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One of the most prolific American playwrights, Lynn Nottage defies categorization. Her plays do not correspond to a particular genre, aesthetic or polemic, and while race, class, and gender are central to her work, her treatment of those categories is catholic. In *Ruined*, a play in which she originally conceived the "morally ambiguous" brothel madame Mama Nadi as an African Mother Courage, she is concerned with the wartime exploitation of women in the Congo.[1] In *Fabulation, or The Re-Education of Undine*, she offers a playful and satirical take on an upwardly mobile African American woman who rejects her roots, while in *Intimate Apparel*, a heartbreaking tale set in turn-of-the-century New York, her subject is a young seamstress of color attracted to both a Hasidic shopkeeper—a forbidden but genuine relationship—and a Caribbean man who ultimately absconds with her life's savings. Adrienne Macki Braconi has reflected on Nottage's "slippery borders" and how the "private, public, and mythic spaces" in Nottage's work either "inject and/or dislodge a sense of belonging and identity."[2] It is identity and its intersections that are at the core of Nottage's plays, and it is the complexity of those intersections that informs the rich and fruitful palette from which she works.

In Nottage's 2015 play *Sweat*, two of her principal characters are women. Cynthia, an African American, and her white friend Tracey (racial identities explicitly designated by Nottage) are both line workers at Olstead's, a Reading, Pennsylvania, manufacturing plant. Once secure in their employment, they now face contingent conditions wrought by economic disruption and the constant threat of job layoffs while sharing a sisterly bond and a comradeship that on the surface appears to tran-

scend race. As Nottage puts it during a scene where the women move to the beat of the local watering hole's jukebox, Tracey and Cynthia "dance together with the intimacy of close friends who've shared many adventures."[3] So too does Tracey's son Jason share a bond with Cynthia's son Chris, who dreams of leaving life on the line to become a teacher. Here is another superficially post-racial friendship, a relationship as brotherly as their mothers' is sisterly. But after Cynthia wins promotion to management and to a job for which Tracey has also applied, both sets of relationships collapse into recriminations, jealousy, and violence.

Major critical reception of *Sweat* tended to view the play as a cautionary tale about economics or race. A post–Great Recession play, *Sweat* is a microcosm of a dystopian America where, according to Ben Brantley, "jobs are under siege and identity is fraying."[4] For critic Jocelyn Buckner, the critical question *Sweat* raises is that of "the human cost of the millennial marketplace,"[5] and it is certainly true that Nottage skillfully examines the deteriorating economic conditions that presaged the financial collapse of 2008 and the emergent working-class despair engendered by an increasingly global and disruptive economy.

For *Chicago Tribune* theatre critic Chris Jones, the central issue in *Sweat* is racism. Writing of the 2019 Goodman Theatre production, Jones alludes to "economic duress," but contextualizes that duress as a catalyst for interracial friendships "ripped apart . . . [and] curdling over time into racism of the bloodiest kind."[6] In his *New York Times* review of the Studio 54 production, Brantley perceptively averred that it was "the first work from a major American playwright to summon, with empathy and without judgment, the nationwide anxiety that helped put Donald Trump in the White House."[7] Certainly *Sweat* can be read as a cautionary tale regarding what Christine J. Walley calls "the flipping of the Rust Belt"[8] in 2016.

Indeed, when *Sweat* opened at Washington, DC's Arena Stage in January 2016 (after its 2015 premiere at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival), it had been only seven months after Trump's ride down the golden escalator to the lobby of Trump Tower to announce his candidacy. The divisive atmosphere surrounding the general election, still months away, would lead CNN senior political reporter Nia-Malika Henderson to describe the political process as replete with a "steady stream of divisive language, racially charged imagery and flat-out racist statements."[9] After the election, the media immediately saw it as a consequence of what Nate Cohn called "an enormous wave of support among white working-class voters."[10] The *Washington Post* published an article with a headline referring to the "revenge of working-class whites," who saw Donald Trump as "the first major-party nominee of the modern era to speak directly

and relentlessly to their economic and cultural fears."[11] "Cultural fears," in the context of white anxiety, is most often a coded term for fear of nonwhites and of the loss of once uncontestable dominance over American society. The immediate consensus that emerged after the 2016 election, as sociologist Musa Al Gharbi has noted, was "that Trump voters were motivated largely (or even *primarily*) by anti-minority or white-supremacist sentiments."[12]

Gharbi sees that explanation as overly simplistic. It would also be a simplistic and false dichotomy to view the tensions in *Sweat* as purely about either race or economics, as Nottage artfully demonstrates that they are a synthesis of the two. It is noteworthy that the racial tensions in *the play* are not, at least overtly, between African American and white workers (with some caveats I address below). *Sweat* interrogates rising American anger over immigration and how economic anxiety can lead to violent resentment against workers of color not only by white workers but also by other workers of color. Chris and Jason go to prison for assaulting Oscar, Stan's Colombian American employee, and are released back into society only to find their mothers struggling under their new economic circumstances. Tracey is strung-out and suffering from drug dependency, while Cynthia barely subsists on poorly paid part-time work doing maintenance and nursing home care. Chris and Jason's brotherly and interracial friendship is, by the end of the play, fundamentally altered and perhaps permanently damaged.

