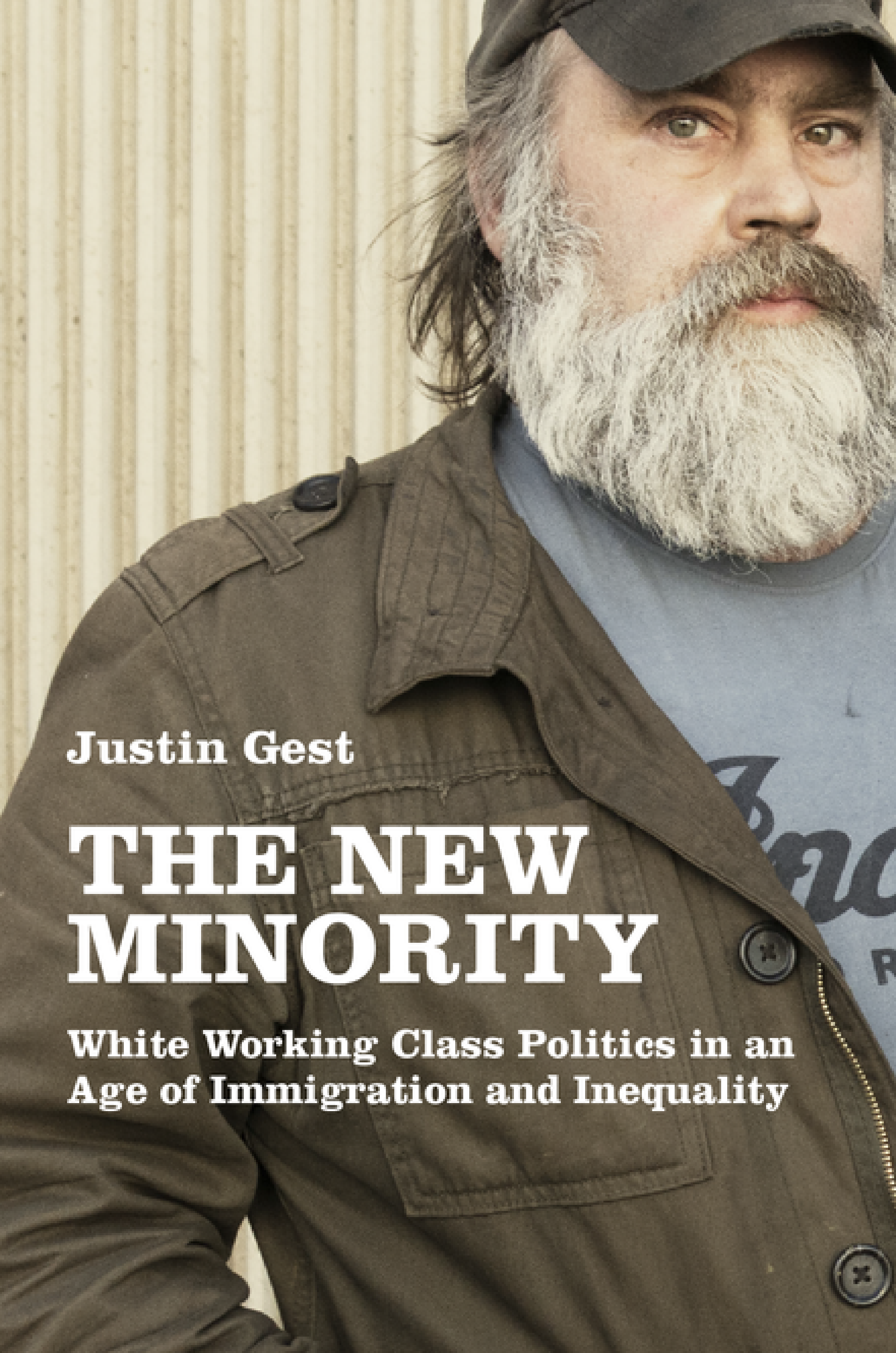

Justin Gest

THE NEW MINORITY

White Working Class Politics in an Age of Immigration and Inequality

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OXFORD
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Published in the United States of America by Oxford University Press
198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016, United States of America.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Gest, Justin, author.
Title: The new minority : white working class politics in an age of immigration and inequality / Justin Gest.
Description: New York, NY : Oxford University Press, 2016. |
Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2016010130 (print) | LCCN 2016022736 (ebook) |
ISBN 9780190632540 (hardcover : alk. paper) | ISBN 9780190632557 (pbk. : alk. paper) |
ISBN 9780190632564 (Updf) | ISBN 9780190632571 (Epub)
Subjects: LCSH: Working class—Political activity—Great Britain. | Working class—Political activity—United States. | Whites—Great Britain—Politics and government. | Whites—United States—Politics and government. | Whites—Great Britain—Social conditions. | Whites—United States—Social conditions. | Right wing extremists—Great Britain. | Right wing extremists—United States.
Classification: LCC HD8395 .G47 2016 (print) | LCC HD8395 (ebook) | DDC 324.086/230941—dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2016010130

