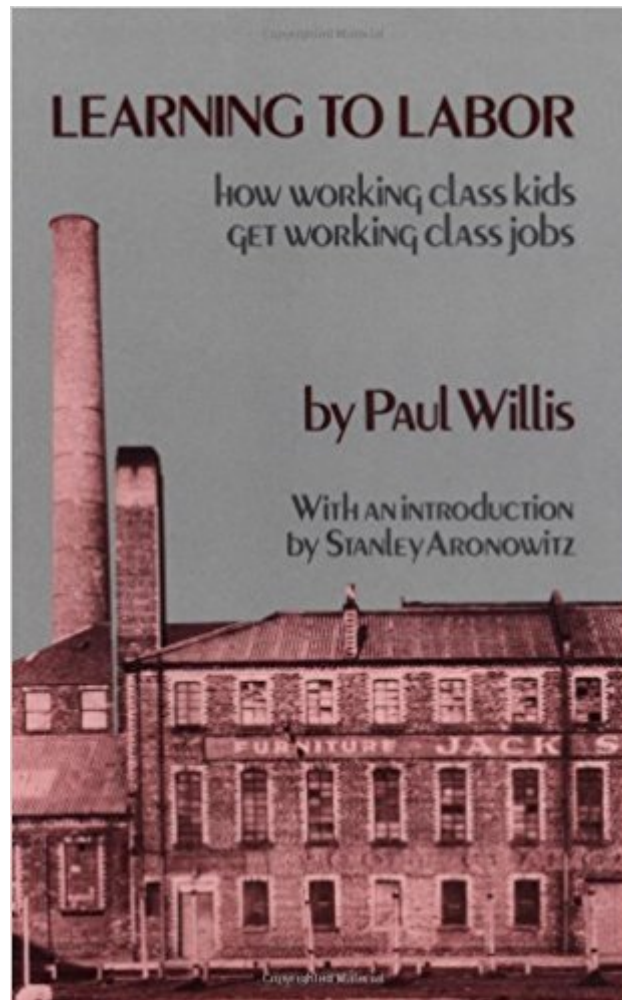




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Learning To Labor: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs



Synopsis

Hailed by the New Society as the best book on male working class youth, this classic work, first published in 1977, has been translated into several foreign languages and remains the authority in ethnographical studies.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

As fresh and challenging as when it was first published, Learning to Labor remains the text to inspire and teach ethnographers, from whatever disciplines, who probe unsentimentally human agency in institutions, political economy, and within the general constraints of modernity. -- George E. Marcus
The unique contribution of this book is that it shows, with glittering clarity, how the rebellion of poor and working class kids against school authority prepares them for working class jobs. No American interested in education or in labor can afford not to read and study this book carefully. -- Stanley Aranowitz

Hailed by the New Society as the "best book on male working class youth," this classic work, first published in 1977, has been translated into several foreign languages and remains the authority in ethnographical studies.

The two books that have contributed most to the way I think about the social world and what it means to be are Simone DeBeauvoir's The Ethics of Ambiguity and Paul Willis' Learning to Labor.

The first one hundred pages of Willis' book are loaded with insights and antidotes to conventional wisdom: Why are working class students often anti-school and generally anti-authoritarian? Because schools ask a great deal in terms of work, conformity, fun foregone, and deference to school officials, but they offer little or nothing in return: working class children are almost certain to become working class adults. Thus, the absence of a basis for exchange generates hostility and resentment. Is that such a bad thing? It's tough on teachers, counselors, administrators, and on students who see reason to conform. But in the 1970's when *Learning to Labor* was written, a working class life in a British industrial city was reasonably comfortable and had its own rewards. So from the classroom to the shopfloor was a natural and easy transition to the world of work for the sons of working class fathers. For readers in the U.S., the absence of interest in upward mobility may seem self-defeating, and may be taken as evidence of family dysfunction. Oddly, however, the families studied by Willis seem supportive and warm; sons admire their fathers and have respect and affection for their mothers; fathers and mothers share their sons' alienation from schooling; and their reasons seem readily interpretable and in no way manifestations of family dysfunction. The anti-authoritarian students embrace the ethos of masculinity and toughness that provides their occupationally devalued fathers with self-esteem. Sadly this way of valorizing a working class life assures that the British working class will remain suffused with pernicious sexism. It's easy to romanticize Willis' working class rebels, and he sometimes makes this mistake. Whatever their attractive qualities, however, sexism, racism, and active derision toward same-aged students with a different mind-set are conspicuous characteristics of their way of life. Perhaps the most troubling question for 21st century readers of Willis' book is what happens to working class students today? The factory floor is unoccupied. Working class jobs have been moved en masse to third world countries to reduce labor costs. A well-defined social identity and lived culture have been destroyed. Again we see that whatever our position, nothing much is guaranteed. All this is part of the often very painful process of what DeBeauvoir called "disclosure of being in the world."

It has been many years since I read this book in graduate school. I actually bought a new copy for a friend who is a reading instructor and interested in the sociology of learning. Willis' book is a brilliant study of working class British students. It details how these students develop their own society out of a sense of self-preservation. The school system works to keep them in their working class ghettos and the inner society they develop helps them to cope with the inequities they face daily: And will continue to face as adults. I read this book as I thought about the United States and the severe inequities in our own educational system. There are some very disturbing parallels, and

though the study in the book is some years old, I would invite anyone interested in thinking about education in a democratic society to review this book as a starting point for discussion of today's issues.

Very happy with the book and the service received.

A must-read for sociologists, particularly those in the field of cultural studies, gender and youth research. Although an older book, it is still very much current.

Will be using for my Masters thesis

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