

Joshua Ashton

Professor Jorgenson

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Liberty and Justice for All

Some say that these United States were built on equality, freedom, and opportunity for all. I would argue that the United States was built on inequality, slavery, and suppression of others to benefit a social class of aristocrats, the rich and powerful elites who controlled our society for centuries. I contend that we still see this in modern day America, and is exemplified in Blue and White Collar discussions. These discussions however, focus too much on the pros and cons of each, when the discussion should focus on how some White Collar workers contribute and enlarge the inequities Blue Collar workers face..

The discussion of Blue and White Collar workers is often viewed through a specific lens created by the elite. Mike Rose, a research professor at UCLA raised by Blue Collar workers, makes this important note: “Although writers and scholars have often looked at the working class, they have generally focused on the values such workers exhibit rather than on the thought their work requires—a subtle but pervasive omission” (Rose). The basis of which all conversations about labor in the United States starts with the “subtle but pervasive omission” that Blue Collar work is devoid of intellect. What Rose points out is this is an elitist perspective that has inserted itself into every conversation by the elite, and thereby limits the ability to advocate on behalf of Blue Collar workers. Regardless if the advocacy comes from Blue Collar workers, or from humanitarian White Collar workers, setting the starting point of a conversation to be

biased to White Collar workers, causes any conclusion to likewise be biased to White Collar workers.

The audience Mike Rose is relaying this perspective to is college-educated, Phi Beta Kappa alumni, who subscribe to the American Scholar. This is both his intended perspective but also the right audience. “Writers and scholars” aren’t Blue Collar workers, they are White Collar workers whose entire job is examining, writing, and theorizing about labor and expectations. Those White Collar workers can’t accurately learn and portray the conditions and environment that Blue Collar workers work in, and inevitably will dictate the “values such workers exhibit.” This article by Mike Rose was written shortly after the Great Recession, which Joseph E. Stiglitz, a Nobel Prize-winning economist and former chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers under President Clinton, pointed to specific causes of the Great Recession specifically being corporations and broken government policies that benefited and deregulated corporations (Stiglitz). The people behind these corporations were White Collar workers, bankers, CEOs, and brokers, who took advantage of tens of millions of Americans and did not face any consequences (Stiglitz). These are signs of drastic disparities in market power and control between Blue and White Collar workers, where White Collar bankers, CEOs, and brokers make millions off of the Global Financial Crisis they caused through exploitation of Blue Collar workers. The purpose of this article can be deduced from the author, audience, and context, as a Blue Collar-raised professor attempts to educate his White Collar audience that Blue Collar work -while inherently different- is as equal and important as White Collar work, shifting the starting point of a conversation about Blue and White Collar workers to neutral, even ground between the two. Creating this neutral, even ground to base a conversation is the starting point to more broadly eliminate systemic inequities Blue Collar workers face, that are often caused by the White Collar

workers that may be reading the American Scholar. Considering Rose's purpose, his audience, and the context, it is clear that he is an important voice in the conversation of Blue and White Collar workers, and in particular the inequities Blue Collar workers face.

The creation of an inferior working class was masterminded by the ruling elite, to divert attention from the inherent equality between Blue and White Collar workers. Matthew Crawford, who was previously an electrician, mechanic, and now a PhD, makes this important distinction of Blue and White Collar workers: "Such a partition of thinking from doing has bequeathed us the dichotomy of 'white collar' versus 'blue collar,' corresponding to mental versus manual. These seem to be the categories that inform the educational landscape even now, and this entails two big errors. First, it assumes that all blue collar work is as mindless as assembly line work, and second, that white collar work is still recognizably mental in character" (Crawford). How can we associate "mental" and "mindless" working conditions to a specific working class? Truly, there is no basis for such a claim, but the elite of our society has worked hard to nevertheless create such connotations. Critically, however, White Collar jobs are increasingly becoming more repetitive, simple, and braindead. Examining my own job history, I currently work as a customer service representative for an annuity company. I hold what is considered a White Collar job that society says has substantial thought required for day-to-day function compared to Blue Collar jobs, such as a position I held packing orders for a warehouse. The societal expectation as to what was "mindless" has been completely opposite to my own experience, as the warehouse position incorporated more free will, autonomy, improvisation, and suggestions I provided were implemented. Compare this to my current position, where I need to ask for permission from others to correct the status of an annuity application from the same individuals who moved the application to the incorrect status. This translates to inequities, discrimination, and prejudice that

Blue Collar workers will face constantly from White Collar workers, such as previously noted during the Great Recession.

Examining the publisher that Crawford is writing for in more detail, the New Atlantis says their focus is on employment trends, and we can determine the audience is therefore White Collar workers in general, potentially those who are workforce or human resource oriented in their careers. Considering these are the individuals Mike Rose considered to have been part of the problem, creating a disparity in societal expectations, it is important to note that Crawford considered that it was important to speak directly to the same group. The article Crawford wrote was published in 2006, where there was a general discussion about workforce trends and socio-economic inequities, but we had yet to encounter the Great Recession of 2008 (though the lead up to the Great Recession started years before). This could easily have been a case of seeing the writing on the wall, and the inevitable danger of how an elitist and derogatory perspective of Blue Collar workers could easily lead to a situation akin to the Great Recession, which was caused by exploitation of American workers. There are inherent inequities that Blue Collar workers face that must be resolved and will likely lead to economic peril in the United States, but doing so requires a perspective change that Crawford is attempting to communicate by showing that Blue and White Collar workers are equal in every way that makes a difference. I would say given the context Matthew Crawford is writing in, however, it is extremely likely that his audience would have been dismissive of the purpose of this article. After all, it's not as if some White Collar workers (largely bankers, CEOs, and brokers) had yet caused a recession.

In examining the arguments and rhetorical devices used by Mike Rose and Matthew Crawford, while extremely similar, the context in which Matthew Crawford wrote his article and arguments leads to what would appear to be a less effective presentation compared to Mike

Rose's article. What should be taken from these papers however, is that over a decade later we still have not seen any meaningful changes in our society, as income inequality is even more prevalent, corporations have absolute control, and the discussion of exploitation of labor has fallen to the wayside over a fight for the very soul of our nation. Ultimately, neither succeeded in fully changing the perspective, the conversation starting point, for any of their White Collar audience members to view Blue Collar workers as an equal and important part of our society. If Matthew Crawford had been successful, perhaps we would have seen more consequences -or the prevention- of the Great Recession. If Mike Rose had been successful, perhaps the conditions of Amazon warehouse employees would be substantively better, or the small regulations made after the Great Recession would have remained instead of being repealed in 2017 and 2018. Either way, our society should focus on how some White Collar workers contribute and enlarge the inequities Blue Collar workers face. If we do not, I fear the future of our nation will become a corporate nation-state.

Works Cited

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