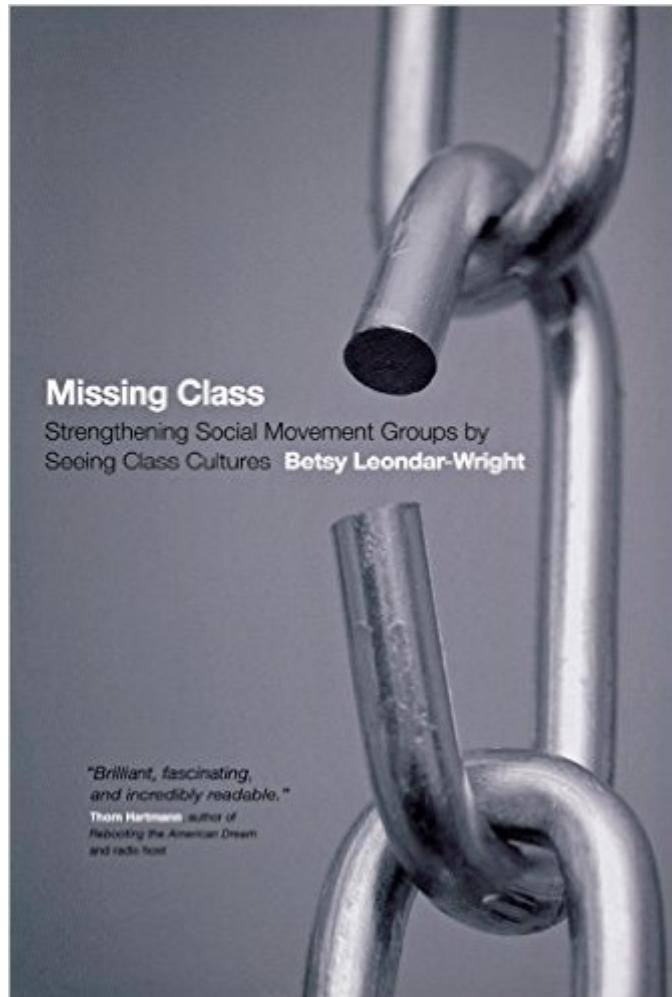


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# Missing Class: Strengthening Social Movement Groups By Seeing Class Cultures



## Synopsis

Many activists worry about the same few problems in their groups: low turnout, inactive members, conflicting views on racism, overtalking, and offensive violations of group norms. But in searching for solutions to these predictable and intractable troubles, progressive social movement groups overlook class culture differences. In *Missing Class*, Betsy Leondar-Wright uses a class-focused lens to show that members with different class life experiences tend to approach these problems differently. This perspective enables readers to envision new solutions that draw on the strengths of all class cultures to form the basis of stronger cross-class and multiracial movements. The first comprehensive empirical study of US activist class cultures, *Missing Class* looks at class dynamics in 25 groups that span the gamut of social movement organizations in the United States today, including the labor movement, grassroots community organizing, and groups working on global causes in the anarchist and progressive traditions. Leondar-Wright applies Pierre Bourdieu's theories of cultural capital and habitus to four class trajectories: lifelong working-class and poor; lifelong professional middle class; voluntarily downwardly mobile; and upwardly mobile. Compellingly written for both activists and social scientists, this book describes class differences in paths to activism, attitudes toward leadership, methods of conflict resolution, ways of using language, diversity practices, use of humor, methods of recruiting, and group process preferences. Too often, we miss class. *Missing Class* makes a persuasive case that seeing class culture differences could enable activists to strengthen their own groups and build more durable cross-class alliances for social justice.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is a very useful book for activists seeking to bridge class differences, based on interviews of 362 members from 25 leftist groups in 5 states, plus transcripts of 100 of their meetings. Most groups were very frustrated, even torn apart, by conflict rooted in class differences but never discussed. With awareness these differences could be a source of strength. The principle categories of class analysis discussed in this book are working class, lower professional class, professional middle class, and upper middle class. But these are supplemented by à œstraddlersâ • who grew up working class but became middle class, and by à œvoluntary downwardly mobileâ • activists from middle class backgrounds who chose to join low income, radical groups such as anarchists. Education and occupation are the primary determinants of class status in this scheme, not income. The research goal was to distinguish differences caused by class versus other factors such as race, gender, ideology, and militancy. The major differences that were identified seemed to be most influenced by education and the associated social and occupational networks. The college educated middle class activists are far more individualistic and politically or ideologically motivated and talk abstractly. Less educated working class activists have a more communal ethic of mutual aid, talk more concretely and in shorter sentences, and bond to their group by relationships of trust, especially with leaders or mentors, as well as help actually given or received. I note that this way of interacting harks to the mutual reciprocity in hunter-gatherer societies (read à œ5000 Years of Debtâ • by David Graeber).

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