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Paperback printed by WebCom, Inc., Canada
Hardback printed by Bridgeport National Bindery, Inc., United States of America

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PREFACE

The Radicalized Middle

Cockneys are pretty much extinct. I'm an Englishman without England. What does it mean to be English anymore? We've been invaded without any blood being spilled. All I hear are foreign languages and it makes me feel like I'm in a foreign country. I feel like other people should have the same opportunities as us, but that we should come first. We should be in the center, but I feel like I'm on the outside, as far from the center as possible.
—Ollie Marks, age 30
Dagenham, East London

The middle has fallen out of American and European politics.

Across the Atlantic, political movements increasingly appeal to the extreme left and right, reflecting the polarization of political constituencies. Rebel representatives and violent activists employ tactics to stall government, hinder coalition building, and communicate their agendas through antidemocratic means. Opinion polls suggest that the public, despite expressing a preference for compromise, is increasingly uncompromising in its preferences.

This polarization and brinkmanship can be explained in multiple, overlapping ways. Some observers note that campaign financing and publicity incentivize confrontation and disagreement among elected officials. Other observers blame the news media's voracious appetite for drama and its focus on ratings at the expense of accuracy and equilibrium. Still others blame electoral and governing institutions that provide fringe groups with an outsized ability to obstruct the predominant prerogatives of those at the middle of the political spectrum.

In this book, I suggest that these trends intensify an underlying demographic phenomenon: the communities of white working class people[1] who once occupied the political middle have decreased in size and moved to the fringes, and

American and European societies are scrambling to recalibrate how they might rebuild the centrist coalitions that engender progress.

It was not so long ago that the white working class occupied the middle of British and American societies. During the mid-twentieth century, the vast majority of white people lacked university credentials and worked in manual or non-managerial labor, often in the manufacturing industry (US Census Bureau 2015a; Skidelsky 2013; Pierce and Schott 2012; Sveinsson 2009; Abramowitz and Teixeira 2009: 395). The middle class was made up of people without university degrees, and the wage gap between those with and without university educations was relatively small (US Census Bureau 2015b; Abramowitz and Teixeira 2009: 392). Many industrial sectors were unionized (UK Department for Business, Innovation and Skills 2015; Bureau of Labor Statistics 2015). The diffuse confederation of white working class voters was the bellwether that backed presidents Franklin Roosevelt and then Dwight Eisenhower; and prime ministers Winston Churchill and then Clement Attlee. Later, many supported Lyndon Johnson and then Richard Nixon; and in the United Kingdom, Harold Macmillan and then Harold Wilson.

Today, members of the same demographic sometimes resort to violence and intimidation to achieve a fraction of the political influence they once wielded as a powerful voting bloc (Dancygier 2010). Estranged from the middle, they feel silenced and ignored by mainstream political parties and therefore, in the United States and the United Kingdom, have created their own.

In the United States' constrained two-party system, the Tea Party emerged as a rebellious faction within the Republican Party after the election of President Barack Obama in 2008. In each subsequent congressional election, this movement expanded their share of the Republican caucus and deposed a number of establishment candidates, including House Majority Leader Eric Cantor in November 2014 and eventually Speaker John Boehner, who was pressured to resign in October 2015. Tea Party members along with many white working class people elevated the unexpected presidential candidacy of real-estate mogul Donald Trump to international prominence and the Republican nomination in 2016. Simultaneously on the left, a separate faction has sought the reorientation of American capitalism. Embodied by the Occupy Wall Street movement during the financial crisis, this group has pulled Democrats to more populist and protectionist economic stances. Among white working class Americans, many denounce global trade deals and censure the collusion between Washington lawmakers and K Street's business lobbyists, and then, in the same sentence, go on to revile undocumented immigrants, demand cuts to welfare programs, and scoff at ongoing movements for racial justice.

