BOOK REVIEWS


Bryan Palmer is a distinguished Canadian labor and social historian who in the 1970s published a history of skilled workers and industrial capitalism in nineteenth century Ontario. With Greg Kealey he edits the Canadian journal *Labour/Le Travail*. He has written a useful history of the Knights of Labor, and a text of Canadian labor history. Thus, he is both an original scholar and a helpful one. As the field of labor history gained an academic place with positions, grants, conferences, societies, and journals of its own, Bryan Palmer cultivated his interest in the methods of E. P. Thompson, whose “cultural Marxism,” moral and political commitments Palmer has done so much to maintain and define for a new generation. Economics and culture inhabited different parts of the university, if not different worlds of thought, where Marxism was torn in two. While Marxism remained alive to him, labor history and its travails receded from his direct view. Carrying forth the Thompsonian legacy, he re-positioned himself with direct interventions into the debates of his times. In 1990 Palmer published *Descent into Discourse*, a major intellectual intervention in the cultural wars. Palmer revised Thompson to allow the categories of race and gender in the history of the working class (Thompson was criticized for omitting them). Palmer writes about them not so much as labor power, but as “identities” or social subjects. Hence, it was not slavery that Palmer examines but race, and it was not the labors of reproduction—nursing, cooking, laundry, housewifery—but gender. He sees race and gender not as sources of unpaid labor but as “Others” who help define the working class as night does the day.

In Plato's *Symposium* Aristophanes tells how true love first began with a fable that can help us. The three sexes (the male descended of the sun, the female of the earth, and the hermaphrodites of the moon) were globular and they attacked the gods by rolling up to the heavens. Zeus punished the attempt by splitting everyone in half, twisting the head to cover the neck, and tying us off at the navel. Ever since, true love has sought its other half. And so it seems with working class studies. Once upon a time the realms of production and reproduction were united in a whole including economics and culture. However since they stormed the heavens, they too have been split and have forever been desolately wandering around in search of their other half. Labor history has been diurnal, the history of the “others” has been nocturnal. The two are in danger of pining away for each other. The labor historian, stuck in the economistic matrix of hours and wages, of immigration and migration, yearns for the pleasure, culture, and danger apparently supplied by the cultural, the feminist, and the gay historian.

Palmer has now written a substantial volume that seeks to bring together...
his interests in labor history on the one hand, and cultural history on the other. It seems the two halves are happily joined. It is an ambitious project with theoretical goals as well as empirical summaries. It is written at a tense rhetorical pitch of excitement and energy; it covers two continents—North America and Europe—with confident assurance; it summarizes with professional competence secondary literature in Italian, French, and English; it is fond of music. Delacroix, Bruegel, O’Keefe, Thomas Hart Benton, Van Gogh, Picasso, Cézanne, and Joe Hendrick are a few of the artists on display. With lubricious ease and graceful acknowledgement Palmer negotiates differing interpretations from a wide span of scholars who otherwise are tetchy with abrasive vanity and theoretical sore spots.

There are chapters on peasant heresies of Europe, and on the witch-crazes of America and Europe; a chapter on the libertines John Wilkes and the Marquis de Sade; the radicals of the French Revolutionary times; there is a chapter on Frankenstein; he writes about pirates and maroons; he writes about the hyper-sexuality of European imperialists; he writes about the sex industry of nineteenth century capitalism; he has a chapter on the tavern and the male fraternal organization; he writes a set-piece on the anarchists in the eight-hour agitation that culminated in the Haymarket bombing and subsequent hangings; he considers sorcery and torture in third world plantation and mining labors; in the sixth part, he writes about “transgressive sexuality” in the gay and lesbian communities, he writes about the festivals of the revolution, and he writes about three nights under the National Socialists—the night of the Reichstag Fire (1933), the Night of the Long Knives (1934), Kristallnacht (1938); he has an appreciative chapter on the blues and jazz; another on the beatniks; and a third, on the noir style of cinematography; he has a chapter on bandits and the mafia—an antidote to Weber’s “spirit of capitalism,” and a chapter on the 1967 Detroit riot, the Miami riots of the 1980s, and the 1992 riot in Los Angeles. Then he concludes with reflections on postmodernism from below, as it were, and “the transgressive cultures of the long night of capitalist containment.” Those are a sketch of the topics covered, roughly in chronological sequence.