The play, as Oskar Eustis has noted, does not attempt to make an overt statement on American politics per se, but it does dissect the circumstances that shape our dysfunctional political and economic moment.[13] Indeed Nottage, a playwright whose humanity is always and everywhere in evidence throughout her work, is not interested in villainizing or judging her characters, who suffer from systemic forces they cannot control and do not understand. Instead, she directs her righteous anger toward the structural conditions that torment them. In *Sweat*, the central issue is identity and crises of identity precipitated by disrupted narratives of American exceptionalism and progress, two of our most cherished mythic spaces. By "spaces," I refer not to physical locations but rather to metaphorical mental spaces, the spaces within the mind where the narratives that sustain and construct our sense of being and purpose reside. The mythic space is both a place of comfort and refuge and a site of cognitive dissonance and anxiety that emerges when the subject must confront and contend with its contradictions.

Nottage's characters do not respond to these contradictions ideologically but rather through their collective id. *Sweat* reflects the neuroses and dissonance endemic to life in the post-industrial neoliberal state in

which we are governed not so much through our ideology as through our affects. In this article, I offer a reading of *Sweat* that, by drawing upon both the materialism of Karl Marx and the phenomenology of philosopher Max Scheler, situates us within our present national predicament—itself an existential crisis of national identity. Such a reading calls attention to the ways in which Sweat explores our neoliberal moment and how that moment has been shaped by tribal feelings of sublimated rage and humiliation.

The social conditions depicted in *Sweat* are most certainly not reduceable to a vulgar relationship between base and superstructure. Nottage, however, is keenly aware that capital is a social relation, that, as Marx would have it, "it is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence which determines their consciousness."[14] The racism in *Sweat*, and the animosity and violence that come with it, does not proceed from a freely embraced and consciously held ideology (i.e., white identity politics), but neither does it exist independently of the material conditions of existence. It is an outcome of an interplay between subjective experience and materialism.

Nottage's empathic framing continuously reminds us of the systemic forces that move within the background of economic life; scenes move nonchronologically between 2000 and 2008, between the bursting of the dot-com bubble and the events that precipitated the financial crisis and Great Recession. Nottage begins scenes with narratives that juxtapose the weaknesses of the national economy with that of contemporaneous events in Reading. The Dow falls 778 points while the locals "sample fresh apple cider at the Annual Fall Festival,"[15] or news breaks of the narrowing "salary gap . . . between men and women in some U.S. industries" while Reading officials proceed with plans to demolish buildings and promote gentrification.[16] These compilations represent foundational erosion, in some cases so abstract that it goes unnoticed until suddenly the existential underpinnings of the Olstead's workers become untenable. "What the fuck is NAFTA?" Tracey says to Stan the bartender. "Sounds like a laxative. NAFTA."[17]

These contextual national and local juxtapositions remind us of the disconnect between awareness of wider systemic decay and immediate local consequences. It is those local consequences, Nottage seems to be telling us, that make manifest the real conditions of our national existence. She also understands that economics and issues of race are rarely if ever unentangled, that the structures of systemic racism are exacerbated and inflamed by economic deprivation. As Jonathan Rutherford puts it, "Talk about migration and race and you end up talking about class and inequality."[18]

The optimism and joyful exuberance in *This Is Reading*, the 2017 multimedia performance piece that emerged as a consequence of Nottage's research for *Sweat*, contrasts sharply with the mood of despair evoked by Nottage's play. Although *Reading* stands independently as a separate work, it does provide a useful dramaturgical context for *Sweat* and valuable insights into Nottage's thinking about the social and economic dynamics both in *Sweat* and the subsequent performance piece. *This Is Reading* was a project conceived in collaboration with the community itself, a celebration of its shared experience that was redolent of hopes for the future.[19] In *Reading*, Nottage and her collaborators devised a piece that both looks toward the rebirth of a community and is rooted in the nostalgia of a glorious and prosperous past. "When we first came into Reading," Nottage says, "one of the things that we always encountered was people speaking of the city in a very nostalgic way. . . . Always speaking in the past tense."[20] One of the poorest and most economically devastated communities in Pennsylvania, Reading is a town tormented by its narrative, the mythic space of its past, of its former prosperity. It is "a city," Nottage observes, "that has fault lines—those fault lines are economic, and they are social, and they are racial."[21] But as Nottage also maintains, there are moments when the fault lines come together, even if they do so imperfectly. "When you interview Black and Latino folks," she told *American Theatre*, "there is a narrative that has existed for the last 50 years of being sort of disaffected by the culture. But I sat in rooms with middle-aged white men and heard them speaking like young Black men in America. They also feel disenfranchised, disaffected."[22]

