, along with people of Jewish, Irish, Mediterranean, Levantine, and Eastern European origin). Indeed, from Revolutionary days through 2004, a majority of Americans were white and had concluded their education before obtaining a four-year college degree (Brownstein 2011). Even as late as the 1990 census, whites without a college degree represented more than three-fifths of American adults. However, with the steady influx of immigrants to compensate for a depleted post-war labor supply, attenuating native fertility rates, and a fledgling global economy, the fault lines of socio-political relations shifted (See Kaufmann 2004).

With the end of the Second World War, an amalgam of ethnic white groups emerged as an expanding middle class. They occupied the industrial working classes of the USA and parts of Western Europe and were boosted by dual-income families, elevated life expectancy, and steady economic growth. Over time, immigrants from disparate countries of origin, spanning Latin America and East Asia in the USA, South Asia in the UK, North Africa in Western Europe, and Turkey in Central Europe, replaced these ethnic whites. Since the early waves of immigration to Western industrialized democracies took place, these societies have grappled with the acknowledged challenge of socially, politically, and economically integrating diverse peoples into post-industrial economies and societies organized around equal rights. Accordingly, social hierarchies metamorphosed. Whether white people's working-class status is defined according to education-, occupation-, or income-based standards, a 30–50% decline in the relative size of this group from the World War II era to today in the USA has transpired (Abramowitz and Teixeira 2009, 395).

An electoral narrative

An *electoral narrative* emphasizes that even with the decline of the British and American manufacturing industries and the countries' ongoing demographic change, white working-class people still comprise a significant sector of the voting public. They represent at least one-third of the American people as of 2005, depending on how working-class status is understood:

- 36% of Americans are white people without college degrees holding non-salaried jobs (Jones and Cox 2012).
- 33% of American families are white households earning less than $60,000 per year (Abramowitz and Teixeira 2009);
- 43% of Americans are white people without professional or managerial jobs (Abramowitz and Teixeira 2009);
- 48% of Americans are white people without a four-year college degree (Abramowitz and Teixeira 2009).

As a result, this subset of the American electorate is a key determinant of electoral outcomes, but nevertheless one that remains misunderstood and under-mobilized. Even though nearly 50% of the US population is white and without a college degree, this group made up only 39% of voters in 2008 and 35% of voters in the 2010 election (CNN 2008, 2010). This is true despite the fact that white Americans are disproportionately of voting age vis-à-vis non-white Americans. The British white working class is even larger. According to the 2011 Census, white British people make up 80.5% of all Britons and, unlike Americans, the British working class has shown a propensity to identify as "working class" even when they are employed in middle class occupations, some of which require some higher education.

Multiple means of disempowerment

White working-class people's disempowerment is entrenched in three primary ways – (1) by systemic forces, (2) by rhetorical and psychological forces, and (3) by political forces. By identifying each of these, we see how they compound to reinforce white working-class marginality.

Systemic entrenchment

A review of recent scholarship about inequality in the UK and the USA exhibits how socioeconomic conditions (among both white and non-white communities) may be entrenched by key processual dynamics and structures of the political system. These conditions exist from the highest echelons of power down to individual preferences. Gilens presents evidence of what he describes as an "elite-led democracy" where, consistently, government policy is more strongly related to the preferences of higher income voters (2005, 788–789). However, even if democratic governing bodies better reflected the interests of both the poor and the rich, economic inequality could still prove to be self-reinforcing. Kelly and Enns (2010, 856) conclude that this is the case, due to how the preferences of both the rich and the poor respond to changes in income inequality. They find a distinct tendency in the American populace to oppose redistribution in the face of rising inequality with a significant negative correlation between economic inequality and public opinion favoring redistribution. Surprisingly, this relationship holds for individuals in both the top and the bottom quintiles of income. Taken together, such trends enable political agenda-setting by elites – a mechanism of control defined by Gaventa as "the second dimension of power" (1980, 9–11). Agenda setting allows elites to exclude grievances or issues from the relevant decision-making arenas by "controlling the rules of the game," considered by Gaventa to be a set of predominant values, beliefs, rituals, and institutional procedures. These act as barriers preventing the dominated group from even participating in the decision-making process.