In Europe since 2010, far-right parties have scored victories across national and European Parliamentary elections. The Swiss People's Party, the

Danis People's Party, and the National Front took more than a quarter of their most recent national votes in Switzerland, Denmark, and France respectively (European Parliament 2015). In Britain, the United Kingdom Independent Party (UKIP) collected 27% of the British vote in the 2014 European elections, 12% in the 2015 Parliamentary election (BBC News 2015), and soon displaced Prime Minister David Cameron when the 'Leave' campaign they backed won the referendum on Britain's EU membership in June 2016. Amid multiple losses, the British Labour Party panicked, appointed far-left socialist Jeremy Corbyn, and then endured a leadership vacuum of their own, without any clear policy platform or electoral strategy in sight. Among white working class Britons, many seek greater unionization and the expansion of social services while simultaneously supporting the dissolution of the European Union, backing the mass deportation of immigrants, and condemning Islam.

At this juncture, most mainstream political parties have eschewed the full endorsement of the most extreme viewpoints, despite their obvious traction among many white working class people. The way a ringmaster gingerly approaches a tiger, parties cautiously navigate around these viewpoints—often acknowledging their legitimacy without engaging their policy implications for fear of alienating more moderate supporters. Both left and right moderates are reluctant to embrace white working class xenophobia and the economic protectionism that will turn off growing ethnic minority voting blocs and the neoliberal business lobby, respectively. Barack Obama won both the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections despite double-digit defeats among white voters without university degrees (Levison 2013). David Cameron was also re-elected in 2015 without the white working class vote (Ford 2015). White working class people have become at best a destabilizing force on attempts to assemble broad, centrist coalitions and at worst, a diminishing, enigmatic afterthought.

How did we get here? How does a group of people synonymous with Middle Britain and Middle America—the heart, soul, and backbone of their respective countries—drift to marginality? What drives their emerging radicalism? What transformations lead a group with such enduring numerical power to, in many instances, consider themselves a "minority" in the countries they once defined?

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Upon our first encounter, Chicago community organizer Josh Hoyt said to me, "I don't talk to no one no one sent." (In other words, he required a personal reference before partnering or really even opening up to someone he didn't already know.) This sentiment extends to so many white working class people and their communities, if not so overtly or explicitly. In their pubs and neighborhoods, our credentials are not achievements or affiliations, but rather the people we know who vouch for our credibility and character. For a scholar of immigration politics extending his work to immigrants' primary antagonists, I needed to build these credentials one relationship at a time. And despite the distrust that characterizes the white working class communities I studied in Youngstown and East London, so many people were kind enough to hear me out and welcome me into their homes. Many I am now proud to call my friends.

In Youngstown, Phil Kidd holds the keys to all doors. His knowledge of people and politics is vast in the city he adopted and now loves more than any native. I am also very grateful to Alyssa Lenhoff, Tim Francisco, and John Russo who facilitated my visiting scholarship at Youngstown State University. It was also a luxury to return each day to the home of Bobby Hagan and Michele Lepore-Hagan, my wise and hospitable landlords. Thank you to Mike Shaffer for hosting me at Youngstown's YMCA, and to the founders of Greyland (Rocco Sait, Melanie Buonavolonta, Paul Burgess, and Hannah Woodroofe), my hangout.

In East London, I thank the responsive civil servants at the Barking and Dagenham Council for their guidance and assistance. Mark Adams was always there when I had a question, and I was also aided by Nicki Lane, Paul Hodson, John Dawe, and Darren Rodwell. I learned the most from Wayne Tuckfield, who went out of his way to integrate me into East London's daily life. Most essentially, and across both cities, I appreciate the honesty and candidness of my many respondents, from whom I learned so much about struggle and dignity, and dignity in struggle.

The book would not have been possible without research grants from the Horowitz Foundation for Social Policy, Harvard University's Center for European Studies, Harvard University's Institute for Quantitative Social Science, and George Mason University's School of Policy, Government, and International Affairs. These grants supported my fieldwork, but also an extraordinary team of research assistants over the years—Sheyda Aboii, Francesca Annichiarico, Andrew Bush, Robert Dagger, Aubrey Grant, Brendan Kopp, and Aaron Roper. You were each so diligent, and have such bright futures ahead.

My quantitative data analysis is thanks to my partnership with Rob Ford, who generously placed my series of questions on his broader YouGov survey in the United Kingdom. I am also deeply indebted to Jerry Mayer, for his support of the American survey and my scholarship more generally, and to Tyler Reny, who was always prepared to share his statistical acumen and sharp analytical skills.