“In choosing to place transgression at the center of historical analysis, and in plotting its changing contours as a night travel through the ages, I was of course consciously seeking out the actual and metaphorical place where marginality might best be both lived as an experience and socially constructed as a representation,” he writes. His book is balanced on the edge of actuality and metaphor, on a ridge between reality and representation. It provides an immense storehouse of phrases—besides the Dark Continent and the Dark Ages, he has the Jacobin night, antiquity’s dark night of imperial degeneration, the night of homosexuality’s “making,” the new left’s nights of transgressive rebellion, the dark triangular trade, pornography’s night of dissent, dark recesses of mysticism and blasphemy, and it goes on with just about everything except Santa’s night-time deliveries, or Paul Revere’s midnight ride. The book is a treasure trove of years of intense teaching, a summary of the best social and economic history of an entire generation of brilliant scholars.
Although he is fond of Karl Marx’s figures of speech comparing the thirst for surplus value to the vampire’s appetite for blood, and the capitalist’s rapacity to the werewolf, Palmer’s Marxism is not that described by Marx in his great chapter on the Working Day. To Marx, the night is a time of “unmitigated slavery” for the Nottingham lace workers; night-work is a cause of the debility of the constitution in the Staffordshire potteries; night is a time of ignorance and early deaths for the children in the blast-furnaces, forges, iron foundries, and plate-rolling mills; it is a time of torpor-caused tragedies for the railway workers; night-time is when the “white slave,” Mary Anne Walkley, the West End milliner, died from over-work; and it is the condition of profiteering for the cotton manufacture. These are transgressions of cupidity; they are, according to Marx, essential to the “law of accumulation.” Dyspepsia, rheumatism, pneumonia, phthisis, bronchitis, asthma, scrofula are some of its nocturnal results. Night is the time of disease and death.

Reproduction, as Zeus found out, depends on sexuality, so he moved the privates around to the front and introduced heterosexual reproduction. The birth of capitalism was illuminated by the fires burning hundreds of thousands of women (the witch-hunts). Thus control of the working day, control of labor power, the formation of cultural institutions for work-discipline depended on control over birth. The enclosure of lands, the legislation against the vagabonds, and the slave trade arose during the same epoch of history, the epoch of “primitive accumulation,” as this terror upon women. Contraception, obstetrics, midwives, came under the control of the early modern European state in order that the first state-science, demography, could assist in the production of a numerous population, the foundation of wealth and security. This was the capitalist imperative to the witch-burnings. At the same time that terror helped put an end to the scattered heretical protests of the Middle Ages by demonizing lower class women, it paved the way for the consolidation of marriage, domesticity, and the nuclear family. Production and reproduction, and the struggles of each, need to be seen as a whole.

I am sorry that, as there is not a history of street lighting, so there is not a history of the nocturnal carnivals caused by power shortages and blackouts. Another regret: in Toledo, Ohio, at the Daimler-Chrysler plant, the second shift starts at four and with two hours of mandatory overtime and a half-hour dinner break, and it goes to two or three in the morning. When Larry Fuentes, the Cuban-American production worker at the plant was mangled to death by a robot, two years ago on the day shift, it was believed by some that a subcontractor on the night shift was responsible by not re-setting a safety switch. This book does not include a history of the second shift, whose stresses and strains still remain largely unknown. Despite this, as a member of the Midnight Notes collective as well as an historian of Bryan Palmer’s ilk, I highly recommend this book and all its wonderful lucubrations.

Peter Linebaugh

University of Toledo

Susan Buck-Morss’ recent book, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*, is an ambitious if not audacious project. Spanning the disciplinary range of the humanities and social sciences, Buck-Morss has produced a work that is as much political theory and philosophy as it cultural criticism and intellectual history. In fact, this is her stated aim: to upset the disciplinary boundaries in search of a new way of conceptualizing the history of the twentieth century.

The Cold War produced two hegemonic and contradictory, yet mutually dependent, intellectual models for conceiving of history and the goals of politics. In the West, the virtues of free-market capitalism were championed for their supposed ability to approximate, if not realize, the general will. This general will was defined through the language of economics, as a society of consumer abundance and domestic bliss. History was viewed as means for “working out the details” of the market, for finding the best set of institutional relationships within which to achieve this goal. Politics was constituted through space, as the development, and more importantly maintenance, of well defined, territorially bounded national states.