When they have a say about economic assistance from the government, white working-class communities are prone to "welfare chauvinism," whereby xenophobia distracts or derails redistributive agendas that would otherwise benefit them. Studies find that more ethnically heterogeneous societies display lower levels of support for redistributive welfare (Freeman 2009, 2–5).[2]

While the phenomenon of welfare chauvinism reflects the salience of income-oriented political divisions, this fault line is complicated by emerging cultural divisions. Gelman (2008) shows that where income is not an accurate predictor of American electoral behavior, we see voters (especially those in richer states) voting against their economic interests to support social or culturally aligned agendas. Under these circumstances cultural considerations can be so important that income and voter choice has no correlation (Gelman 2008, 18). For example, in richer states higher income is associated with being less religious and more socially liberal, causing many higher-income voters to be pulled toward democratic candidates who are also supportive of greater wealth redistribution. Inversely, many poorer voters in the USA are attracted to the socio-cultural agendas of Republican policy-makers, who simultaneously oppose further wealth redistribution (Gelman 2008, 83; also see Inglehart and Welzel 2005, 3). Explaining such trends, Saffran (1977, 10) contends that because working-class people tend to be predominantly liberal on economic issues and predominantly conservative on most social issues, an increase in the salience of social issues will encourage these individuals to vote against their own economic self-interest.

Some scholars contend that the lower class members of majority groups tend to organize around their social issues through their ethno-religious identity because of a lack of achieved occupational identity. Yiftakel (2000), for example, observes that the economic and social marginalization of oriental Jews in Israel has given rise to political movements that emphasize Sephardi

Jewishness. Brodkin (1994, 86–89) traces how Jewish immigrants in the USA embraced whiteness as part of their transition into the middle class. Roediger (1991, 137) describes how Irish immigrants in the 1800s came to "insist on their own whiteness and on white supremacy" as a bulwark against association with the black laboring underclass in the USA. Described as "low-browed," "savage," "bestial," and "wild," Irish immigrants depended on the white racial label to secure political rights, keep treasured jobs, and to remain at least one step ahead of their black co-workers on the socioeconomic ladder (Roediger 1991, 133–136). Ignatiev (1995, 96) writes along similar lines, tracing the Irish immigrant turn to whiteness as protection against "slavery" of wage labor. And Vecoli (1995) discusses the socioeconomically advantageous recasting of Italian Americans as whites. Wright (2004, 36) contends that poor or lower middle-class white Americans continue to glean "vital psychic income" by identifying with those of an upper class who happen to share similar "external characteristics."

Using the concept of "assortative migration," Bishop argues that internal migration in the USA serves as a mechanism for Americans to sort themselves into more homogeneous "tribes," a process that generates segregation. Critically, this sorting process leads to segregation (by income, belief system, political affiliation, etc.) and entrenchment inevitably results. The effects of this sorting and resulting segregation are profound. In terms of opinions and beliefs (political, social, religious, etc.) the grouping of like-minded people may act as a positive feedback loop. Indeed, research in social psychology suggests that "as people [hear] their beliefs reflected and amplified, they … become more extreme in their thinking" (Bishop 2008, 6). This in turn leads to more intense polarization, and a lack of common ground that makes (sometimes violent) anti-system political behavior more likely (20–21; see Gest 2010). Perhaps more specifically relevant to our discussion of socioeconomic entrenchment is the fact that the American population is simultaneously being sorted along socioeconomic lines.

While a certain level of segregation by income and education has always been present in American society, Bishop and others now warn that this trend is accelerating beyond any historical precedent – in part, as a result of modern transportation, social insurance programs, and a more efficient "college sorting machine" (Bishop 2008, 11). Murray also cites the dramatic rise of "superZips," ZIP codes in which residents earn on average in the 95th–99th percentile of household income. At the same time, the lower status groups are also re-sorting themselves geographically along class lines (Bishop 2008, 135). Over time, this self-segregation results in further socioeconomic entrenchment, in part because the chances for social mobility that are created by the mixing of different types of people are diminished, and perhaps also because society is also being divided by cognitive ability, as Charles Murray more controversially suggests (61).

