

331: Labor Economics as seen through the Collection Development of an Iowan Library

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LIS 4321: Collection Management

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May 9, 2023

Community Profile

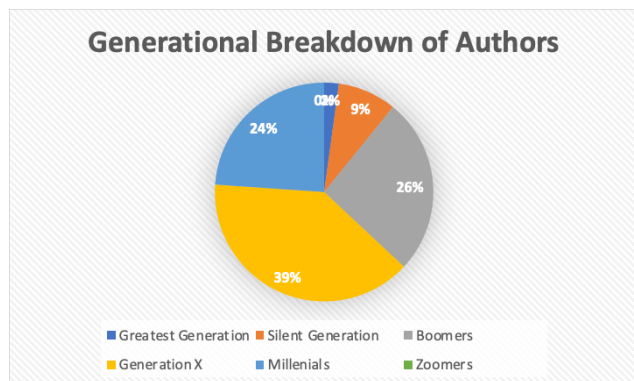
I chose to look at the community of Bettendorf, Iowa. Bettendorf is a relatively small town located on the banks of the Mississippi River and is one of the “Quad Cities.” When the city is mentioned in regional and national newscasts, it is almost always regarding the river levels and the devastation that flooding brings. As of July 2021, it had a population of 39,327. It has a high population of minors, with 26% of residents being under the age of 18. The major industries in Bettendorf are weapons manufacturing, agricultural manufacturing, and healthcare. The John Deere world headquarters are in Moline, Illinois, another one of the Quad Cities, and is the largest employer for the area. The population is overwhelmingly middle-class white families. The median income is \$89,375 and 3 out of every 4 Bettendorffians own their residence. There are approximately 7% of Bettendorf’s population living under the poverty line. (U.S. Census, 2022)

The library is very active in Bettendorf’s community. Perusing their website, their schedule was packed with activities for different interest groups. They had English learning courses, fan-centered groups for interests like Star Wars, youth and teen groups, and activities for retired people. They offered all sorts of other resources and engaging materials as well. One thing that truly impressed me was the ability to check out a mobile hotspot from the library for up to a week at a time.

Quantitative Analysis

I decided to use 331 as my range. 331 is dedicated to labor economics. Though I tried to pair it down, I ended up with 46 titles, ranging in date of publication from 1974 to 2023. I was impressed that only 2 of the titles (4%) were published in the 20th century, with all the others being written in the 21st. In fact, the collection was so current that I found 54% of my sample

titles were published within the last 5 years (2019-2023). The collection ranged in length from 189 to 772 pages, and while most books were only available as a single copy, Ronan Farrow's *Catch and Kill* was the largest with nine books in circulation. I also took an interest in the demographics of the authors highlighted in this section. I was able to find this information by finding author biography pages through Google search. 24 of the 47 authors, or 51% identified as female. In addition, 15% identified as people of color. Overall, I was impressed with the reflection of town demographics in the authors. I also decided to look at age demographics of authors and compare those to town demographics. I found that the most common generation of authors was Generation X with 18 confirmed authors, or 38%. The Breakdown is below.



Time	Amount	Percentage
2018-2023	25	54.3%
2013-2018	9	19.6%
2008-2013	5	10.9%
2003-2008	1	2.2%
2000-2003	3	6.5%
Pre-2000	2	4.3%

I chose to look at 331 and focus on labor economics because Bettendorf and the Quad Cities are the location of one of the largest labor disputes in American History. (Mettler, 2009) It is a working-class community with large industry, and because of that I thought Labor Economics would be an important part of the non-fiction collection within this particular library. Beyond that, there is a global conversation beginning to be had about work and worker's rights

in post-pandemic America. This has led to increased interest in unionization and alternative forms of work at levels much higher than pre-pandemic. (Sheirholz et al, 2023)

Qualitative Analysis

As I mentioned above, I was impressed with how some of the demographics mirrored the town population, and especially the representation of authors who are women and people of color. While they were much higher than I expected them to be, I would still like to increase diversity in my future selections if possible. The subject matter of the materials was similarly diverse, covering all parts of the political spectrum, and discussing labor economics from the position of both the capitalist class and the exploited underclass. To see so many books with such vastly different opinions one right after the other is a bit disorienting, but ultimately a sign of a healthy and useful library. One demographic issue I did take pause in was the lack of young voices. While Millennials did represent 23% of authors surveyed, they were almost exclusively from the older part of that generation, and the surveyed materials did not include any Gen Z authors. While that may seem like something that will fix itself as Gen Z grows up, the truth is, the oldest Generation Z members are in their mid-to-late twenties. Further than that, NPR describes Gen Z as “the most pro-union” generation (Restrepo, 2023) so their exclusion seems notable to me. Below is a chart with some of the quantitative analysis done on 331.1 and 331.2, to show the diversity of books in this range.