In the East, or the so-called Communist bloc, history and politics were articulated in a more ambitious manner. Through the ideology of Marxism-Leninism, history became the medium of progress towards socialism, a society of material abundance free from class contradictions. In the Eastern model, spatial concerns took a back seat to considerations of time, as the “underdeveloped East” sought to advance industrial development at all costs, thus accelerating history and waging a virtual total war on time.

However, according to Buck-Morss, as different as the two competing models may appear they in fact share many things in common and, in fact, depend upon one another for their coherence and appeal. She traces the origins of these competing yet interdependent models to the period following World War One, the period of capitalist reconstruction following the shattering of the old order represented by the devastation of the war. During this era, the capitalist West, as a result of the penetration of Fordist production methods throughout the economy as well as the general social landscape, witnessed the emergence of “mass society.” For the first time in history, the masses—a social phenomenon distinct from the contingent emergence of crowds or mobs in earlier periods—entered the historical stage as a political actor in their own right. The threat of Bolshevism inspired the articulation of an ideology of pacification. The defense of democracy, nation and civilization were all incorporated into this ideological edifice, but with one novel addition, the promise of a consumerized utopian “dreamworld” in exchange for the alienation of productive labor.

In the East, the etiology of the ideological dreamworld differed in origin and content, but resulted in the construction of a no less totalizing ideology. The
East, which in this period was the Soviet Union alone, entered this new era in history with a severe competitive disadvantage vis-à-vis the West. Ravaged by war and famine, having lost a large percentage of its proletariat in the civil war, facing economic and military strangulation and blockade, the Soviet Union was faced with the historic task of, as Stalin put it, “. . . accomplishing a thousand years of development in ten.” This rapid industrialization, with all of its attendant social dislocations, necessitated the construction and maintenance of a sophisticated ideological system in order to control and manipulate dissent, but more importantly to orient and inspire production, defined as historical progress. The Soviet Union found this ideology ready made in the form of Marxism-Leninism. Stripped of its internationalism in the form of Stalin’s doctrine of “socialism in one country” and its humanism in the form of “sacrifice the present to build the future”, Marxism-Leninism (which was now really something rather different, i.e., “Stalinism”) constituted the dreamworld of the East. The Soviet masses, constructed on the spot from the peasantry, came to believe themselves the savior of humanity and the motor of historical and social progress in the world. In the Eastern dreamworld, the ever-present threat of counter-revolution played the role of civilizational challenge that Bolshevism did in the West, thus demonstrating the systems’ binary and interdependent nature.

In general, in theoretical discussions of the issue, particularly those originating in the language of Western Marxism (from whose tradition Buck-Morss as an intellectual is closely affiliated) ideology is regarded negatively, as a superstructural veil to mask the oppression and exploitation of the masses. Buck-Morss, in her endeavor to think differently, takes a more nuanced view. She argues that in the twentieth century ideology was omnipresent. The twentieth century could perhaps best be remembered as the “century of ideology.” However, she claims that the ideology of the twentieth century was something of a special historical phenomenon: it was a mass utopian dreamworld. The construction and development of these dreamworlds originated in a response to the emergence of mass production based Fordist economies, whether in their Western or Stalinist varieties. Nevertheless, at a certain point in their development these dreamworlds became detached from the industrial systems that produced them and were transformed into material forces in their own right. Seized by their ideological dreamworlds, the masses—and thus mass society—set about the business of industrial development in the twentieth century. In the twentieth century, ideology became a force with directly productive implications.

However, Buck-Morss concludes her story in a somber mood. As they could only ever survive as binary oppositions, the collapse of the Eastern dreamworld in the late twentieth century has led to an eventual unraveling of its Western counterpart revealing the catastrophe that has always lied beneath both. In the East, the destruction of the environment, the erasure of the individual and the brutality of the “wild-zone” of totalitarian politics are now visible. In the West, the false promise of consumerized bliss is revealed in the serial banality of the culture industry in all its forms; moreover, the West’s own “wild-zone” of sovereign political power, or the undemocratic manner in which the defense of democ-
The term “home front,” as distinct from “war front,” is so familiar today that we tend to forget that the concept is less than a century old, a coinage of the First World War. Ironically, it was the very collapse of the familiar boundaries between military and civil sectors of society that prompted the invention of a term that purported to differentiate clearly between the “battle front” and the “domestic front.” In a war in which all sectors of society were directly or indirectly...
affected by the military conflict, the distinction between the actual combatants on the front lines and their fellow citizens in the factories, on the farms, and in the shops becomes, at times, difficult to determine. The novelty of appending the modifier “home” or “domestic” to the military term “front” captures the essence of “total war.” The First World War was fought not only in the trenches of northeastern France, but in the urban bread lines and the munitions factories, and in every town subjected to the aerial bombardments that literally demolished any real distinction between military and civilian life.