While Bishop, Murray, and others have highlighted many important effects (political, economic, social, etc.) of internal migration and population "sorting," their preliminary investigations leave important gaps unexplained. For instance, how do these migration trends influence political behavior on the individual level? As previously noted, Bishop suggests that the decreased common ground and increased extremism associated with segregation along ideological lines may increase the likelihood that individuals turn to active, anti-system behavior. Current scholarship does not provide a model for how such demographic trends might alter political behavior. And yet, if resource-oriented understandings of political behavior are correct, such transformations hold serious implications for the psychological orientations that promote civic engagement (and disengagement).

Psychological and rhetorical entrenchment

Given the growing inequality in developed states, recent scholarship demonstrates a set of paradoxical tendencies among actors that reinforce immobility. An emerging sociological and

psychological literature on "system justification theory" traces people's tendency to support and justify the status quo, particularly inequality and social hierarchies. Jost and Hunyady (2005, 263, 264) argue that most people, from both advantaged and disadvantaged groups, possess at least some motivation to see the social, economic, and political arrangements around them as fair and legitimate. This tendency to "justify" the current social system is driven by people's desire to reduce uncertainty and threat by maintaining what is familiar, thereby providing psychological benefits such as increased satisfaction at the individual level (Jost and Hunyady 2005, 262). The mechanism by which people engage in system-justification consists in forming stereotypes that rationalize social and economic status differences between groups. These stereotypes come about by attributing more moral worth to the advantaged than to the disadvantaged (Jost, Banaji, and Nosek 2004, 894, 912).

However, even if white working-class constituencies were to develop a sense of collective grievance and a desire to organize, they continue to lack a defined identity around which they may mobilize. The importance of a strong identity around which to organize is highlighted by the experiences of African-Americans in the USA as described by Dawson (1995). He attributes much of the unity of African-American political behavior to their "linked fate." According to this logic, where prospects of success were deemed to be determined by one's race, that which is good for the racial community is also good for the individual (Dawson 1995, 81). Similarly, Lamont (2000, 20–21) argues that black working-class individuals exhibit a more "collectivist" morality than their white counterparts, a unity formed around black "cultural resources" such as the shared experience of "fighting together against racial segregation and discrimination." White workers who do not have access to these same collective cultural resources and subsequently tend to embrace a more individualistic moral code.

It has also been shown that communities at the bottom of social hierarchies may be further disincentivized to act politically because of certain psychological tendencies. Laurin, Fitzsimons, and Aaron (2010) have shown how beliefs in the fairness of socio-political conditions impact people's motivation to pursue and willingness to invest resources in long-term goals, which are recognized as being fundamental to psychological and physical well-being. Fairness beliefs, they find, are more important to the motivation of members of disadvantaged groups when pursuing long-term goals, because their chances of success are more likely to be determined by fairness of opportunity (Laurin, Fitzsimons, and Aaron 2010, 165).

Such perceptions also connect with psychological research on individuals' "locus of control" or their understanding of the extent to which they can control events that affect their life (See Rotter 1990). A sense of powerlessness, in turn, may encourage withdrawal from the political sphere, which then further diminishes the power of that group. Indeed, Zweig notes that feeling powerless within the political sphere results in the belief that politics is a waste of energy (2000, 166) – a belief that may derive from a number of different sources, including perceptions about the influence of corporations or wealthy individuals, perceptions on government corruption or incompetence, or even broader feelings about the efficacy of the political system. As I previously suggest, these beliefs may be reinforced or amplified in communities where like-minded working-class individuals reside.

White working-class communities' tendency to self-segregate or justify their disadvantage is reinforced – or perhaps inspired – by similar trends in social discourse that crystallize class tensions. In deconstructing the rhetorical treatment of white people, Wray (2006) details how over time the most disadvantaged "white people" have been cognitively categorized as an out-group. Terms such as "white trash" are evidence of the symbolic distancing and social exclusion of the lowest status white citizens (Wray 2006, 134). This symbolic boundary can, with enough social power, become institutionalized and therefore lead to unequal opportunities for those stigmatized by the stereotype. If we again consider psychological research, there is a tendency for

people to fulfill the characteristics of a stereotype more than they otherwise would if the stereotype did not exist (Steele 1997).