Title	Professional Review	Goodreads Reviews	Intended Audience	Author Background	Subject Heading
<i>Post Grad: Five Women and their First Year Out of College</i>	“Candid revelations that fail to inspire much empathy.” -Kirkus Reviews	3.7	College age and post-college women	The author is a post-college aged woman. This book is an account of her and her friends’ experiences postgrad.	Women College Graduates, Women, Feminism & Feminist Theory, Women’s Studies, Women – Social Condition.
<i>The Great Escape: A True Story of Forced Labor and Immigrant Dreams in America</i>	“This is a searing account of the harrowing road to justice.” -David Larabell, Publisher’s Weekly	4.6	Adults interested in sociology, politics and the labor movement. This is an accessible read for most adults.	A labor-rights activist and post-disaster expert. Has successfully launched several legal campaigns to end the sufferings reported in his book.	Forced Labor, Mississippi History, Immigrants, Foreign Workers, Labor Camps, Escapes, Exploitation, Public Policy, Social Activists.

<i>Made in China: a Prisoner, an SOS Letter, and Immigrant Dreams in America</i>	“Spanning biography, business, and sociology, this well-reported and well-researched account of labor practices shows the impact of the demand for global goods. It will especially interest consumers and labor advocates.” -Library Journal.com	4.4	This is a piece of investigative journalism, and as such is accessible to a wide variety of adults but most especially those with interest in labor justice.	An investigative reporter of Chinese heritage investigating claims of human rights abuses both in China and in the US.	Manufacturing Industries, China, Work Environment, Political Prisoners, Globalization, Labor, Asian & Asian American,
<i>The Robots are Coming! The Future of Jobs in the Age of Automation</i>	“A promising, terrifying, and cautionary tale of the ‘unstoppable’ rise of automation.”	4.23	Adults, particularly those with vested interest in automation and the prevention of job loss due to automation.	A foreign affairs columnist. He focuses on Latin and South American affairs and the book is translated from Spanish to English.	Labor Supply, Employment Forecasting, Technological Innovations.
<i>Maestro: Greenspan's Fed and the American Boom</i>	“Greenspan (is) so compelling a figure that they have emphasized a great man at the expense of exploring	3.4	Adults interested in inflation and economic precursors to the 2008 housing crash.	A journalist famed for running hard-hitting stories on American political figures	Greenspan, Alan 1926-, Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, Monetary Policy

	the institution.”				
<i>First Jobs: True Tales of Bad Bosses, Quirky Coworkers, Big Breaks, and Small Paychecks</i>	t's difficult not to read this in big chunks. The book affords a chance to share in other people's formative experiences and to see how they dealt with one of the first big challenges of adulthood. Recommended for anyone with an interest in other people. -Audrey Snowden for Library Journal	3.5	Young Adults seeking commiseration, insight into first jobs.	A millennial free-lance journalist collecting and curating the experiences of many different people as they embark on their first employment opportunity .	Entry-Level Employment, Occupations.
<i>American Made: What Happens to People When Work Disappears</i>	“A worthy but at-times stilted portrait of the lasting effects of job losses on factory workers.” -Kirkus Reviews	4.3	Adults with interest in automation and job loss	A Pulitzer-Prize winning journalist	Plant Shutdowns, Work, Indiana, Unemployed, Economics, Working Class
<i>Work Won't Love You Back: How</i>	“A welcome cri de Coeur against the soulless	4	Adults, Working People	A journalist covering labor movements	Quality of Work Life, Job Satisfaction,