Both Belinda Davis and Susan Grayzel interrogate the relationship between the war front and home front of the First World War in their studies of Berlin, in the former case, and France and Britain, in the latter. Davis contends that civilians were not simply “historical objects” but critical actors in the shaping of wartime politics. She seeks to demonstrate that the actions, opinions, and emotions of non-combatants not only were shaped by the war, but themselves “might have changed what politicians said and did, and even how the war was fought” (4). Grayzel focuses instead on the cultural dimensions of what she terms the “interpenetration” of the military and domestic fronts. She is interested centrally in “the role of the war in determining the meaning of gender and of gender in determining the meaning of war” (3). Significantly, Davis’s focus on the economic and politic aspects of the relationship between the two arenas suggests that World War I witnessed a real change in the character and strength of women’s political power. By contrast, Grayzel’s cultural study emphasizes continuities with the past: the symbolic, cultural, and even political power of women remained firmly rooted in their role as mothers. During the War, as in the pre-War (and post-War) years, all other roles for women were regarded with suspicion at best, and at worst, condemnation.

*Home Fires Burning* offers a detailed account of the experience and political significance of material scarcity in wartime Berlin. Drawing liberally on press and police reports on breadlines, food riots, and, in general, the mood of the urban civilian populace, Davis explores the impact of the severe, sometimes catastrophic, food shortages that affected Berlin from the fall of 1914 until the war ended four years later. She documents meticulously the rising levels of popular discontent, then anger, and finally despair as bread, meat, sugar, butter, potatoes, and even turnips were rationed out in ever smaller, and, according to many, ever more inequitable portions. In the book’s most moving passages, Davis paints a vivid portrait of the real human suffering endured by women and children, the result not only of the British blockade of German ports and the constant need to provision soldiers, but also of inappropriate and ineffective government policies. It is the latter, Davis argues, that most angered the Berlin populace and that eventually served to undermine the credibility of the imperial regime. Letter after letter addressed to newspapers and government agencies reveal the widespread perception that the government unjustly favored some sectors of society (soldiers’ wives, families with many children, rural populations) over others. By 1915, Berliners were demanding a “military food dictatorship” (115) attached to the War Ministry to ensure fairness and efficiency in
food distribution. Yet even the establishment of the Kriegsernährungsamt in 1916, apparently in response to public demand, failed to bring relief or satisfy Berliners’ sense of justice. City dwellers now complained that government policies “focused only on controlling consumption in the cities” ignoring the “greed and profit” of the “self-provisioning” countryside (130). The cycle of tightened rations, popular protest, and ineffectual government response repeated itself almost ad nauseum until the revolution of 1918. The women of Berlin may not have brought down the government, but their progressive loss of confidence in its ability to govern fairly surely contributed to its demise.

In showing that government officials concerned with food allocation acted largely in response to consumer agitation, Davis aims not only to endow ordinary Berliners with political agency but to challenge “still-dominant assumptions regarding the nature of politics itself as representing a narrow terrain of activity, largely separated from the rest of everyday life, practiced only at particular moments and often by limited segments of society” (3). Exactly how innovative is such a challenge? While a survey of history books in print might certainly give the numerical edge to works that limit their definition of politics to the higher reaches of government and the privileged sectors of society that directly influence its policies, the expansion of the term “political” to encompass a broad range of activities including bread riots, labor strikes, and petitioning—even fashion, literature, and dance—is hardly a theoretical breakthrough. While the historiography of Germany may be an exception, much recent work in European and American history might be faulted not for its restrictive definition of politics but for the apparently overly elastic understanding of the term. Recent studies have cast as political such activities as shopping, dancing, and writing to a newspaper, as well as voting and engineering a particular social policy. If these disparate acts are all “political,” then what, indeed, does the word mean?