At multiple junctures, I profited from critical feedback from a number of friends and colleagues, who were kind enough to take time from their schedules to read my work and provide their suggestions and encouragement. Thank you to Anna Boucher, Nick Carnes, Noam Gidron, Sean Gray, Zoli Hajnal, Peter Hall, Jennifer Hochschild, Kay Schlozman, Kris-Stella Trump, and Jennifer Victor. And thank you to Nancy DiTomaso, Jack Goldstone, Eric Kaufmann, Michele Lamont, Monica McDermott, Kimberly Morgan, Dan Rasmussen, John Russo, Danny Schlozman, and Jessica Streib, who participated in my book workshop or volunteered to review the entire manuscript.

I am also very grateful to Niko Pfund, Dave McBride, Anne Rusinak, and especially Angela Chnapko at Oxford University Press for their thorough editorship and belief in my work.

The book's impetus emerged during the defense of my doctoral research on European Muslim political behavior at the London School of Economics, when Steve Vertovec challenged me to apply my ideas to white working class people. The idea was subsequently nourished by my various mentors—Terri Givens, David Held, Henrietta Moore, and Sid Verba. Thank you so much for your unconditional support, thoughtful guidance, and never-ending enthusiasm for my ideas.

At Harvard University, my profound thanks to David Ager, Mary Brinton, Tim Colton, Steve Levitsky, Judy and Sean Palfrey, Mary Waters, and Cheryl Welch for supporting my fellowship and lectureship. I also very much appreciate the assistance provided by Nancy Branco, Frankie Hoff, Sharon Jackson, Karen Kaletka, Joanna Lindh, Dotty Lukas, Suzanne Ogungbadero, Laura Thomas, and Diana Wojcik. At George Mason University, I am grateful to David Hart, Naoru Koizumi, Mark Rozell, and Roger Stough for facilitating my research and welcoming me to the university. I also very much appreciate the assistance

provided by Chris Anclien, Bill Coester, Michelle Ely, Barb Hill, Susan McClure, and Ryan Pryke.

Controversial and current, my subject matter frequently came up in conversations with my friends, who supported me and shared their perspectives. My sincerest thanks to Lynn Armitt, Matt Bai, Gideon Bresler, Nick Broadway, Belinda Broido, Kat and Sarah Burgess, Andrew Butters, Matt Cipolla, Joana Cruz, Jeremy Ferwerda, Ole Frahm, Justin Fraterman, Marian Gamboa, David and Kira Gest, Kathy and Ted Gest, Catherine Giguère, Irem Güney, Debra Hauer, Christina Helden, Janet Hiebert, Sharon Howell, Xandra Kayden, Laura Kelly, Chris Kyriacou, Ralph Mamiya, Sona Narula, Jessica Purmort, Eric Rachlin, Will Rasmussen, Parisa Roshan, Katrina Rouse, Erik Sand, Arthur Schilling, Bill Schneider, Desireh Sedaghat, Amish Shah, Patricia Shour, Alexandra Sicotte-Levesque, Stephen Noble Smith, Jack St. Martin, Shai Steinberger, Susan Wilen, Amanda Weingarten, Jeffrey Weingarten, Sara Whitaker, and Nader Yermian for their sustained interest and support.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the love I received from my family members over the course of writing this book. For backing my every endeavor, thank you to my parents Gail and Max Gest, my brother Darren, my sister-in-law Rebecca, my parents-in-law Tatjana and György Hargitai, my brother-in-law Gyuri, my nephew Ádám, my adopted grandparents Ann and Matt VandeWydeven, my grandmother Jeannette Litt, my late grandfather Alvin Litt, and to my most precious wife Monika and our daughter Valentina, who have given me unending joy and inspiration.

Hell's Kitchen, New York City
JUSTIN GEST
June 2016

The New Minority

1

Introduction

POLITICAL MARGINALITY IN THE POST-TRAUMATIC CITY

The snake which cannot cast its skin has to die. As well the minds which are prevented from changing their opinions; they cease to be mind.
—Friedrich Nietzsche

White working class people are perplexing.

They are subject to the pressures of intensifying inequality across much of the developed world, and yet inherit the advantages of language and integration. They live in societies that are subject to significant demographic change, but not in such a way that the predominance of white people is in question. They are so frustrated politically that they would rather start their own movements than submit to the compromises required by mainstream coalitions. Some have become quite rebellious. Has ever a group so purportedly marginalized possessed such power?

In this book, I contend that this tension—between the vestiges of white working class power and its perceived loss—produces the phenomenon of their radicalization. I use multiple research methods to examine white working class people's attitudes and clarify these paradoxes, in order to improve our understanding of white working class people's political behavior—which can be extreme and, thanks to their numbers, remains meaningful in North American and European societies.

Multiple Narratives of Decline

A key reason that white working class people perplex observers is that multiple narratives depict their plight and attempt to explain their political behavior in the United States and the United Kingdom.