Political entrenchment

With a set of structural conditions that hardens social hierarchies and a set of perceptive tendencies that inhibit dissent and activism, white working-class communities possess limited resources and fewer outlets for political engagement. Indeed, the extant circumstances compound to reinforce each other and exert downward pressure. In his comprehensive consideration of political opinion, Zaller (1992) reveals the dynamics of marginalized communities' dismissal by political opinion leaders. His model suggests that individuals with low political awareness are less likely to change their attitudes over political issues, primarily because of the low probability of political communication filtering through to them. Political parties consequently tend to divert their efforts to citizens with higher levels of reception to their outreach, typically those in the middle classes and above. The implication of this trend is that marginalized communities are ignored. Conversely, Goodwin (2011) reveals that many poor white British voters experienced more face-to-face contact with extremist party campaigners than those from mainstream parties, who lack an active and visible presence in poor white communities.

Such findings hold true for the marginalized independent of their ethno-cultural identity. In his consideration of African-Americans, Dawson (1995) shows how the poor may be funneled into political organizations that do not accurately represent their interests or views due to a deficiency of group-specific outlets for political expression. Despite finding class-based differences in African-American public opinion, he notes that isolation on the left of the political spectrum could mask important political cleavages within the black community (Dawson 1995, 181). While the Democratic Party is the only viable mainstream partisan outlet for African-Americans, poor white Britons are perhaps even more restricted today. During thirteen years of Labour Government from 1996 to 2010, little attention was paid to the plight of the white working-class – the party's one-time base – and the UK's inequality gap expanded. However, options became slim with the unlikely coalition of Conservatives – long viewed as averse to working-class agendas – and Liberal Democrats – who have a mixed relationship with poor whites anyway, given the party's views on European integration and immigration. Such circumstances relate to the earlier argument advanced by Templeton (1966, 256) that the traditional two-party political system does not allow a significant proportion of the electorate to express their political views with their vote. Given the trends discussed above, it is reasonable to expect poor white people to be among the least represented.

Because people are thinking beyond the paradigms provided by political parties today, individuals are increasingly able to define their political views separately from organized agendas (Inglehart and Welzel 2005). In order to pursue alternative agendas, activists are engaging in largely informal means including internet-based petitions, demonstrations, boycotts, and blogging rather than party campaigning, associational membership, and letters to policy-makers. While Inglehart and Welzel argue that these shifting means of political activism should placate fears of widespread civic disengagement and a "crisis of democracy" (2005, 117), it is questionable how much access under-resourced communities have to such efforts. The under-resourced tend to lack a sense of internal and external political efficacy, lack access to new tools of self-expression, and lack the disposable time and energy of middle class citizens. At the same time, as previously noted, individuals of lower socioeconomic status feel a deficiency of influence because of the notion that the government is controlled by rich campaign donors and "corporate influence" (Zweig 2000, 166).

In the past 10 years, we have subsequently witnessed the rising salience and support of radical right and populist political parties in Europe and similar movements in sentiment in the USA.

Ford and Goodwin (2010, 3) recognize rising support for the British National Party among white working-class voters in the UK. Similarly, Sniderman, Hagendoorn, and Prior (2004) show how the growth of ethnic minorities in Western European countries has, in several countries, driven increased support for extreme right-wing parties. Despite this support, Givens (2005) argues that the success of radical right parties across countries is largely determined by differences in these countries electoral systems. Proportional representation electoral systems and conditions where two main parties form coalition governments both reduce strategic voting among radical rightists, who instead may feel incentivized to back a fringe candidate (Givens 2005, 100). However, in electoral systems like those of the USA and the UK, the relative difficulty of supporting such parties and movements (and their subsequent lack of success) has led significant numbers of individuals to disengage from the political process completely.

Minoritization

White working class claims of minority status range from the subtle to the blatant, but nearly all pertain to three phenomena:

Outnumbering: White working class people recognize the steady deterioration of their numbers. This is a national phenomenon, as increasing proportions of all population groups are attaining higher levels of education and white people are comprising a decreasing share of national populations (Kaufmann 2004). By 2040, the US Census estimates that white people generally will number less than fifty percent of the American population. However, this is more conventionally a local matter, when demographic change alters the share of white working class people in neighborhoods and cities. Such change is attributable to variable birthrates, foreigners' immigration and native emigration to other parts of a region or country.

