

American Factory is great documentary for us, mainly because it discusses how some can fall out of the middle class, becoming vulnerable if not poor, but then thanks to government policy (what government) claw the their way back into the middle class, keeping the Dream alive for themselves and their children we hope (IG mobility). It is also the almost universal story but a story of how workers and managers learn by doing (aka learning by doing). For reasons that become obviout in the film the same factories and workers learn to do better overtime, like AI but not artificial, more of a group dynamic with input from workers and managers. Somehow workers can become much more productive over time, using lesst time to produce the same number of cars (or glass panels..). The makers of this documentatry sense this dynamic: the camera dwells on the machinery and workers converting sand (silicon) many shapes of very transparent glass (our Coa our Chinese owner entreprenuer writes a song about transparency, which could have two meanings, and Fu, see the Terry Gross interview below. We see the last GM S-10 truck role through the assembly line and we are off, new owners, some new workers from China and 2000 American workers, some from the GM plant that closed. To spread the pain/ privelidge we can the divide the 1 hour 50 minute file into three sections. Everyone read the cast of characters below should watch the first 20 minutes (some of the key cast members are listed below, the huge factory building itself is a star...I thought it was in Dayton, Ohio but actually in another town, this happens when land intensive factories spring up near cities). Also please listen to Terry Gross interviewing the [Directors of American Factory](#) (it says 47 minutes, but the interview we are interested in is just 20 minutes. Even better see the transcript of the longer full interview with text and pictures. [What's It Like Working At A Chinese-Run 'American Factory'? It's 'Complicated](#) one of many digs against the Chinese is that are referred to as “engineers” even though many of them do not have engineering degrees (Furnance Engineer Wong He for example went to work at Fuyao when he was 18 years (and has worked there for 20 years plus). On Fuyao Glass and benefits, see [their indeed page](#) See also Terry Gross NPR [What’s it like working in a Chinese American Factory? It’s ‘complicated’](#) (text and voice).

**Key Topics:** role of unions, role of manufacturing jobs, wages + benefits (medical insurance), varieties of capitalism (see Milanovic, 2019, Capitalism Alone presentation)



A scene from Julia Reichert and Steven Bognar's "American Factory." Credit...Netflix

'American Factory' **Won for:** Best documentary **Where to watch:** Stream it on [Netflix](#).

When the Chinese glass company Fuyao reopens a Dayton, Ohio factory that once housed General Motors, many former G.M. employees return to the work force with the hope of renewed prosperity and cross-cultural harmony. The filmmakers Julia Reichert and Steven Bognar are present for that optimistic moment and they stay through the difficulties that follow, as differences in work ethic, employee safety and compensation open up a rift between Chinese management and disgruntled American line workers. The promise and peril of this globalist experiment is evoked through Reichert and Bognar's compassionate eye.



[Rob Haerr](#) and [Wong He](#) in [American Factory](#) (2019)

[https://www.imdb.com/title/tt9351980/fullcredits/?ref\\_=tt\\_ov\\_st\\_sm](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt9351980/fullcredits/?ref_=tt_ov_st_sm)



Wong He

Contribute to IMDb. Add a bio, trivia, and more.  
[Update information for Wong He](#) »

I think Rob Haerr is a furnace engineer to be apprentice/co-worker to Wong He.

[American Factory](#) Himself - Furnance Engineer

[https://www.imdb.com/name/nm10930331/?ref\\_=ttfc\\_fc\\_cl\\_t2](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm10930331/?ref_=ttfc_fc_cl_t2)



## Cynthia Harper (II)

Contribute to IMDb. Add a bio, trivia, and more.  
[Update information for Cynthia Harper »](#)

Herself - Lamination Specialist

[American Factory](#) (Documentary)



## Dave Burrows (V)

Contribute to IMDb. Add a bio, trivia, and more.  
[Update information for Dave Burrows »](#)

President, Fuyao Glass America

[American Factory](#) Himself - Vice



## Junming 'Jimmy' Wang

Contribute to IMDb. Add a bio, trivia, and more.  
[Update information for Junming 'Jimmy' Wang »](#)

Himself - Vice President, Fuyao



## Shawnea Rosser

Contribute to IMDb. Add a bio, trivia, and more.  
[Update information for Shawnea Rosser »](#)

Herself - Glass Inspector

[American Factory](#) (Documentary)



## Jill Lamantia


Contribute to IMDb. Add a bio, trivia, and more.  
[Update information for Jill Lamantia »](#)

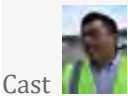
Operator

[American Factory](#) Herself - Forklift

### [American Factory](#) (2019) Full Cast & Crew



See agents for this cast & crew  Directed by [Steven Bognar](#) and [Julia Reichert](#)



