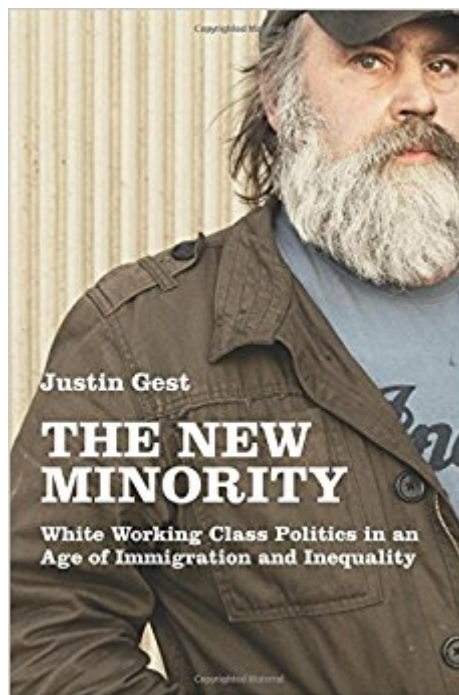




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The New Minority: White Working Class Politics In An Age Of Immigration And Inequality



Synopsis

It wasn't so long ago that the white working class occupied the middle of British and American societies. But today members of the same demographic, feeling silenced and ignored by mainstream parties, have moved to the political margins. In the United States and the United Kingdom, economic disenfranchisement, nativist sentiments and fear of the unknown among this group have even inspired the creation of new right-wing parties and resulted in a remarkable level of support for fringe political candidates, most notably Donald Trump. Answers to the question of how to rebuild centrist coalitions in both the U.S. and U.K. have become increasingly elusive. How did a group of people synonymous with Middle Britain and Middle America drift to the ends of the political spectrum? What drives their emerging radicalism? And what could possibly lead a group with such enduring numerical power to, in many instances, consider themselves a "minority" in the countries they once defined? In *The New Minority*, Justin Gest speaks to people living in once thriving working class cities--Youngstown, Ohio and Dagenham, England--to arrive at a nuanced understanding of their political attitudes and behaviors. In this daring and compelling book, he makes the case that tension between the vestiges of white working class power and its perceived loss have produced the unique phenomenon of white working class radicalization.

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Customer Reviews

"The New Minority is a considered piece of research. [Gest's] study turns a valuable spotlight on what media and politicians on both sides of the Atlantic have begun to call "the left behind"." --Times

Higher Education "Justin Gest brings to his craft a rare combination of scientific rigor and journalistic storytelling, which is why *The New Minority* stands out. It's a deeply revealing account of what's happened in our communities and in our politics." --Matt Bai, national political columnist for Yahoo News, and author of *All the Truth Is Out: The Week Politics Went Tabloid* "With both sympathy and objectivity, Justin Gest explains the tragedy beneath the anger of the white working class. They have not only lost good jobs and incomes, but also their middle class social status and the respect-and gratitude-of the larger society. Political elites pretend to be surprised and bewildered by them. Yet it is those same governing elites who engineered this great injury to working people. This will be illuminating reading for anyone who seeks to understand the motivations and the possible impact of this 'new minority,' particularly in light of the upcoming presidential election." --Bill Greider, national correspondent for *The Nation*, and author of *One World, Ready or Not: The Manic Logic of Global Capitalism* "An incredibly timely book. White working class dynamics explain the populist right surge and centre-Left slump in Europe. They underpin rising white suicide rates and Trump support in America. Justin Gest asks poor whites the penetrating questions that help us understand." --Eric Kaufmann, University of London, author of *Changing Places: The White British Response to Ethnic Change* "In *The New Minority*, Justin Gest transcends the usual arguments about the defensiveness and disaffection of the working class to develop a schema for understanding multiple forms of white working class political expression. Based on a fascinating set of interviews with working class residents of London and Youngstown, Ohio, Gest deftly connects their voices of frustration and resignation to their political beliefs and behavior. The result is an important analysis of an increasingly vocal and visible group in American and British politics." --Monica McDermott, Department of Sociology, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign "White working-class resistance movements are convulsing politics in the U.S. and Europe- Donald Trump, neo-fascism, anti-immigrant backlash, white identity politics. What's driving it? Gest's book gets to the core of the matter: the experience of marginalization and the sense of loss. He gets there, not just by analyzing data, but by actually talking to working class people and grasping the texture of their lives." --Bill Schneider, veteran political journalist, and Visiting Professor of Communication Studies, University of California, Los Angeles

Justin Gest is Assistant Professor of Public Policy at George Mason University's Schar School of Policy and Government. He is also the author of *Apart: Alienated and Engaged Muslims in the West*.