According to an *economic narrative*, Western countries' reorientation toward more service-oriented, high technology, globalized economies 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 state-sponsored welfare support systems which had been in place in the postwar era. The white working class individuals who adapted to these changes have since joined a reconsolidated social majority of white people and ethnically diverse immigrants who constitute 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 United Kingdom, 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). In 1940 in the United States, 74% of employed workers were white and did not hold professional or managerial jobs. By 2006, that percentage plummeted to 43% (Abramowitz and Teixeira 2009: 394–395). 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% (ibid.). 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 (ibid.).

The postindustrial middle classes have therefore swelled with various European-origin, white communities and upwardly mobile immigrant-origin people 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. For the poor, chances of upward mobility remain low. The United States and the United Kingdom feature the least economic mobility among OECD countries (OECD 2010; Corak 2013); parental income remains highly determinant of lifelong economic status. This conclusion has been elaborated in great detail in research on the United States, where mobility has stalled for over a generation (Chetty et al. 2014).

Advocates of this resource-oriented perspective argue that while ethnic, gender, and cultural backgrounds are factors in explaining a person's life prospects and behavior, it is the social class into which one is born that is still most determinant (National Equality Panel 2010). In this depiction, the outmoded white working class is juxtaposed with a white middle class and upper class that both expanded with economic development in the twentieth century and have since created economic—along with cultural—space between themselves and those who failed to make this socioeconomic leap. Such resource disadvantages have been shown to consistently lead to disengaged political behavior (see Verba and Nie 1972; Verba, Nie, and Kim 1978; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995; Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2013).[1] The widening gap is indeed frequently justified on meritocratic grounds that subtly insinuate cultural differences. Nevertheless, resource-oriented explanations of white working class marginalization argue that the social stigma ascribed to that demographic is merely the residue of severe inequality.

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 ethnocultural 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 other, often equally poor, ethnocultural minority groups—groups that have worked to gain equal footing through efforts like the continuing civil rights movement.

More subtly, white elites, whose antecedents may have once supported policies of exclusion and rose to elite status through prejudiced systems of education and promotion, vilify poor whites (see Jones 2011; Wray 2006). In the drive to counterbalance historical discrimination, both white elites and minority groups often distance themselves from poor white people to account for their success in these systems—systems that working class white people had a lesser hand in building.

Specifically, white members of the "underclass" have been singled out as behaviorally or morally inferior. In the United Kingdom, they are associated with "backwardness" and stereotypes condemning "unclean" and "lazy benefit-hunting mother[s] of several children" (Jones 2011; Wray 2006), even while white people are also able to claim a rhetorical high ground as their country's "heart and soul"—the people that historically spilled blood and perspired for a continuing national existence.

Charles Murray (2012) describes the white underclass, and its deviant norms in the United States, thusly: "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. More and more of these white individuals are claiming disability benefits or are employed in "less-than-full-time work"; Murray (2012: 171, 176) notes that this is especially true among less-educated white males.

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 because the overall economy grew well enough from 1960 to the present day. 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 wrote, "and . . . the decay in the industriousness occurred overwhelmingly [among the least educated]" (181).

Beyond work habits, Murray cites the deterioration of American norms with regard 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, Murray argues that 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 have pointed 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 extramarital birth rate among white American women with a college degree has remained nearly constant at 5% since the 1960s. Meanwhile, the rate of extramarital births among white American women without a high school diploma is now 60% (Murray 2012: 161–162; see also Douthat and Salam 2008: 134).

In a recent column lamenting white working class support for Donald Trump's presidential candidacy, the *National Review*'s Kevin Williamson (2016) wrote:

> "[If] you take an honest look at the welfare dependency, the drug and alcohol addiction, the family anarchy—which is to say, the whelping of human children with all the respect and wisdom of a stray dog—you will

> come to an awful realization. It wasn't Beijing. It wasn't Washington, as bad as Washington can be. It wasn't immigrants from Mexico, excessive and problematic as our current immigration levels are. It wasn't any of that.
>
> Nothing happened to them. There wasn't some awful disaster. There wasn't a war or famine or a plague or a foreign occupation. Even the economic changes of the past few decades do very little too explain the dysfunction and negligence—and the incomprehensible malice—of poor white America. So the gypsum business in Garbutt ain't what it used to be. There is more to life in the 21st century than wallboard and cheap sentimentality about how the Man closed factories down.
>
> The truth about these dysfunctional, downscale communities is that they deserve to die. Economically, they are negative assets. Morally, they are indefensible. Forget all your cheap theatrical Bruce Springsteen crap. Forget your sanctimony about struggling Rust Belt factory towns and your conspiracy theories about the wily Orientals stealing our jobs. Forget your goddamned gypsum. . . . The white American underclass is in thrall to a vicious, selfish culture whose main products are misery and used heroin needles."