[Junming 'Jimmy' Wang](#)

... Himself - Vice President, Fuyao



[Robert Allen](#)

... [Himself - Furnace Off-Loader](#) (as Bobby)

















[Sherrod Brown](#)

... Himself - U.S. Senator, Ohio



[Dave Burrows](#)

... Himself - Vice President, Fuyao Glass America

	<a href="#"><u>Austin Cole</u></a>	...	Himself - Tempering Backlight Production Supervisor
	<a href="#"><u>John Crane</u></a>	...	<a href="#"><u>Himself - Fuyao Safety Director</u></a>
	<a href="#"><u>John Gauthier</u></a>	...	Himself - President, Fuyao Glass America
	<a href="#"><u>Rob Haerr</u></a>	...	<a href="#"><u>Himself - Furnace Supervisor</u></a>
	<a href="#"><u>Cynthia Harper</u></a>	...	Herself - Lamination Specialist
	<a href="#"><u>Wong He</u></a>	...	<a href="#"><u>Himself - Furnace Engineer</u></a>
	<a href="#"><u>Timi Jernigan</u></a>	...	Himself - Furnace Technician
	<a href="#"><u>Jill Lamantia</u></a>	...	<a href="#"><u>Herself - Forklift Operator</u></a>
	<a href="#"><u>Jeff Daochuan Liu</u></a>	...	Himself - President, Fuyao Glass America
	<a href="#"><u>Shawnea Rosser</u></a>	...	Herself - Glass Inspector
	<a href="#"><u>Rebecca Ruan-O'Shaughnessy</u></a>	...	Herself - Fuyao Attorney
	<a href="#"><u>Fred Strahorn</u></a>	...	Himself - Ohio House of Representatives
	<a href="#"><u>John Withrow</u></a>	...	Himself - Lamination Supervisor (as John Winthrop)
	<a href="#"><u>Cho Tak Wong</u></a>	...	Himself - Founder & CEO, Fuyao (as Cao Dewang)

31 minutes in Senator Sherrod Brown of Ohio comes to October 16<sup>th</sup> opening and urges factory to unionize... chairman says if a union appears he will shut down the factory... 37 minutes dark side of factory work Robert Allen asks “do I have the stamina and the will to do this type of job...”



Every Chinese person should do things for our country and our people.

American Factory Chairman reminds workers they “were born of Chinese mothers...” 38 minutes we have not reached our goals,

### What's It Like Working At A Chinese-Run 'American Factory'? It's 'Complicated'

February 3, 2020 1:12 PM ET Heard on [Fresh](#)

[Air](#) [TERRY GROSS](#)



FRESH AIR

LISTEN 43:55 43-Minute Listen [PLAYLIST](#)



Chinese workers at Fuyao Glass America attend training to learn about American culture.

*Courtesy of Netflix*

In 2008, GM [closed](#) its manufacturing plant in Dayton, Ohio, sending the community into a tailspin. Workers who had been unionized at GM struggled to find jobs that paid close to the wages the plant had paid.

"After that GM plant closed, things were so hard for so long," Ohio-based filmmaker Steven Bognar says. "People lost their homes. The jobs you could get were at the Kohl's distribution center or Payless Shoes warehouse distribution center or fast food. People were making \$9 an hour."

When the Chinese glass manufacturer Fuyao reopened the shuttered GM plant in 2016, the community welcomed the influx of new jobs. But as time went on, enthusiasm waned. Some former GM employees found themselves working longer hours at Fuyao for half the pay.

In the Oscar-nominated documentary, *American Factory*, Bognar and Julia Reichert capture the tensions that exist within the Chinese-owned, Ohio-based plant. This is Reichert's fourth Oscar nomination — her first was in 1978.

## TV REVIEWS [Work Cultures Clash When A Chinese Company Reopens An 'American Factory'](#)



"In the United States, we fought to have an eight-hour day and have weekends off," she says. "That's pretty much unheard of in industrial work in China. ... If the boss says you have to work six days a week or seven days a week you just do it."

Bognar describes the relationship between the company and its American employees as a "complicated" one. People are grateful for the jobs, but the work is tough — especially on the factory floor: "It's hard, it's hot, it's dangerous, and the expectations are very high," he says. "And yet the pay is not what it should be."

*American Factory* won last year's Sundance Award for Directing of a U.S. Documentary. It was the first acquisition for Barack and Michelle Obama's production company, Higher Ground, and is streaming on Netflix.