In *Sweat*, the wistfulness of the nostalgic mode is both a way of coping and a catalyst for the emergence of a rage long sublimated. Brucie, Cynthia's ex-husband and one of Nottage's African American characters, has been locked out of his union job but remains trapped in a mindset more suited to the heyday of the labor movement of the twentieth century than the neoliberal marketplace and globalist world within which he finds himself. His union has rejected the contract offered by management, and he is defiant. "Yup. Didn't want to take the new contract," he tells Stan while a presidential primary debate between George W. Bush, John McCain, and Alan Keyes plays on the bar's television. "Be a fucking slave. That's what they want. We offered to take a fifty-percent pay cut, they won't budge, they want us to give up our retirement. What's the point? Full circle, a lifetime, and be the same place I was when I was eighteen. What is that?" Brucie's bravado and defiance are matched by a nostalgia for a lost America, the America of his father, who "clocked in every day until he didn't, and went out with a nice package. He went on an eighteen-day cruise through the Greek Islands last October. Me, shit,

I run the full mile, I put in the time, do the right thing. . . . But, dude, tell me what I did wrong, huh?"[23]

Tracey, too, views her life through the prism of a lost past, specifically through memories of her German grandfather, a man who "could build anything." Her nostalgia for her grandfather is tied not only to Reading's former prosperity but also to the masculine strength of her grandfather's hands, which becomes a metaphor for the former greatness of a working-class past and the seemingly lost relationship between manual labor and economic power. "Sturdy. Meaty. Real firm. You couldn't shake his hand without feeling his presence, feeling his power."[24] Tracey's reverie about her grandfather is tied also to a sense of lost community, the prosperity of which fosters pride, confidence, and identity: "And I remember when I was a kid, I mean eight or nine, we'd go down to Penn with Opa. To walk and look in store windows. Downtown was real nice back then. You'd get dressed up to go shopping. You know, Pomeroy's, Whitner's, whatever. I felt really special, because he was this big, strapping man and people gave him room. But, what I really loved was that he'd take me to office buildings, banks . . . you name it, and he'd point out the woodwork. And if you got really, really close he'd show some detail that he'd carved for me. An apple blossom. Really. It was back when if you worked with your hands people respected you for it."[25] For Tracey, the strength and power of her grandfather, and by extension her agency as a working-class woman, are metaphorically inscribed upon the buildings of her hometown.

The yearning for the irrecoverable recalls the inchoate sensibility that Fredric Jameson, writing in 1991, saw as a hallmark of late capital. For Jameson, the structure of feeling surrounding late capitalism is the sense "that something has changed, that things are different, that we have gone through a transformation of the life world which is somehow decisive but incomparable with the older convulsions of modernization and industrialization, less perceptible and dramatic, somehow, but more permanent precisely because more thoroughgoing and all-pervasive."[26] This is not a definition of late capital (a term that has historically been used in a variety of ways)[27] but a description of its affective impact—of the growing sense of unease, of alienation from the world, and the cognitive and emotional dissonance that results from the realization that things are not as they should be. The retreat to the nostalgic mode becomes a coping mechanism for alienation and for the disruption of the narrative of economic security and progress that is central to existential well-being within a national culture that has viewed itself as exceptional.[28]

Like Brucie and Tracey, Jessie, who is also an Olstead's worker, speaks longingly of a past that was open and pregnant with optimism. For

Jessie, the promise of the past is replete with dreams that assume a life free from economic anxieties—hitching across the country and traveling the world with her boyfriend, Felix. "I figured I'd be at Olstead's for six to eight months max," she tells Cynthia, Jason, Chris, and Stan.[29] "That was so long ago. We were gonna do Alaska . . . and save enough money to get to India. Live in an Ashram for a while, then bum along the hippie trail. Istanbul, Tehran, Kandahar, Kabul, Peshawar, Lahore, Kathmandu. Places. . . . I mapped the whole thing out. Yeah, we had this, um, world map, that Felix had ripped outta an atlas in the library. *The World Book*. God. . . . That was the plan."[30] Unlike Brucie and Tracey, Jessie had once seen a future for herself outside of Reading but now senses that her youthful feelings of agency and optimism were an illusion. "I regret the fact," she tells Chris, "that for a little while it seemed like, I don't know, there was a possibility."[31]

Lost possibility is compounded by what is, in the Marxist sense, alienation from the species itself. Tracey's grandfather's confidence reflects his status as what Karl Marx called a "species-being," that is, one who "in creating a *world of objects* by his personal activity, in his *work upon* inorganic nature . . . proves himself" to be fully human. "This production is his active species-life. Through this production, nature appears as *his* work and his reality. The object of labor is, therefore, the *objectification of man's species life*: for he duplicates himself not only, as in consciousness, intellectually, but also actively, in reality, and therefore sees himself in a world that he has created."[32]

But as Marx also pointed out, the efficiencies of capital lead to a paradox: the more the worker "realizes" her labor, the more "the object that labor produces—labor's product—confronts [the laborer] *as something alien*, as a *power independent* of the producer." Tracey's reflection on her grandfather, a man whose labor is a marker of his identity, contrasts with her realization of her objectification, in the "*loss of the object and bondage to it*."[33]

So too Cynthia's description of the conditions of her job on the floor obliquely refers to her reification as an objectified laborer. She has been promoted to management, and on her first day in her new position, she heads to the floor instead of the office, carried forward by pure muscle memory. "Then I remember," she tells Jessie and Stan, "I can go sit down. I'm not wearing my Carhartt, not gonna be on my feet for ten hours, I loosen my support belt, I don't have to worry about my fingers cramping or the blood blister on my left foot. I can stop sweating because goddamn the office has air-conditioning. These muthafuckers got air-conditioning."[34]

