

# Economic Crisis and New Social Realities: Bait and Switch and the American Dream— Presidential Address 2010<sup>†</sup>

Rosanna Hertz

First published: 21 October 2010

<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1573-7861.2010.01205.x>

<sup>†</sup> I thank Emily Mahon and Harve Horowitz, without whose guidance, help, and friendship this story would not have been possible. Robert J. Thomas helped me figure out how to tell this story with amazing insight from across the world. I thank Howard Becker, Susan Reverby, and my colleagues in the Women’s Studies and Sociology Departments for their critiques and suggestions for revision. I thank the 2010 Program Committee, Anita Garey, Nazli Kibria, Jonathan Imber, Chris Winship, Pamela Stone, and William J. Wilson for their dedication, hard work, and good company. A version of this article was presented as the Presidential Address at the 2010 Annual Meeting of the Eastern Sociological Society.

## Abstract

The ESS was called to act during the fall of 2009. We faced a critical test: to stand beside the housekeepers at the hotel where we were supposed to hold the 2010 conference or to ignore their plight. I use the case study of breaking a contract with the Hyatt Hotel in order to locate the Hyatt layoffs in a broader context. This case is meant to illuminate two related issues. (1) The Hyatt Hotel used a traditional strategy of labor substitution in the context of a new global economy. During this ongoing economic crisis, housekeepers, who were promised good jobs and benefits, had worked hard on a steep climb toward fulfilling the American Dream. The resourcefulness of the unions, who saw the loss of these jobs as a threat to the entire industry, and articulate laid-off workers, who captured the media’s attention, kept this newsworthy. (2) When faced with choices over “whose side are we on,” our strategies for how to act need to be different than academic posturing. I answer the question of how we should act when we become actors in these situations, which is what the ESS was confronted with over the Hyatt’s housekeeper firing.

## References

×

This website utilizes technologies such as cookies to enable essential site functionality, as well as for analytics, personalization, and targeted advertising. You may change your settings at any time or accept the default settings. You may close this banner to continue with only essential cookies. [Privacy Policy](#)

Manage Preferences

Accept All

Reject Non-Essential

---

Chase, Katie Johnston 2009a. "Patrick 'Troubled' by Hyatt," *Boston Globe*, September 19.

[Google Scholar](#)

---

Chase, Katie Johnston 2009b. "Hotel Staffing Company Faced Wage Complaints," *Boston Globe*, September 26.

[Google Scholar](#)

---

Chase, Katie Johnston 2009c. "Workers Reject Hyatt's Job Offer," *Boston Globe*, September 29.

[Google Scholar](#)

---

Chase, Katie Johnston. 2010. "Ex-Hyatt Workers Find Job Market Hard to Penetrate," *Boston Globe*, April 2.

[Google Scholar](#)

---

Epstein, Cynthia Fuchs. 2007. "Great Divided: The Cultural, Cognitive, and Social Bases of the Global Subordination of Women," *American Sociological Review* 72(1): 1–22.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

---

Fenimore, Jillian. 2010. "Cambridge City Council Votes for Ban on Subcontracting Hotel Maids," *Wicked Local Cambridge*, April 6.

[Google Scholar](#)

---

Friedland, William H., and Robert J. Thomas. 1974. "The Paradoxes of Agricultural Unionism in California," *Society* 11(4): 54–62.

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#)

---

Goffman, Erving. 1956. "Embarrassment and Social Organization," *American Journal of Sociology* 62(3): 264–

This website utilizes technologies such as cookies to enable essential site functionality, as well as for analytics, personalization, and targeted advertising. You may change your settings at any time or accept the default settings. You may close this banner to continue with only essential cookies. [Privacy Policy](#)

Manage Preferences

Accept All

Reject Non-Essential

Hartmann, Heidi 2008. "The Impact of the Current Economic Downturn on Women" [Testimony Presented to the Joint Economic Committee at the Hearing: The Employment Situation, June], *Institute for Women's Policy Research B260*: 1-11.

[Google Scholar](#) 

U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2010. " Union Membership Annual." Retrived January 22, 2010 (<http://www.bls.gov/news.release/union2.toc.htm>).

[Google Scholar](#) 

Wall Street Journal. Company Research Key Facts. Hyatt Hotels Corp." Retrieved February 21, 2010 ( [http://online.wsj.com/quotes/dey\\_facts.html?mod=2\\_0470\\$symbol=H&news-symbol=H&mg=com-wsj](http://online.wsj.com/quotes/dey_facts.html?mod=2_0470$symbol=H&news-symbol=H&mg=com-wsj) ).

[Google Scholar](#) 

Woolhouse, Megan. 2009. "Firing Housekeepers Creates PR Mess for Hyatt: Effect on Bottom Line of Cancellations, Boycott Calls Unclear," *Boston Globe*, September 25.

[Google Scholar](#) 

## Citing Literature



[Download PDF](#)

### ABOUT WILEY ONLINE LIBRARY

[Privacy Policy](#)

[Terms of Use](#)

[About Cookies](#)

[Manage Cookies](#)

This website utilizes technologies such as cookies to enable essential site functionality, as well as for analytics, personalization, and targeted advertising. You may change your settings at any time or accept the default settings. You may close this banner to continue with only essential cookies. [Privacy Policy](#)



Manage Preferences

Accept All

Reject Non-Essential

## OPPORTUNITIES

Subscription Agents  
Advertisers & Corporate Partners

## CONNECT WITH WILEY

The Wiley Network  
Wiley Press Room

Copyright © 1999-2026 John Wiley & Sons, Inc or related companies. All rights reserved, including rights for text and data mining and training of artificial intelligence technologies or similar technologies.

WILEY

This website utilizes technologies such as cookies to enable essential site functionality, as well as for analytics, personalization, and targeted advertising. You may change your settings at any time or accept the default settings. You may close this banner to continue with only essential cookies. [Privacy Policy](#)

Manage Preferences

Accept All

Reject Non-Essential