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### Interview highlights

#### **On the difference between wages at the unionized GM plant and at Fuyao**

**Bognar:** In the film, Shawnea Rosser, who worked at the old GM plant and now works at Fuyao, she says it varies directly. She says at GM she was making \$29 and some cents per hour and at Fuyao she makes \$12.84. So that's less than half of what she used to make. She has several children. ... They lost their house because they couldn't they couldn't make the mortgage payments after GM closed. It's a very different world.

Here's the crazy thing: In China, it's been a remarkable trajectory. China's on the rise and [so are] people in the film, like Wong He. He is the furnace engineer who has been sent from China to the U.S. He's here for at least two years. He's not going to see his children for two years. But he's been working at **Fuyao since he was** 18 years old. He is so dedicated to Fuyao, and it's offering him a path to the middle class. He told us he's going to be able to build a house for his family, for his kids back in China, because he's making such good money. Meanwhile, in the States, people like Shawnea, who once had a blue-collar, middle-class life — modest but secure — they have no security anymore, and it's a very different landscape.



**Enlarge this image** Directors Julia Reichert and Steven Bognar live 25 minutes from the Fuyao factory in Dayton. Their previous film, *The Last Truck*, documented the closing of a GM factory in Moraine, Ohio.

*David Holm/Netflix* **On the work culture clash between Chinese and American workers**

**Reichert:** In our work culture, workers expect to be respected. [They] expect to be not told, "Just do this." [The] American worker will respond, "Why?" And, "Maybe I have a better idea." They'll look, the supervisor right in the eye and question them. This does not really happen in China very much. It's just a different work culture where people do what the boss says. ... People [in China] expect to work 12-hour days, six days a week. The Chinese workers we spoke with — we spoke with a lot of them — they're not happy about it. They don't like being away from their kids for most of the year or only seeing them on Sunday. Partly it's because that's what the culture has brought them to. They've lifted millions and millions of people out of poverty in one and a half ... generations. But that has resulted in this really intense work life. ... Chinese workers are proud of their country, they're proud of their company, they're really proud of how China is flourishing in the world. ... The American workers we know, I can't say that they're proud of their company or they feel really behind America, like America is really helping them rise in the world.

**filmmaker Julia Reichert :** The American workers we know, I can't say that they're proud of their company or they feel really behind America, like America is really helping them rise in the world. I think we're on a trajectory of less hope, [fewer] possibilities ... as far as working class people.

**On Fuyao slogans and songs the Chinese workers are accustomed to reciting**

**Reichert:** There's a slogan that is said, which I think so in kind of [encapsulates] capitalism, which is "To stand still is to fall back." ... They chant it every day.

**Bognar:** When one of the American supervisors, when he got home [from the trip to Fuyao headquarters], he tried to get the Americans to line up in that kind of military formation and it just did not go that well. It's like the people who signed up to work in this hot, intense glass factory in the United States, they're making \$12.84 an hour and they're not getting paid enough to line up and be regimented like that.

**On why many American workers at Fuyao wanted to unionize with the United Automobile Workers**



**Reichert:** In the plant it was pretty hot. You see there's safety issues. You see there were a lot of injuries. For a long, long time, there was no nurse there. At the old GM plant they had a nurse on duty and a doctor on call at all times — all shifts. They had nothing like that at the Fuyao plant at first. ... Now they do, something like three years into it. Right at the end of our filming, they actually did get a nurse.



I think a really big thing was the policies would change, things like the sick leave. Do you need a doctor's note? ... Do you get fired even with a doctor's note? Do you get fired if you have to go to the emergency room or whatever? How many vacation days you would get, what your pay was. People were told when they joined [the company] ... that within a year they would get a raise. And we went around and asked people a year or so later: Did you get your raise yet? And nobody said they did. And now maybe they'd get it three months later, if they really bugged H.R., they'd get it. But those kind of things were just really frustrating, that they had no power.

**Bognar:** From the Chinese perspective, the company was not making a profit as quickly as the Chinese expected it to. They thought the company would be profitable after a year. We heard this again and again.

And here we are, like, a year and a half, two years into being an operational facility and it's still not turning a profit. So the Chinese management fires the American leadership and replaces it with Chinese leadership. Supervisors are swapped out from American supervisors to Chinese supervisors, and there's more and more pressure on the American workforce. And that led to growing frustration on the part of the Americans. They felt they were being treated even more roughly because of the because of higher demands for productivity. And it was just getting harder and harder — and so goodwill started really evaporating both directions.