Cynthia is now one of those "muthafuckers," one of the managerial

types who, in her twenty-four years as a rank-and-file Olstead's worker, never once engaged with her as a human being. "I mean some of these folks," she tells her friends, "have been working there as long as us, but they're as unfamiliar as a stranger sitting next to you on a bus."[35] Stan, once an Olstead's employee himself, has turned to bartending after a serious injury brought on by a malfunctioning piece of machinery that management had not bothered to repair. After being hospitalized for two months and unable to walk or feel his extremities, the usually even-keeled Stan recalls, "Not one of those Olstead fuckers called to check on me, to say, 'I'm sorry for not fixing the machine.' They knew the machine was trouble."[36] Stan's discovery that he is valued less than the cost of a maintenance check is both a humiliation and an epiphany: "That's when I knew, I was nobody to them. Nobody! Three generations of loyalty to the same company. This is America, right? You'd think that would mean something. They behave like they are doing you a goddamn favor."[37] Again, we see the anxiety produced by the disrupted narrative of American promise.

John B. Davis, writing in the aftermath of the financial crisis, has maintained that the "concept of an individual economic agent . . . includes at the very least the idea of an entity able to initiate courses of action,"[38] and Mary Wrenn, also drawing on Davis, has written that "neoliberalism embodies the ideological shift in the purpose of the state from one that has a responsibility to insure full employment and protect its citizens against the exigencies of the market to one that has a responsibility to ensure individual responsibility and protection of the market itself." Wrenn sees neoliberal ideology as positing a society that is no more than "a collection of individuals."[39] For Wrenn, the neoliberal subject, struggling "under the enabling myth of equality of opportunity" finds itself "responsible for . . . its own success or failure."[40] The narrative of neoliberalism masquerades as a force for a deterministic individualism, assuming the free subject of the Enlightenment who may determine his or her fate by making rational choices while in reality creating "a vacuum in the lives of individuals left by the social dislocation and discontinuity created by the disembedded economy and the subordination of social life to the dictates of the market."[41] In effect, the neoliberal narrative burdens the subject with an imperative to act while promoting a free market competition that drains the subject of the ability to act. The resulting contradiction produces what Engin F. Isin has called "the neurotic citizen."[42]

Nottage understands how this alienation leads to cognitive dissonance and self-destructive behavior. When we first see Jessie, she's slumped over a table in a drunken stupor, threatening violence and calling the disabled Stan a "fucking cripple" when he refuses to pour her another drink (22).

She is a functional addict, out every night until 2 am but ready to go on the line every day for her 7 a.m. shift.[43] But she does so reeking of vodka; her dreams of traveling the world deferred, she is now divorced and emotionally shattered, "a complete wreck" since her former husband remarried.[44] Nottage's characters reflect the crisis of addiction that has afflicted small town and rural life in the United States, the only developed country in the world where the mortality rate is on the rise.[45] We learn that Brucie, after a romantic evening with Cynthia, has stolen her Christmas presents in the middle of the night to buy drugs,[46] and when Jason gets out of prison in October 2008, a month after the collapse of Lehman Brothers and the beginning of the full-blown financial crisis,[47] Tracey is decidedly inhospitable to her son. "Who told you, you could sit down?" she asks him.[48] They might as well be strangers.

For all of *Sweat*'s misery, shared by Black and white workers alike, it would be a mistake to interpret it in any way as a post-racial play solely concerned with issues of economic inequality. Lawrence D. Bobo has reflected on the usage of the term "post-racial" in American discourse, positing that it could "signal a hopeful trajectory for events and social trends," or a dismissal of the grievances of people of color, or a conviction that demographics are rendering mute traditional American racial concerns. Bobo notes that the election of Barack Obama to the American presidency became a symbol of the nation's putative transcendence of the racial divide.[49]

Bobo sees this as naive, and *Sweat* suggests that Nottage does too. Despite *Sweat*'s empathy for its working-class characters, it also interrogates the idea of "working class" as a discrete category, as a status fully independent of racial considerations. Class, as Walley puts it, is "a notoriously fuzzy concept," a matter of perception rather than something that exists categorically. People of color, Nottage suggests, experience their class identity and their histories in ways that are not accessible to their white counterparts. For all of Brucie's union-man bravado, the history of unions in America has traditionally been hostile to the interests of workers of color. In his history of Black American labor, Joe William Trotter Jr. chronicles the racialized politics of twentieth-century unions in the aftermath of the Great Migration and "the deepening 'color lines' in the work-force, housing, and community life of the industrial city."[50] These "color lines" included segregated unions, apportionment of the least desirable jobs to people of color, and a particularly harsh environment for African American women in the workforce.[51] This history of Black working-class labor is not explicitly acknowledged in *Sweat*, but it hangs heavily over it.

Even in the generally upbeat *This Is Reading*, the disparities between

the lived experience of the white residents of the town and the townspeople of color are somewhat more explicit. During a collage of nostalgic monologues about Reading's former greatness, Nottage and her collaborators depict an African American man who grew up in a Polish neighborhood, and "until I was eight," he says, "I thought I was Polish." But he also recalls that, as one of a handful of Black students in a class of about thirty kids, he was the target of his elementary school teacher's racial epithets and stereotyping.[52] Nottage tacitly acknowledges the gap between reality and perception; for her, the post-racial is yet another mythic space.