Externality: White working class people are sensitive to their exclusion from consultation and representation – not only in bodies of representative government, but also more generally in popular entertainment, public institutions and employment. They are wary that the same principles of equal access and representation that compensate for other groups' disadvantages do not apply to them. Congressmen who have previously belonged to the working class comprise only two percent of Congress (Carnes 2012). *The Washington Post* reports that between 1984 and 2009, the median net worth of a member of the House grew from $280,000 to $725,000 in inflation-adjusted dollars, while the wealth of an American family slightly declined from $20,600 to $20,500 (Whoriskey 2011). As a result, government and business feel distant, clubby, and unwelcoming.

Subjection to prejudice: White working class people believe they are frequently subject to conscious or unconscious prejudgment by members of ethnic minorities, but also by middle- and upper-class white people (Gest 2015). They believe that such prejudice affects their ability to get hired for jobs, receive equal treatment by officials and businesses, and access government benefits like housing or welfare (Gest 2015). Sometimes, this is also a matter of the special treatment white working class people believe members of non-white minorities receive – such as scholarships, employment, exemptions or leniencies, and government contracting.

Most fascinating is that many white working-class people plead for an equal society in the language of the American civil rights movement – with references to Martin Luther King, equality, fairness, and color-blindness (Gest 2015). This indeed turns the tables of racial politics. And yet, our closer examination above suggests that, equally so, the tables have been turned on the white working-class.

Research challenges

These circumstances pose two primary challenges for researchers' and commentators' consideration of white working-class politics and social affairs. First, the state of white working-class people's politics and social affairs expands conventional considerations of minority groups. It leads us to question whether minoritization is – alongside socioeconomic disadvantage, histories of disempowerment, sociocultural discrimination and situated demography – also a matter of race. If so, it suggests the limitation of its use as a universal social scientific concept. For how useful is a concept that cannot be applied across populations? If minority status is not necessarily a matter of race, it demands the consideration of alternative claims of minority status from a group that similarly experiences disempowerment and forms of disadvantage.

Second, the objective study of white working-class people demands that the observer reasonably considers claims of disadvantage. While we are obligated to contextualize and even vet the assertions made by our respondents, we are also obligated to resist the discounting of these claims on grounds of moral judgment. Scholars of minority politics and social affairs generally maintain a sense of empathy (or at least understanding) that heightens their sensitivity to subjects' disadvantage and their self-perceptions, despite their subjects' demonstrated flaws. The challenge is to sustain this empathy for the primary antagonist of the subjects we are accustomed to examining.

Indeed, white working-class people complicate conventional understandings about marginality because the social and political system is one that they believe they helped build, and one that rendered them a structural advantage for centuries. This remains true even though working-class white people were nevertheless subject to alternative forms of disadvantage. In response to a perceived loss of social, economic, and political status, the last decade has witnessed white working-class communities' engagement in efforts to reclaim the high ground of cultural politics. The British National Party developed a foothold in several English constituencies and boroughs, leading to the actual election of numerous municipal councilors and one member of European Parliament in the UK. Many of their supporters now back the United Kingdom Independent Party (UKIP). In the USA, white working-class constituencies have swayed several national and congressional election campaigns in the "swing states" that determine presidential campaigns. Simultaneously, white working-class communities have engaged in political violence through organizations like the English Defence League in the UK and "sovereign citizen" or "survivalist" groups across the American countryside. There has also been extensive disillusionment from the democratic political arena, leading to the aforementioned lower civic participation levels and organizational apathy. These trends and these individuals are too important to exclude from systematic examination in the field of social and minority politics.

How does this change minority politics research?