### **On the "union avoidance" campaign Fuyao ran to dissuade workers from unionizing**

**Reichert:** They were very highly paid and they were in there from very early on. As soon as there was any whisperings like a T-shirt about the UAW or those meetings going on, immediately the union avoidance company was brought in. Now, I will say this is not a Chinese thing. Pretty much in any facility, be it a distribution center, be it a warehouse, be it a factory — actually be it in a white-collar working place — if there's talk of a union, they're going to bring in one of ... these consulting companies. ... There's hundreds of them all across the country. I think most Americans do not realize that that is behind a lot of the loss of union power, the loss of the strikes. They taught the Chinese management and supervisors to do everything they could to avoid the union.

**Bognar:** Next time you read in the paper like, "Oh, the Volkswagen workers in Tennessee, they [rejected](#) the idea of a union." The thing we don't hear about is all the inside closed door campaigning that the companies do. *Roberta Shorrock and Seth Kelley produced and edited the audio of this interview. Bridget Bentz, Molly Seavy-Nesper and Beth Novey adapted it for the Web.*



Yuzhu Yang (left) trains Lori Cochran at the Fuyao Glass America factory in Dayton, Ohio, in the documentary *American Factory*.

Danni Wang/Netflix **Editor's note:** This is an excerpt of Planet Money's newsletter. You can [sign up here](#).

The *Planet Money* movie reviews desk is normally a pretty sleepy place. There aren't a lot of blockbusters about economics. But we sure woke up when we recently watched *American Factory*, now [streaming on Netflix](#). It's directed by Julia Reichert and Steven Bognar. Its backers include Participant Media and the Obamas' Higher Ground Productions, which is a partner of Netflix.

*American Factory* doesn't sound like a barn burner. Disney probably doesn't have an *Avengers: American Factory* in the works. And, yes, *American Factory* really is a documentary about a plant in Dayton, Ohio, that makes windshields.

But it's a challenging, strange, eye-opening film. Here at *Planet Money*, we've all been watching it. As our colleague Alex Goldmark said after he finished it, "My wife and I sat there and looked at each other, and we just didn't know how to feel."

It would be easy to know how to feel about it if it were just the thing it looks like it set out to be, the usual sympathetic story about the American blue-collar worker, with the expected problems and questions: Factories are shutting down, the unions are in retreat, the bosses stay powerful and rich. These are important stories, but they quickly fall into a kind of pattern of hard work and hopelessness. We mostly know how to feel.

It looks like it's going to be the same at the glass plant in Dayton. But then a Chinese company, Fuyao Glass America, shows up to reopen it. Chinese companies buy American companies all the time. At this point, that shouldn't be that interesting, either.

But Fuyao let the filmmakers film everything.

And so *American Factory* is only nominally a film about America. The part that is astonishing about *American Factory* is seeing everything about the United States through the eyes of Chinese factory workers and managers arriving to reopen and restaff a plant in the rust belt. *American Factory* is the view we never get. Americans know how they feel about competing with China. But we don't know how China feels about working with America.

Just minutes in, two workers from China, a couple, stand on a ledge overlooking Dayton. They marvel at the houses, which seem like antique wonders to them. They think it's beautiful. And on second watching, I took a moment to look at the view, too, and, yeah, Dayton may be an opportunity zone, but it's underrated.

We eavesdrop as a manager tries to explain America to a cafeteria filled with Chinese workers at long white tables, eating food out of foam boxes and wearing neon yellow vests. He wants to help them acclimate. "America is a place to let your personality run free," he says. "As long as you're not doing anything illegal, you're free to follow your heart. You can even joke about the president. Nobody will do anything to you." He also notes that Americans are "very obvious" and that "everything is practical and realistic."

Any jealousy over freedom of expression quickly gives way to a general disappointment in the Americans as workers. The chairman comes to visit, and a manager explains what the Americans are like as workers. "They're pretty slow," he explains. "They have fat fingers. We keep training them over and over." Americans also like to take off weekends.

The chairman, Cho Tak Wong, is a forbidding presence, alternating between lofty language about character and serious complaints about unions. "The motherland is like a mother," he says in one address to the Chinese staff. "This is eternal." Noting that they aren't there for the money but to represent their country, he tells them: "It's down to every one of you here." In the next scene, he's on a plane, trying to figure out how to deal with labor. "I can't manage them," he complains. "When we try to manage them, they threaten to get help from the union."

There is so much more to this movie. There's a visit to headquarters in China, which starts with the executive staff singing the company anthem — "Noble sentiments are transparent/For the sake of transparency" — and it gets more unfamiliar from there. The directors take their loving time with process, too. This is a movie for activists but also for people who think it's interesting to see how glass goes from hot sand to polished windows, and it spends a few moments on the challenges and pleasures of forklift driving. It's not exactly an uplifting film, but it's one of the most interesting ones to come along in a while.