And yet the central act of violence in *Sweat* is an attack perpetrated by a Black and a white man together on a Hispanic man, an American-born citizen who is perceived as essentially "foreign" and who comes to represent for both the Black and white workers a scapegoat for all of the indignities of the marketplace. Here is where *Sweat* most strongly captures the structure of feeling of the 2016 election and its dynamics—not in terms of the ideological racism of white supremacy but in the pervasive ressentiment that accrues to a society in which significant numbers of citizens no longer feel at home in the world.

Ressentiment—a term coined by Friedrich Nietzsche and further developed by the philosopher Max Scheler—describes long-sublimated feelings of impotence and rage that manifest affectively rather than rationally. It is distinguished from mere "resentment" in that the rage it produces is sublimated. The action that might be taken to remediate the injury is unavailable to the aggrieved and is thus, frustratingly, always deferred. It is the product of a long-simmering sense of helplessness, humiliation, and impotence. According to Harold Bershady, "Ressentiment must therefore be strongest in a society like ours, where approximately equal rights (political and otherwise) of formal social equality, publicly recognised, go hand in hand with wide factual differences in power, property, and education. While each has the 'right' to compare himself with everyone else, he cannot so do in fact. Quite independently of the characters and experience of individuals, a potent charge of ressentiment is here accumulated by the very *structure of society.*"[53] This is in contrast to the idea of "resentment," which sociologists Bernard M. Meltzer and Gil Richard Musolf describe as a short-term feeling of victimhood caused by interpersonal incidents involving "rebuffs, slurs, snubs, insults, and other relatively minor injuries."[54] Ressentiment, as Manfred Frings describes, is a much more enduring condition, much more persistent and productive of a long-term "disorder in value experiences"[55] and is driven "by the *unattainability* of positive values that others represent."[56] While an incident that provokes resentment may engender a desire for revenge, ressentiment entails a deferral of action over long periods of time, manifesting

"both a desire for revenge and the blockage and subsequent postponement and sublimation of that same desire."[57] Ressentiment is the warp and woof of the alt-right movement, of Charlottesville, of the border wall, of "owning the libs," and the nihilism of post-truth populism. It is not a strategy or a belief system; it is a condition.

There is both resentment and ressentiment in *Sweat*. It is true that Tracey's feelings about Cynthia's promotion have racial connotations, as Nottage reminds us when Cynthia points to the Black skin on her hand and implores her erstwhile friend not to "make it about this,"[58] but Tracey's attitude comes not from a sense of vengeance deferred but from the immediacy of her disappointment in being passed over. This changes later on, however, when Cynthia is perceived to be aligning with management—counseling her friends not to take a hard line and to accept a 60 percent pay cut in order to save their jobs. Tracey's anger now has less to do with Cynthia as the proximate cause of her failure to secure promotion than with deep-seated and long-festering anger against management, "the white hats," who leave "work in clothes as clean as when they walked in."[59] Her disgust with Cynthia's actions is an anger against the wider system that has weakened the unions and empowered the bosses, the impotence and humiliation of being locked out of Olstead's, and the inability to respond to those conditions in a redressive way. Her feelings are not wholly divorced from a sense of white privilege to be sure, but only when Cynthia becomes a symbol of managerial oppression do they become reflective of ressentiment.[60]

Nottage acknowledges that people of color are also vulnerable to ressentiment's suppressed longing for redress and the mix of sublimated rage and the sense of powerlessness that comes with it. When Brucie urges his son to back off and not get involved in any union retaliation to the lockout, it is a shock to Chris. "You taught me how to throw a rock," he tells his father, recalling the long-ago day when Brucie stood, larger than life, at a union meeting held in the aftermath of a management outrage, urging his coworkers to hold their ground. "You looked like warriors," Chris recalls, "arms linked, standing together." But Brucie's emasculation is complete, his bravado erased: "You think they give a damn about your black ass? Let me tell you something," he says to his son, "they don't even see you."[61]

One of the hallmarks of the 2016 election was the anti-immigration stance of the Trump campaign. This was a dog whistle of ressentiment, the harnessing of suppressed rage against NAFTA, the loss of manufacturing jobs, growing income inequality, and cultural anxiety clumsily but effectively redirected toward a conveniently powerless scapegoat, the brown-skinned "other." In *Sweat* it is Oscar—a Hispanic man work-

ing as a busboy for Stan—who becomes the individuated, human face of "the problem," despite the fact that he is a native-born US citizen and a lifelong resident of Reading. Oscar's working-class bona fides are as authentic as any of Olstead's workers, but Nottage marks his otherness early on with a note that "he goes about his business, rarely acknowledged by anyone except Stan."[62] He is always in the background, usually observing but not socially participating, and largely invisible. Despite his low profile, it is he who becomes the focus of *Sweat*'s fullest expression of ressentiment.

Oscar lives *in* Reading but is not perceived as being *of* Reading. When Tracey jokes about hiring someone to burn down her house, she asks Oscar where she should look for prospects.

