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Document A

Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman* (1949), Act Two

HOWARD: Say, aren't you supposed to be in Boston?

WILLY: That's what I want to talk to you about, Howard. You got a minute? [*He draws a chair in from the wing.*]

HOWARD: What happened? What're you doing here?

5 WILLY: Well...

HOWARD: You didn't crack up again, did you?

WILLY: Oh, no. No...

HOWARD: Geez, you had me worried there for a minute. What's the trouble?

WILLY: Well, tell you the truth, Howard. I've come to the decision that I'd rather not travel any more.

10 HOWARD: Not travel! Well, what'll you do?

WILLY: Remember, Christmas time, when you had the party here? You said you'd try to think of some spot for me here in town.

HOWARD: With us?

WILLY: Well, sure.

15 HOWARD: Oh, yeah, yeah. I remember. Well, I couldn't think of anything for you, Willy.

WILLY: I tell ya, Howard. The kids are all grown up, y'know. I don't need much any more. If I could take home — well, sixty-five dollars a week, I could swing it.

HOWARD: Yeah, but Willy, see I...

20 WILLY: I tell ya why. Howard. Speaking frankly and between the two of us, y'know — I'm just a little tired.

HOWARD: Oh, I could understand that, Willy. But you're a road man, Willy, and we do a road business. We've only got a half-dozen salesmen on the floor here.

WILLY: God knows, Howard. I never asked a favour of any man. But I was with the firm when your father used to carry you in here in his arms.

25 HOWARD: I know that, Willy, but...

WILLY: Your father came to me the day you were born and asked me what I thought of the name of Howard, may he rest in peace.

HOWARD: I appreciate that, Willy, but there just is no spot here for you. If I had a spot I'd slam you right in, but I just don't have a single solitary spot.

30 [*He looks for his lighter. Willy has picked it up and gives it to him. Pause.*]

WILLY [*with increasing anger*]: Howard, all I need to set my table is fifty dollars a week.

HOWARD: But where am I going to put you, kid?

WILLY: Look, it isn't a question of whether I can sell merchandise, is it?

HOWARD: No, but it's a business, kid, and everybody's gotta pull his own weight.

35 WILLY [*desperately*]: Just let me tell you a story. Howard...

HOWARD: 'Cause you gotta admit, business is business.

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40 WILLY [*angrily*]: Business is definitely business, but just listen for a minute. You don't understand this. When I was a boy — eighteen, nineteen — I was already on the road. And there was a question in my mind as to whether selling had a future for me. Because in those days I had a yearning to go to Alaska. See, there were three gold strikes in one month in Alaska, and I felt like going out. Just for the ride, you might say.

HOWARD [*barely interested*]: Don't say.

45 WILLY: Oh, yeah, my father lived many years in Alaska. He was an adventurous man. We've got quite a little streak of self-reliance in our family. I thought I'd go out with my older brother and try to locate him, and maybe settle in the North with the old man. And I was almost decided to go, when I met a salesman in the Parker House. His name was Dave Singleman. And he was eighty-four years old, and he'd drummed merchandise in thirty-one states. And old Dave, he'd go up to his room, y'understand, put on his green velvet slippers — I'll never forget — and pick up his phone and call the buyers, and without ever leaving his room, at the age of eighty-four, he made his living. And when I saw that, I realized that selling was the greatest career a man could want. 'Cause what could be more satisfying than to be able to go, at the age of eighty-four, into twenty or thirty different cities, and pick up a phone, and be remembered and loved and helped by so many different people? Do you know? When he died — and by the way he died the death of a salesman, in his green velvet slippers in the smoker of the New York, New Haven and Hartford, going into Boston — when he died, hundreds of salesmen and buyers were at his funeral. Things were sad on a lotta trains for months after that. [*He stands up. Howard has not looked at him.*] In those days there was personality in it, Howard. There was respect, and comradeship, and gratitude in it. Today, it's all cut and dried, and there's no chance for bringing friendship to bear — or personality. You see what I mean? They don't know me any more.

60 HOWARD [*moving away, to the right*]: That's just the thing, Willy.

WILLY: If I had forty dollars a week — that's all I'd need. Forty dollars, Howard.

HOWARD: Kid, I can't take blood from a stone, I...

65 WILLY [*desperation is on him now*]: Howard, the year Al Smith was nominated, your father came to me and...

HOWARD [*starting to go off*]: I've got to see some people, kid.

70 WILLY [*stopping him*]. I'm talking about your father! There were promises made across this desk! You mustn't tell me you've got people to see — I put thirty-four years into this firm, Howard, and now I can't pay my insurance! You can't eat the orange and throw the peel away — a man is not a piece of fruit! [*After a pause.*] Now pay attention. Your father — in 1928 I had a big year. I averaged a hundred and seventy dollars a week in commissions.

HOWARD [*impatiently*]: Now, Willy, you never averaged...

75 WILLY [*banging his hand on the desk*]: I averaged a hundred and seventy dollars a week in the year of 1928! And your father came to me — or rather, I was in the office here — it was right over this desk — and he put his hand on my shoulder...