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<https://www.npr.org/sections/money/2019/09/10/759152615/why-we-should-all-watch-american-factory>

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**PLANET MONEY** [Why We Should All Watch 'American Factory' Work Cultures Clash When A Chinese Company Reopens An 'American Factory'](#) August 23, 2019 11:47 AM ET



Heard on [Fresh Air](#) [John Powers](#) 6-Minute Listen [Download](#)  [Transcript](#)



American workers Jill Lamantia and Bobby Allen struggle to adapt to the expectations of Chinese management in the documentary *American Factory*. Steven Bognar /Netflix

In the 1960s, there was a [terrific comedy](#) in which a teenage Maoist scrawls a bit of graffiti that would become famous: "CHINA IS NEAR." Half a century on, China is here. It's here on our screens, where [Hong Kong protests](#) domination by the Communist mainland. It's here in the [tariff war](#) between President Trump and Chairman Xi. And, of course, it's here [inside the cell phones](#) we all worship.

China's arrival in the American workplace is the subject of a fine new Netflix documentary *American Factory* by Julia Reichert and Steven Bognar, who've spent years chronicling blue-collar lives. Set on the outskirts of their home city of Dayton, Ohio, this measured, deeply moving film takes a familiar idea — the notion of an American factory — and shows how tricky that concept has become in today's globalized economy.

The story begins with a 2008 prologue in which General Motors shuts its Moraine, Ohio, plant, chucking 2,400 union workers out of work and into years of desperate struggle. Then, in 2015, comes hope. The Chinese company Fuyao, which makes glass for automobiles, decides to reopen the plant and hire 1,000 locals. Led by its self-made billionaire owner, Chairman Cao Dewang, Fuyao brings along 200 experienced Chinese employees to oversee production.

At first, the film shows things going OK. True, a worker like Shawnea Rosser is making only \$12.84 an hour, way down from the \$28 she earned at GM. And true, the Chinese are frustrated that the Americans work so slowly — "They have fat fingers," one says. Still, everyone wants the factory to succeed. Furnace supervisors like Rob Haerr and Wong He become friends, while others seek to understand their cultural differences. When it comes to work, these are profound.



We see this in two contrasting Fuyao celebrations. In the first, a few Ohio workers fly to China and watch the company's New Year festivities, a heavily scripted display of totalitarian kitsch, complete with dancing girls and little kids singing about teamwork and corporate success. The second is the American factory's opening ceremony, at which Ohio senator Sherrod Brown startles and enrages Cao and his American execs by saying he hopes the plant will be unionized. If you think American capitalists don't like unions, try the Chinese Communists.

While Americans expect eight-hour days with vacations and benefits, Fuyao management is used to Chinese employees who work 12-hour shifts, with one day off a month, often sharing dorm-like apartments. The bosses think Americans lazy for talking on the job. Meanwhile, the Americans grow dispirited by the relentless factory regimen.

Reichert and Bognar are clearly on the side of the workers, both American *and* Chinese, yet their film is no [Michael Moore](#) polemic. It's an old-school observational documentary in the very best sense of the term. They don't approach the Fuyao story with a thesis, don't dehumanize the Chinese, don't tell us what to think. Working with 1,200 hours of footage — heroically edited by Lindsay Utz — they have amazing access to a complex economic reality that is touchingly hard on workers.

Eventually, many of Fuyao's American workers get fed up with the factory's cramped, hectoring conditions. I won't say what happens, but watching events play out is an education in the workings of the global economy. From the factory floor to the boardroom, everyone is caught in the logic of the market, which defines everything in terms of the bottom line. If you don't help maximize profit, you're gone. We're not surprised when Cao starts to replace his workers with robots.

Reichert and Bognar capture a reality facing millions of Americans. Even as their wages go down and they long for the comfortable lives folks like them once could afford, workers in China — whose low pay has driven down wages all over the Western world — enjoy a prosperity they've never known. Life's looking rosier for them. Their 12-hour work-day, without time off or benefits, represents the rising model of labor in 21<sup>st</sup> century capitalism.

Near the end of *American Factory*, Chairman Cao strolls outside a glassy, pillared mansion that contains what looks like a shrine to himself. "The point of living is to work," he says. "Don't you think so?" It's hard to think of a sadder, or scarier, line in any movie this year.

[TV Reviews](#) [Work Cultures Clash When A Chinese Company Reopens An 'American Factory'](#)

[Business](#) [A Chinese Company Brings Hope To Former GM Workers In Ohio](#)