> OSCAR: I dunno. How would I know?
> TRACEY: What do you mean, you don't know? C'mon.
> OSCAR: I don't know.
> TRACEY: You Puerto Ricans are burning shit down all over Reading. You gotta know.
> OSCAR: Well, I'm Colombian. And I don't know.[63]

In another scene, Oscar asks Tracey questions about the working conditions at Olstead's and shows her a Spanish-language flyer recruiting nonunion workers. She refers to the Spanish language as "gibberish," and when she implies that he is an undocumented worker with advantages over the native-born, Oscar replies that he was born in Berks County. "Still," Tracey tells him, "you wasn't born here, Berks. . . . Listen, that piece of paper that you're holding is an insult, it don't mean anything, Olstead's isn't for you."[64]

In a world governed solely by the logic of materialism, where the need to mitigate the effects of economic structures deleterious to the interests of all workers would rationally take precedence over petty prejudices, there would be a natural alliance between Oscar and workers of all colors. In reality no such fellow feelings exist, at least for Tracey, Brucie, and Chris. Brucie does not directly refer to Oscar, but he is outraged when some "white cat" in the unemployment line begins "talking about how we took his job." Brucie's umbrage is not about the white cat's bigotry so much as the implication that he is "fresh off the boat or some shit." Brucie belongs in Reading; those who are "fresh off the boat" do not. "He don't know my biography," Brucie says referring to the white cat.[65]

From Oscar's perspective, he is entitled to the American Dream, which for him means taking eleven dollars an hour to replace those locked out of Olstead's. He too has a narrative, that of an immigrant father shut out of union membership but who "got up at four A.M. because he

wanted a job in the steel factory, it was the American way, so he swept fucking floors thinking, 'One day they'll let me in.'"[66] But in Nottage's brutal, climactic scene, Jason and Chris, goaded by a drunken and rageful Tracey, remind Oscar of his status as an outsider by brutally beating him with a baseball bat. Stan and, initially, Chris attempt to talk Jason down, but Stan is seriously and permanently injured in the process, and when Oscar headbutts Chris during a melee with Jason, Chris snaps and succumbs to the rage that has been building inside him and joins in the attack. Theirs is a vengeful energy misdirected, ineffectual as a remedy, but devastating in effect.[67]

In the years since *Sweat* premiered, the American racial landscape—crystalized by the deaths of George Floyd and many others at the hands of the police—has become even more fraught, and the economy, victimized by a plague that has killed about 600,000 Americans as of this writing, lies in tatters. Atavism infects our politics as the nation endures a newly energized white supremacist movement, the separation of immigrant children from their families at the border, and the revanchist ethnonationalist politics of "The Wall." It is a political and cultural moment driven by the engines of ressentiment, which itself is fueled by an existential yearning for an irrecoverable and mythic past. It is a nightmarish moment.

But at the end of *Sweat*, Nottage allows for a small semblance of hope, of potential for reconciliation. It is noteworthy that the final scene, written by a playwright so profoundly interested in the lives of women, ends with a tableau composed exclusively of men. Chris and Jason, newly paroled, return to the bar that Oscar now tends and where he looks after the cognitively disabled Stan. Their testosterone-driven rage is now long spent, and Nottage leaves the spectator to wonder whether they have been hollowed out and defeated by their experiences or whether they are on the threshold of reconciliation. "There's apology in their eyes," Nottage's notes tell us, but they cannot articulate it; they cannot speak, and so they stand in awkward silence. Whether the men can find a way forward is an open question that Nottage leaves unanswered.

Notes

1. Nosheen Iqbal, "Lynn Nottage: A Bar, a Brothel and Brecht," guardian.com, April 20, 2010, accessed January 22, 2020, www.theguardian.com/stage/2010/apr/20/lynn-nottage-ruined.

2. Adrienne Macki Braconi, "Intimate Spaces/Public Spaces: Locating Sites of Migration, Connection, and Identity in *Intimate Apparel*," in *A Critical Companion to Lynn Nottage*, ed. Jocelyn L. Buckner (New York: Routledge, 2016), 71.

3. Lynn Nottage, *Sweat* (New York: TCG, 2017), 14.

4. Ben Brantley, "Review: 'Sweat' Imagines the Local Bar as a Caldron," review of *Sweat*, by Lynn Nottage, directed by Kate Whoriskey, Studio 54, New York, nytimes.com, last modified March 26, 2017, accessed January 11, 2020, www.nytimes.com/2017/03/26/theater/sweat-review-broadway.html.

5. Jocelyn L. Buckner, introduction, "'Sustaining the Complexity' of Lynn Nottage," in Buckner, ed., *A Critical Companion to Lynn Nottage*, 9.

6. Chris Jones, "'Sweat' at Goodman Theatre: Lynn Nottage's Pulitzer Winner Set in a Factory Town is Now in Chicago—and Better than Broadway's," review of *Sweat*, by Lynn Nottage, chicagotribune.com, last modified March 19, 2019. Accessed January 11, 2020, www.chicagotribune.com/entertainment/theater/ct-ent-sweat-goodman-review-0320-story.html.