<i>Devotion to Our Jobs Keeps us Exploited, Exhausted, and Alone</i>	machinery of late capitalism.” -Kirkus Reviews			and grassroots organizing.	Labor, Work-Life Balance
<i>Working: People Talk about What They do all Day and How they Feel about What they Do</i>	“ <i>Working</i> is a compelling, fascinating look at jobs and the people who do them.” - The New Press	4.2	Adults, Working-class and employed people	Oral Historian and radio broadcaster	Working Class, Interviews, Attitudes
<i>The Fight for Fifteen: The Right Wage for Working America</i>	“A savvy inside look at the social movement challenging decades of stark economic decline.” -Kirkus Reviews	3.7	Adults, people interested in unionizing/unionization	A Labor leader and advocate for the fight for living wages	Minimum Wage, Working Class, Labor, Labor Laws and Legislation, Industrial Relations
<i>Temp: How American Work, American Business, and the American Dream Became Temporary</i>	“An important contribution to our understanding of American capitalism, then and now.” -Australasian Journal of American Studies	3.9	Adults, Temp Workers, those interested in labor movements and deconstructing capitalism. This book is attempting to be accessible, but may not be for all audiences.	Labor Historian at Cornell University.	Temporary Employment, Job Security, Labor Market, United States, History
<i>Retirement Heist: How Companies</i>	“Schultz unleashes an undeniably powerful and	4.1	Adults, Workers, Older adults near retirement age	An investigative journalist for the	Pensions, Corporations, United States, Moral and

<i>Plunder and Profit from the Nest Eggs of American Workers</i>	penetrating look into corporate money-making machinations and the havoc inflicted on rank-and-file employees. Essential reading for anyone who works for a living.”” – Kirkus Reviews			Wall Street Journalist with a history of reporting on corporate scandals.	Ethical Aspects, Life Insurance Policies
<i>Will Work from Home: Earn the Cash – Without the Compromise</i>	“Good tips and good words abound, although it’s somewhat surprising that two such accomplished professionals push the same kind of work-at-home occupations for women, such as interior design, instead of helping blaze a trail.” – Barbara Jacobs for Booklist	3.4	Adults, Women, Disgruntled Employees, People interested in remote work	The author is the CEO of Women for Hire inc. and is a public speaker and media personality.	Home Labor, Telecommuting, Home-based Businesses
<i>Flex: Reinventing Work for</i>	"The call for flexibility—once shunned	3.4	Adults, Disgruntled Employees, Women, Unhappy People	Author is a brand consultant	Flextime, Flexible Work Arrangements,

<i>a Smarter, Happier Life</i>	in the workplace and elsewhere—has grown larger and louder. Auerbach delves into five areas where most of the world needs more malleability." — <i>Booklist</i>			and strategist, working with multinational corporation .	Women Employees
<i>The Weekend Effect: The Life-Changing Benefits of Taking Time Off and Challenging the Cult of Overwork</i>	"Often we race through the week, only to find our weekends packed with countless errands and never-ending to-do lists....In <i>The Weekend Effect</i> , Katrina Onstad offers a powerful argument, and practical advice, on the importance of reclaiming your leisure time to live a happier and more fulfilling life." — Gretchen	3.5	Adults, Workers/Employees, those interested in worker's rights	An award-winning journalist with extensive narrative writing experience	Weekly rest-day. Hours of Labor, Success, Work-Life Balance, Self-Help, Personal Growth, Happiness, Social Science, Sociology, Quality of Life, Social Policy, Time Management, Work and Family, Happiness, Sociology.

	Rubin, <i>New York Times</i>				
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Conclusion

As you can see, there is a great variety of different materials and voices in the collection. Professional journalists are the most popular authors in this range, but I think that comes with the territory. The average Goodreads score for this range was 3.89, and the professional reviews trended positive more often than not. The Bettendorf Library provided a wide range of Subject Headings attached to their catalog, but certain words like Labor and Employment popped up frequently, making sense with the subject material of the range. Almost every book in this range is geared towards adults, but labor economics is not a topic frequently associated with youth culture, so this makes sense.

Overall, I think this collection serves the people of Bettendorf well. It gives many different entry points into the conversation and seems to have books geared at all different levels of understanding. While I was disappointed in the lack of youth-written literature, there are several works geared towards younger generations, and many calling to action and political books, which can be refreshing to find in the modern landscape of libraries clinging to apolitical neutrality. I was pleased with what I found and feel that whoever the collection development librarian at the Bettendorf Public Library is doing an excellent job.

References

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