Williamson, Murray, 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 cultural norms of a white underclass (Murray 2012; Jones 2011), in a manner similar to treatment of poor racial and ethnoreligious minority groups.

This moral account contends that white working class political behavior is a product of cultural habits that diverge from other groups of white people and an essentialized understanding of "white culture" (see Demie and Lewis 2010 for examples; and see reviews in Jones 2011). It juxtaposes the ostensible complacency, ignorance, and backwardness of white working class people with the industry, naïveté, and resourcefulness of immigrants and minority groups who push forward despite adversity and structural disadvantage, but also with the way the primarily East and West Coast bourgeoisie have adapted to the economic transformations that they had a hand in driving. However, the ubiquity of this culturalist account appears to be institutionalizing itself. It acts as a sort of structural hindrance to the advancement of white working class individuals, who have trouble shaking off this stigma, and therefore improving their economic well-being and making political claims effectively. As this book shows, white working class people conventionally value hard work and use it—for better or worse—as a mark of moral distinction and as a means of identification to separate themselves from non-white working class countrymen.

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 the founding of the nation 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, attenuating native fertility rates, and an increasingly global economy, the fault lines of sociopolitical relations shifted (see Kaufmann 2004c; Abrajano and Hajnal 2014).

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 United States and parts of Western Europe and were boosted by dual-income families, elevated life expectancies, and steady economic growth. Over time, immigrants from disparate countries of origin, spanning Latin America and East Asia in the United States, South Asia in the United Kingdom, North Africa in Western Europe, and Turkey in Central Europe, replaced these ethnic whites. Since 2004 in the United Kingdom, the minority population has almost doubled, and minority groups account for 80% of the country's population growth (Sunak and Rajeswaran 2014: 6). The nonwhite population represented 37% of the United States population in 2015, and it is expected to grow as the American population under age 5 is over 50% nonwhite (US Census Bureau 2015c). The United States' foreign-born population grew from 9.6 million (4.7%) in 1970 to 40 million (12.9%) in 2010—the highest share since 1920 (Singer 2013).

Ever since the earliest waves of immigration to Western industrialized democracies, these societies have grappled with the challenge of socially, politically, and economically integrating diverse peoples into 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% to 50% decline in the relative size of this group from the World War II era to today in the United States has transpired (Abramowitz and Teixeira 2009: 395). Recent research (Case and Deaton 2015) suggests that these trends may be intensified by an extraordinary 22% rise in the mortality rate of white working class people since 1999—which has taken place in an era during which the death rates among all other groups decline.