7. Brantley, "Review."

8. Christine J. Walley, "Trump's Election and the 'White Working Class': What We Missed," *American Ethnologist* 44, no. 2 (May 2017): 234, accessed January 26, 2019, DOI 10.1111/12473.

9. Nia-Malika Henderson, "Race and Racism in the 2016 Campaign," cnn.com, last modified September 1, 2016, accessed March 2, 2020, https://www.cnn.com/2016/08/31/politics/2016-election-donald-trump-hillary-clinton-race/index.html.

10. Nate Cohn, "Why Trump Won: Working-Class Whites," nytimes.com, last modified November 9, 2016, accessed April 11, 2020, www.nytimes.com/2016/11/10/upshot/why-trump-won-working-class-whites.html.

11. Jim Tankersley, "How Trump Won: The Revenge of Working-Class Whites," washingtonpost.com, last modified November 9, 2016, accessed April 11, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/11/09/how-trump-won-the-revenge-of-working-class-whites/.

12. Musa Al Gharbi, "Race and the Race for the White House: On Social Research in the Age of Trump," *American Sociologist* 49, no. 4 (December 2018): 497, accessed December 15, 2019, DOI: 10.1007/s12108–018–9373–5. Gharbi takes a nuanced view of the racial dynamics of the election. While he does not deny the existence of racism as a contributing factor in the election results, he argues against attributing Trump's main appeal to racial animus as reductionist, pointing to Mitt Romney's share of the white vote in 2012, which was larger than Trump's in 2016 (511–12). Gharbi concludes that "the available evidence suggests that the role of race has been widely overblown" (519).

13. Eustis, who toured the New York Public Theater's production of *Sweat* to a number of Rust Belt cities in 2018, included a program note stating that the play was not "a Republican or Democrat play. This play does what theatre does best: it tells the truth about the lives of people who don't normally get the spotlight, who aren't glamorous or rich, but who are as heroic and deep and complicated as anyone." Quoted in Peter Marks, "'They Just Told My Story': What Happens When a Play About Union Busting Tours Rust Belt Cities," washingtonpost.com, last modified October 2, 2018, accessed September 25, 2020, www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/theater_dance/they-just-told-my-story-what-happens-when-a-play-about-union-busting-tours-rust-belt-cities/2018/10/02/13a43648-c376–11e8–8f06–009b39c3f6dd_story.html.

14. Karl Marx, preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859), trans. S. W. Ryazanskaya, last modified August 23, 2000, accessed May 11, 2020, Marxists.org, https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx_Contribution_to_the_Critique_of_Political_Economy.pdf.

15. Nottage, *Sweat*, 5.

16. Nottage, *Sweat*, 61.

17. Nottage, *Sweat*, 20.

18. Quoted in Vron Ware, "Towards a Sociology of Resentment: A Debate on Class and Whiteness," *Sociological Research Online* 13, no. 5 (September 2008), accessed November 21, 2017, DOI:10.5153/sro.1802.

19. The performances were held in the town's former train station, a symbol of its former prosperity, and consisted of a number of "movements" using a variety of media, including video and film of Reading's past and present, oral history, live actors playing Reading residents, dance sequences, and video of audience members reflecting on their experiences as members of the community. See *This Is Reading*, by Lynn Nottage, Tony Gerber, and Kate Whoriskey, directed by Kate Whoriskey, choreographed by Rennie Harris, score composed by Deb O, Market Road Films, vimeo.com, last modified February 8, 2018, accessed December 15, 2019, https://vimeo.com/ondemand/thisisreading/253882849.

20. Quoted in Allison Considine, "This Is Reading, This Is Home," Americantheatre.org, last modified July 26, 2017, accessed August 31, 2019, www.americantheatre.org/2017/07/26/this-is-reading-this-is-home/.

21. Considine, "This Is Reading, This Is Home."

22. "Nottage's Steel-Town Blues," *American Theatre* 32, no. 6 (July–August 2015): 21.

23. Nottage, *Sweat*, 35–36.

24. Nottage, *Sweat*, 49.

25. Nottage, *Sweat*, 49.

26. Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), xxi.

27. The term "late capital" was coined by the German sociologist Werner Sombart in his multivolume work *Der Moderne Kapitalismus*. A Marxist who later became a National Socialist, Sombart's project was in part to demonstrate the ways in which Capital was subject to radical change in its organizational structure. According to Jürgen Backhaus, Sombert's work consisted "in establishing the subdiscipline of comparative economics with a historical perspective in order to capture the developmental process leading up to a particular institutional realization." See Backhaus, "Sombart's Modern Capitalism," *Kyklos* 42 (1989): 602. It is not until Ernst Mandel revived the term in the 1970s, defining it in terms of global capital flow and the dominance of multinational corporations that it took on its meaning as a component of postmodern globalism. See Mandel, *Der Spätkapitalismus* (Berlin: Surkamp Verlag, 1972). For an accessible overview of the shifting meaning of the term, see Annie Lowrey, "Why the Phrase 'Late Capitalism' Is Suddenly Everywhere," atlantic.com, last modified May 1, 2017, accessed August 20, 2020, www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2017/05/late-capitalism/524943/.