HOWARD [*getting up*]: You'll have to excuse me, Willy, I gotta see some people. Pull yourself together. [*Going out.*] I'll be back in a little while.

[*On Howard's exit, the light on his chair grows very bright and strange.*]

80 WILLY: Pull myself together! What the hell did I say to him? My God, I was yelling at him! How could I? [*Willy breaks off, staring at the light, which occupies the chair, animating it. He approaches this chair, standing across the desk from it.*]

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Document B

Owen Jones, *Chavs: The Demonization of the Working Class* (2011)

There are some who defend the use of the word 'chav' and claim that, actually, working-class people are not demonized at all; 'chav' is simply used to designate anti-social hooligans and thugs. This is questionable. To begin with, no one can doubt that those on the receiving end are exclusively working class. When 'chav' first appeared in the Collins English Dictionary in 2005, it was defined as "a young working-class person who dresses in casual sports clothing." Since then, its meaning has broadened significantly. One popular myth makes it an acronym for "Council Housed And Violent." Many use it to show their distaste towards working-class people who have embraced consumerism, only to spend their money in supposedly tacky and uncivilized ways rather than with the discreet elegance of the bourgeoisie. Celebrities from working-class backgrounds such as David Beckham, Wayne Rooney or Cheryl Cole, for example, are routinely mocked as chavs.

Above all, the term 'chav' now encompasses any negative traits associated with working-class people—violence, laziness, teenage pregnancies, racism, drunkenness, and the rest. As *Guardian* journalist Zoe Williams wrote, " 'Chav' might have grabbed the popular imagination by seeming to convey something original—not just scum, friends, but scum in Burberry!—only now it covers so many bases as to be synonymous with 'prole' or any word meaning 'poor, and therefore worthless.'" Even Christopher Howse, a leader writer for the conservative *Daily Telegraph*, objected that 'many people use chav as a smokescreen for their hatred of the lower classes... To call people chavs is no better than public schoolboys calling townies "oiks".'

'Chavs' are often treated as synonymous with the "white working class." The BBC's 2008 *White* season of programs dedicated to the same class was a classic example, portraying its members as backward-looking, bigoted and obsessed with race. Indeed, while the "working class" became a taboo concept in the aftermath of Thatcherism, the "white working class" was increasingly spoken about in the early twenty-first century.

Because 'class' had for so long been a forbidden word within the political establishment, the only inequalities discussed by politicians and the media were racial ones. The white working class had become another marginalized ethnic minority, and this meant that all their concerns were understood solely through the prism of race. They became presented as a lost tribe on the wrong side of history, chavs disorientated by multiculturalism and obsessed with defending their identity from the cultural ravages of mass immigration. The rise of the idea of a "white working class" fuelled a new liberal bigotry. It was OK to hate the white working class, because they were themselves a bunch of racist bigots.

One common defence of the term 'chav' points out that "Chavs themselves use the word, so what's the problem?" They have a point: some young working-class people have even embraced the word as a cultural identity. But the meaning of a word often depends on who is using it. When uttered by a heterosexual, "queer" is clearly deeply homophobic; yet some gay men have proudly appropriated it as an identity. Similarly, although "Paki" is one of

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40 the most offensive racist terms a white person can use in Britain, some young Asians use it as a term of endearment among their peers. In 2010, a controversy involving right-wing US shock-jock Dr Laura Schlessinger vividly illustrated this point. After using the word “nigger” on-air eleven times in a conversation with an African-American caller, she attempted to defend herself on the grounds that black comedians and actors used it.

45 In all cases, the meaning of the word changes depending on the speaker. When uttered by a middle-class person, ‘chav’ becomes a term of pure class contempt. Liam Cranley, the son of a factory worker who grew up in a working-class community in Greater Manchester, describes to me his reaction when a middle-class person uses the word: “You’re talking about family: you’re talking about my brother, you’re talking about my mum. You’re talking about my friends.”

50 Demonizing people at the bottom has been a convenient way of justifying an unequal society throughout the ages. After all, in the abstract it would seem irrational that through an accident of birth, some should rise to the top while others remain trapped at the bottom. But what if you are on top because you deserve to be? What if people at the bottom are there because of a lack of skill, talent and determination?

55 Yet it goes deeper than inequality. At the root of the demonization of working-class people is the legacy of a very British class war. Margaret Thatcher’s assumption of power in 1979 marked the beginning of an all-out assault on the pillars of working-class Britain. Its institutions, like trade unions and council housing, were dismantled; its industries, from manufacturing to mining, were trashed; its communities were, in some cases, shattered,
60 never to recover; and its values, like solidarity and collective aspiration, were swept away in favour of rugged individualism. Stripped of their power and no longer seen as a proud identity, the working class was increasingly sneered at, belittled and scape-goated. These ideas have caught on, in part, because of the eviction of working-class people from the world of the media and politics.

Document C

George Clair Tooker, Jr, *Government Bureau*, 1956

Egg tempera on wood, 49.8 x 75.2 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