This is a very timely book and deserves to be read by anyone who seeks a thoughtful and data-driven explanation of Donald Trump's appeal to voters. The author reports on some very scholarly sociological research on the disaffected white working class in two failing communities (Youngstown, Ohio and East London, UK). The first part of the book is a bit ponderous, and reader's confidence may be unsettled by an amazing proof reading failure (The cells in crucial Table 2.1 are mixed up left for right.) The author also occasionally resorts to neologisms that are disruptive. Nevertheless the book moves steadily and with increasing clarity to the final two chapters which are definitely worth reading. The book is current enough (2016) to draw specific conclusions about the Trump phenomenon and make specific recommendations to the party leaders in the US and UK.

Raising questions and fostering debates around the ways that class, the intersection between race and gender may never have been more important or relevant than they will be in 2017. In the wake of a Donald Trump victory and a looming Brexit-shaped Britain, there has been a rush to understand "the white working class" and it has centered around this group's "failings". Their failure to understand a wider political argument, i.e., their failure to grasp the "truth" of good old political rhetoric and their failure to realize that they are racist when they talk "or alternatively don't talk" about immigration. In the next few years, there will be a plethora of research, journalistic literature and social comment on the subject. But there is a warning to heed here: reactive and non-critical debate will tell us little, even as it marginalizes and divides communities. "The New Minority" is a considered piece of research, and public policy scholar Justin Gest has long had an interest in what he describes as "the new minority". Gest's study turns a valuable spotlight on what media and politicians on both sides of the Atlantic have begun to call "the left behind". The book's main focus is Youngstown in Ohio, although Gest also spent time in the UK and undertook qualitative research in Dagenham in East London. He argues that the centrist approach to politics has "driven voters to the fringes". Although the white working class have traditionally been markers of a center ground in national politics, he says, they are now voting for right-wing politics in increasingly significant numbers. The key question Gest asks is whether the white working class are voting for these politics because of their own racism, or in reaction to the failings of capitalism and the economic decline of industrial areas both in the US and the UK. Gest draws on the oral histories of his respondents to contextualize family traditions and the political and economic landscapes of Youngstown and Dagenham. The outlook for those he encounters is far from optimistic and he

makes clear that the fear and uncertainty that has gripped deindustrialized communities does not appear to be subsiding “ and it is this climate that has destabilized mainstream politics. I enjoyed this book, and I’m grateful to Gest for willingly entering into a debate that has recently become very tricky and divisive in both academia and political discourse. However, I am unsure to what extent the white working class really are increasingly supporting right-wing political agendas, and "The New Minority" does not prove its case that they are. For me, personally, the book’s most important argument is its critique of the failings of mainstream political agendas, and in particular the failure of Republicans and conservatives to tackle or understand the importance of the mechanisms of mobility. As for the Democrats and center left, their challenge is to draw white working class voters into their diverse coalition by convincing them that the challenges they are experiencing, at both household and workplace level, are general working-class challenges that have very little to do with being white.

Liked the methodology comparing and contrasting London, U.K., and Youngstown Ohio USA. Appendices were scholarly but of minor interest. A readable book on an especially important subject after the recent election.

Forgotten factory workers and their personal perception of their status in society is an important point made, or identified, by this book. When people lose their job and income and see their lives falling apart they react in strange ways, many times not in their own best interest. They try to maintain their position in the social hierarchy of their community or group. They resent anything that reminds them that they are sinking, or losing their position, in the new economy for which they have no knowledge, skills, or abilities. Something must be done to help them while maintaining their self respect, pride, and their self perception of social position. The politician that figures this out will be in a very strong position.

Very disturbing to realize how disempowered and abandoned the white working class feels and how justified it is. Pointing out their misconceptions, errors, etc. would only reinforce their conviction that the "elites" favor other groups. But the solution to their economic plight involves geographic mobility and retraining which means stepping out of peasant identity or community. Their social exclusion, based on speech, manners, daily habits is even more woven into identity (See Hillbilly! Elegy). For all its faults, the Victorian Age tried bringing middle class culture to workers. First "elites" must gain trust by deserving it.

A very interesting look at the Trump base from an international point of view. Requires careful reading in some spots.

Awesome book, really puts things into perspective.

Current and thought provoking

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