How might mainstream research on minority groups look different if scholars examined the white working class as a minority? Most essentially, minority status would be more about power than numbers or optics. This is hardly revolutionary. Few scholars of Middle East politics treat the Palestinians of Jordan as a dominant majority, despite numbering over two-thirds of the country's population. Despite their number, Palestinian Jordanians have been subjected to systematic discrimination and second-class status in a country ruled by the Hashemite dynasty and their Bedouin collaborators (Zahran 2012). Congruently, as a result of their prosperity and upward mobility the USA, Japanese, Jewish, Cuban, Armenian and Iranian Americans are largely absent from discussions of disempowerment, despite their small numbers. Indeed, if minority politics is sensitive to these groups' ascendance, then it is reasonable to suggest sensitivity to another group's disempowerment.

A further difference is the extension of minority politics scholars' consideration of actors' perceptions to working-class white people. Scholars of minority politics in the USA already solicit the attitudes of their subjects to ascertain their perceptions of discrimination (e.g., Schildkraut 2005), group consciousness (e.g., Avery 2006; Sanchez 2008), and linked fate (e.g., Jones-Correa 2011; Masuoka 2006). Rather than evaluate the validity of these attitudes, scholars evaluate these attitudes' capacity to explain political behavior, social relations, and other phenomena. As I argue in my consideration of white working-class perspectives, this does not require normative agreement or empirical verification of these attitudes; it merely requires acknowledgement of their existence and their impact.

A final difference is the broadening of the conversation that minority politics scholars have begun with scholars of class and inequality – a primary attempt of this journal issue. As I have emphasized above, ethno-cultural differences and visible differences do not always align with differences in class. However, power differences do frequently overlap or interact with inequality and resource discrepancies. Consulting theories of inequality can only strengthen the depth and range of minority politics research, which is so often contextualized by various other forms of inequity.

The disempowerment of white working-class people in North America and Europe takes a path that distinguishes these communities from the more traditional subjects of minority politics scholarship. However, their contemporary sense of outnumbering, externality, and prejudice connects them to principal themes in the consideration of other disempowered groups. And their systematic, rhetorical, psychological, and political entrenchment in this disadvantaged state suggests that the circumstances are related to – and may be examined in a similar manner as – those of the disempowered minorities who preceded them.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes

1. This state of affairs can again be traced back to conceptions of racialized poverty. When race is used as a proxy for socioeconomic status it is assumed that the white working class individual benefits from the same advantages as whites in the upper echelons of society. Indeed, it is imagined that they share in a form of "cross-class alliance" (Olson 2002, 395) that maintains their privileged status. And yet, when this proves not to be the case, the white working class individual may be left with little opportunity for recourse and great capacity for resentment.
2. Three theories are advanced in the literature to explain this trend. First "in-group out-group theory" explains how humans have a propensity to classify others relative to themselves as either members of a common group (in-group members) or members of a different group (out-group members). People are more likely to discriminate against and distrust out-group members. Second, "neo-Darwinian theory" follows a similar logic but makes the concrete assumption that people instinctively prefer members of their own ethno-cultural group. Third, "reciprocal altruism" theory proposes that people will in turn cooperate and help people who have cooperated or helped them in the past.

   Several authors (Gilens 1999; Van der Waal, Achterbergand, and Van Oorschot 2011) support the reciprocal altruism hypothesis, without dismissing the role of racial stereotypes on the construction of white working class identity. Gilens (1999, 173) concludes that the violation of reciprocal altruism or the belief that welfare recipients are undeserving is the key factor underlying opposition to welfare in the USA. He goes on to argue that white opposition to welfare programs is reflective of widespread perceptions that African-Americans are the largest recipients of welfare and negative stereotypes that African-Americans are typically lazy and therefore undeserving (Gilens 1999, 113). Similar results can be found in Europe (Lamont 2000; Van der Waal, Achterbergand, and Van Oorschot 2011, 16). In countries with the most generous unemployment benefits, the unemployment level of immigrants is positively related to the welfare chauvinism of natives. The perception that ethnic minorities don't put in what they take

out of the welfare system is the dominant explanation for opposition to welfare. Interestingly, Van der Waal et al. find that neither a country's proportion of non-Western immigrants nor its proportion of less-educated immigrants is correlated with levels of welfare chauvinism. They therefore conclude that neither the ethno-racial composition nor educational background of a population holds any effect on public opinion (2011, 13–14).

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