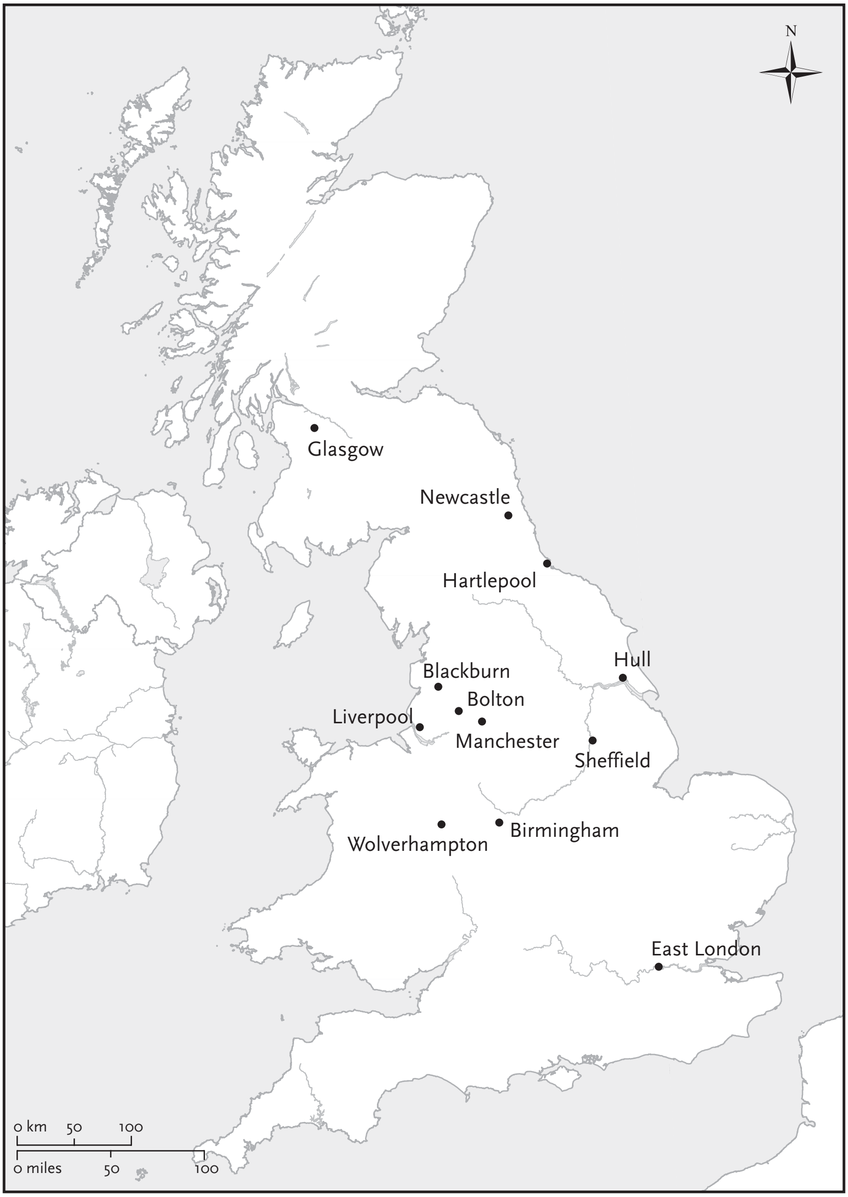
Even with the decline of the British and American manufacturing industries and the countries' ongoing demographic changes, white working class people still compose a significant sector of the voting public. They represent at least one-third of the American population as of 2005, depending on how working 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 (ibid.);
- 48% of Americans are white people without a four-year college degree (ibid.).

As a result, this subset of the American electorate can still affect electoral outcomes, but nevertheless 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 employed in middle-class occupations, some of which require some higher education.

Post-Traumatic Cities

The setting for these countervailing narratives is not uniform, but they are 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 Blackburn, Bolton, Hartlepool, Hull, Wolverhampton, and East London in the United Kingdom, and Erie, Flint, Gary, Kenosha, Michigan City, Toledo, and Youngstown in the Rust Belt of the United States. 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 and dominate their politics. Today, such cities endure as shells of their former splendor.

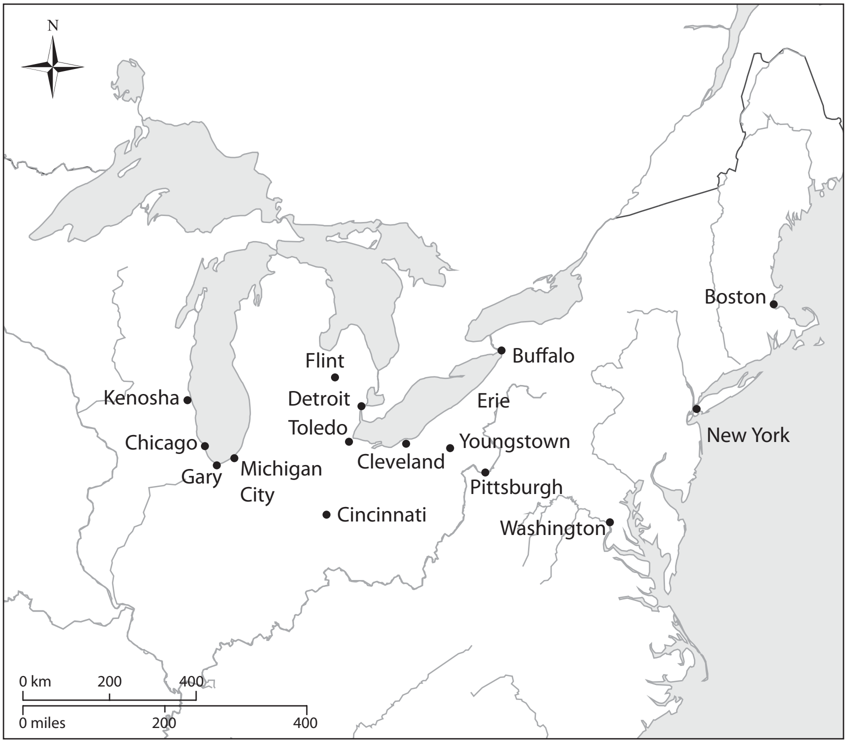

N
Glasgow
Newcastle
Hartlepool
Hull
Blackburn
Bolton
Liverpool
Manchester
Sheffield
Birmingham
Wolverhampton
East London
0 km 50 100
0 miles 50 100

Map 1 Map of the United Kingdom.