28. American exceptionalism is a colloquially fluid and poorly defined term, sometimes credited to de Tocqueville, but actually coined by Joseph Stalin, who used it as a term of derision. See Terrence McCoy, "How Joseph Stalin invented 'American Exceptionalism,'" atlantic.com, last modified March 15, 2012, accessed May 2, 2020, https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2012/03/how-joseph-stalin-invented-american-exceptionalism/254534/. Brendan O'Connor has defined American exceptionalism as an ideology, one embraced and propagated by both major political parties and constituted by three pillars: "the exceptionalism of birth, the exceptionalism of opportunity, and the exceptionalism of role." I use the term in the sense of O'Connor's second pillar, that of America's status as a land of ever-growing opportunity. See O'Connor, *Anti-Americanism and American Exceptionalism: Prejudice and Pride About the USA* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 132.

29. Nottage, *Sweat*, 55–56.

30. Nottage, *Sweat*, 56.

31. Nottage, *Sweat*, 56.

32. Karl Marx, "Estranged Labour," *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, xxiv, trans. Martin Milligan. marxists.org, accessed May 2, 2020, https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/labour.htm (translator's italics).

33. Marx, "Estranged Labour," xxii (translator's italics).

34. Nottage, *Sweat*, 53.

35. Nottage, *Sweat*, 54.

36. Nottage, *Sweat*, 36.

37. Nottage, *Sweat*, 37.

38. John B. Davis, "Identity and Individual Economic Agents: A Narrative Approach," *Review of Social Economy* 67, no. 1 (2009): 73, accessed May 3, 2020, DOI: 10.1080/00346760802431009.

39. Mary Wrenn, "Identity, Identity Politics, and Neoliberalism," *Panoeconomicus* 4 (2014): 506, accessed May 3, 2020, DOI: 10.2298/PAN1404503W.

40. Wrenn, "Identity, Identity Politics, and Neoliberalism," 509.

41. Wrenn, "Identity, Identity Politics, and Neoliberalism," 506.

42. See Engin F. Isin, "The Neurotic Citizen," *Citizenship Studies* 8, no. 3 (September 2004): 217–35. Isin posits that neoliberalism has led to a form of "neuropolitics," in which the state has abandoned any semblance of mitigating actual threats, in favor of policies that emphasize personal responsibility within a culture of fear and under conditions that the citizen is unable to negotiate. For Isin, "the fundamental right for the neurotic citizen is the right to angst" (233).

43. Nottage, *Sweat*, 14.

44. Nottage, *Sweat*, 23.

45. Carol Graham, "Understanding the Role of Despair in America's Opioid Crisis," *Policy2020*, Brookings Institution, last modified October 15, 2019, accessed May 9, 2020, https://www.brookings.edu/policy2020/votervital/how-can-policy-address-the-opioid-crisis-and-despair-in-america/.

46. Nottage, *Sweat*, 17.

47. The bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers was not the first crisis leading to the

Great Recession, but as a very large and systemically critical institution, it sparked a worldwide panic, precipitated by fears that Lehman's fall could have a ripple effect on other major financial institutions worldwide. See Ben Chu, "Financial Crisis 2008: How Lehman Brothers Helped Cause 'the Worst Financial Crisis In History,'" *Independent*, last modified September 12, 2018, accessed August 3, 2020, www.independent.co.uk/news/business/analysis-and-features/financial-crisis-2008-why-lehman-brothers-what-happened-10-years-anniversary-a8531581.html.

48. Nottage, *Sweat*, 65.

49. Lawrence D. Bobo, "Somewhere between Jim Crow and Post-Racialism: Reflections on the Racial Divide in America Today," *Daedalus* 2 (Spring 2011): 13–14.

50. Joe William Trotter Jr., *Workers on Arrival: Black Labor in the Making of America* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019), 85.

51. See chapter 4, "The Industrial Working Class," in Trotter, *Workers on Arrival*, 77–109.

52. Nottage, et al., *This Is Reading*.

53. Quoted in Ware, "Towards a Sociology of Resentment," *Sociological Research Online*.

54. Bernard N. Meltzer and Gil Richard Musolf, "Resentment and Ressentiment," *Sociological Inquiry* 72, no. 2 (Spring 2002): 243.

55. Manfred S. Frings, preface, *Ressentiment* by Max Scheler (1913), Marquette Studies in Philosophy, ed. Andrew Tallon (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1994), 6.

56. Frings, preface, *Ressentiment*, 7.

57. Richard Ira Sugarman, preface, *Rancor Against Time: The Phenomenology of "Ressentiment*," by Sugarman (Hamburg: Meiner, 1980), xi.

58. Nottage, *Sweat*, 59.

59. Nottage, *Sweat*, 77.

60. "Yeah, it sucks," Tracey says of being passed over. "And, I betcha they wanted a minority." Nottage, *Sweat*, 48.

61. Nottage, *Sweat*, 88.

62. Nottage, *Sweat*, 16.

63. Nottage, *Sweat*, 21.

64. Nottage, *Sweat*, 47–49.

65. Nottage, *Sweat*, 37–38.

66. Nottage, *Sweat*, 92.

67. Nottage, *Sweat*, 95–109.