East London was planned as a "Garden City," to be anchored by major manufacturers that would lure white working class East Enders away from London's congested inner city after it became crowded with Eastern European Jewish (and later, South Asian) immigrants. 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 what would become an enormous factory on several square miles of Dagenham's riverfront (Hudson 2009). These employers provided dependable jobs for the residents of the new estate. The population of Dagenham soared from 9,000 to 90,000 between 1921 and 1931, and the combined populations of Barking and Dagenham increased another 50% before 1951.

However, 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 postindustrial 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 homes, many new immigrants were assigned to public housing in council-owned rowhouses and tower blocks. There were sub-Saharan Africans, Lithuanians, Bosnians, Poles, and South Asian Muslims in each of the borough's wards. By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Map 2 Map of the Northeastern United States.

the 2000s, these immigrant groups composed about half the population of East London, as an extension of London's globalizing metropolis.

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 sites for political organization and social life. Throughout the late 1800s and early 1900s, a 30-mile-long stretch of mills developed along the Mahoning River. 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's population owned their homes, and by the 1940s, Youngstown's population reached 170,000—about 90% of which was white (Linkon and Russo 2002: 38; Buss and Redburn 1983: 2).

These circumstances ended 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 (ibid.). Unemployment climbed to a staggering 24.9% in 1983 and a wave of personal bankruptcies and foreclosures resulted (ibid.). The city spiraled into a tailspin characterized by 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—groups who simply did not flee as quickly as their white neighbors.

East London and Youngstown are but two examples of a class of cities that have experienced this trauma of a simultaneous economic, social, and political collapse. They are also characteristic of the more industrialized neighborhoods of larger cities. There and elsewhere, the white working class populations I consider are consumed by a nostalgia that expresses bitter resentment toward the big companies that abandoned their city, a government that did little to stop them from leaving, and a growing share of visible minorities who are altering their neighborhoods' complexion.

Other cities and regions have undergone economic and social decline. However, few have experienced such a decline so universally and so immediately after enjoying the zenith of prosperity and influence that once characterized industrial towns in the mid-twentieth century. Post-traumatic cities were often so wholly dependent on a single company or sector that their sudden closure or downsizing undercut an entire social, political, and economic infrastructure—depriving their vast communities of the sense of stability, power, and centrality to which they had become accustomed.

The sprawling factories, towering smokestacks, and vast warehouses that once pumped and percolated with the booming business of an era now sit still in the center of cities that remain physically oriented around their lost productivity. Residents maneuver around the crumbling, rusty relics of industrialism much like the way today's Greeks and Italians maneuver around the roped-off ruins of Ancient Athens and Rome. They simultaneously taunt inhabitants with memories of better days, and render false hope that they are one big break from returning to glory.

This determinism of the built environment and pervasive nostalgia corrodes innovation and paralyzes the evolution of these communities. And as a result, the characteristic politics of these cities is often backward facing. Rather than adapt to the post-traumatic future, people seek to reinstate the pre-traumatic past—which is an impossibility. Small programs have begun to shrink some cities, returning outlying land to nature and clearing the amassed tangle of deserted railroad tracks, electrical lines, and auxiliary piping. But as with urban planning, the politics of modernization are laced with resentment.

Most of us witness the politics of resentment at the national level, where it is detached from its origins in post-traumatic environments. Headlines depict the xenophobic platforms of nativist political movements rising to power. Election results show exit polls touting white working class support for candidates vowing to limit social programs. Satellite news channels beam images of unions and working class white people protesting global trade deals or demanding the maintenance of outdated subsidies. Police mobilize against hate crimes and forms of political violence.

However, such events are exceptional, and they distract from the diversity of white working class political behavior. Many white working class people engage in peaceful democratic processes. A large group is simply too busy to advocate, given the demands and pressures of daily life. Still others quietly withdraw to the fringes. How can we understand these political choices and the attitudes that underpin them? How can we understand white working class marginality?

A Theory of Marginality

Much of our knowledge of political behavior links the intensity of citizens' political participation with their resources, in the form of income, education, and skills. Yet among similarly under-resourced communities of white working class people, what leads some individuals to engage in the democratic political system to create reform, and others to circumvent the political system by rebelling or withdrawing from it? This is not a question of intensity, but rather one that inquires about the nature—the orientation—of individuals' political activism.

In earlier research, I addressed this question as it relates to communities of Muslims in Western Europe—highly politicized people who have largely