Despite her claims to be challenging the conventional definition of politics, Davis actually accomplishes something perhaps less theoretically radical but more empirically important. Not content to simply declare the daily activities of the Berlin citizenry to be “political,” Davis amply demonstrates that ordinary peoples’ (especially poor women’s) discontent, anger, rage, or even despair, actually mattered to those “limited sectors of society” that made and enforced policy and prosecuted the war. She produces numerous police reports, government memoranda, and substantial correspondence that explicitly voice concern about the most effective responses to the bread riots, looting, theft, and general grumbling that constituted the bulk of Berliners’ “everyday acts.” Consumers’ anger at the dire wartime food shortages and their dissatisfaction with the austerity policies instituted to address them served to undermine the credibility of the imperial government and ultimately contributed to its overturn after the war. While denying that the government’s failed rationing and food distribution policies caused Germany to lose the war (an argument made by contemporaries as well as some modern historians), Davis convincingly shows that Berliners—and by extension other urban Germans—progressively lost faith in their government and that by the time it fell in November 1918, its popular political support
had been spent. Military defeat merely dealt the death-blow to an already moribund regime.

Any study of the relationship between the home front and the war front must, of course, come to terms with the gendered implications of the distinction between the two. As Grayzel notes, “conventional studies of war” have designated the “home front” as the feminine realm and the “front line” as a strictly masculine theater. Indeed, the combination of “home” with “front” simultaneously brought the home into the purview of the war, while still clearly associating the civilian arena with the home and domesticity. Davis’ study reinforces this familiar gendered identification of the two fronts while ably demonstrating the political and material relationships between them. Government officials frequently made the mutual dependency of the two fronts quite explicit when they urged German women to wage an “economic war” of prudent consumption while men fought for victory in battle. The complete feminization of the image of the wartime consumer can be seen clearly in the figure of the “woman of little means” who came to symbolize the struggle of all women, from the lower middle classes as well as the working classes, to put food on their tables. In an unexpected demonstration of cross-class consumer solidarity, Berliners frequently invoked the plight of “the woman of little means” to reveal the inequities and injustices of government food policies.

The sad irony of Davis’s study of empowered female consumers helping to undermine an empire is that Home Fires Burning is ultimately a sorry tale of human frailty, pettiness, and vulnerability to the stresses of extreme privation. In this minute, sometimes moving, and often—perhaps revealingly—repetitive recounting of food shortages that marked almost every week of the war, Berliners exhibit barely a shred of stalwartness or forebearance. Instead, these women complain endlessly not only that they have no butter for their bread and therefore their coffee is undrinkable (real Germans need a true Butterbrot to accompany their coffee), but worse, they suspect that other Germans, somewhere, have more than they do. Calls for complete government control of the food supply often emerged from resentment that children and soldiers’ wives—not just the wealthy—were getting more than their fair share. Certainly, no one can accuse Davis of romanticizing her subject, but a politics of the belly rooted in envy and a rigid sense of propriety is, however powerful, an ugly sight to behold. One wonders if Davis’ understandably heavy reliance on police reports and letters of complaint to newspapers and government agencies has skewed her account in favor of the malcontents at the expense of those who shouldered their heavy burden in silence. Sadly, though perhaps inevitably, the mark of forebearance is often invisible in the historical record.

While Davis’ book examines the actions, however ignoble, of real women on the streets of Berlin, Grayzel’s comparative study of Britain and France explores the cultural meaning of “woman” and “the feminine” during the War. Without explicitly invoking theory and avoiding obfuscating jargon, Grayzel shows exactly what Denise Riley meant when she wrote that “woman” was at once an “empty category” and one that is overflowing with meaning. At the
heart of Grayzel’s fascinating and important book is what she calls a paradox, but which is perhaps better understood as a revealing contradiction: While the war “expanded the range of possibilities for women,” it also “curtailed them by . . . heightening the emphasis on motherhood as women’s primary patriotic role and the core of their national identity” (3). Contrasting her work with that of Susan Kent and Mary Louise Roberts, Grayzel argues that the war neither disrupted nor shattered the “gender order” in Britain and France, but rather strengthened nineteenth century associations of women with motherhood and domesticity.

That this reaffirmation should occur during a time when women were mobilized (often literally) to work in factories or hospitals and to take over numerous tasks normally assigned to men is, however, neither surprising nor paradoxical. The very fact that women’s lives changed dramatically during the war elicited a culturally conservative response. Thus, nurses at the front were said to be serving as surrogate mothers and sisters; members of the khaki-clad British Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps who described themselves as serving their country by enabling more men to go to the front, were most frequently described in the press as serving “the men serving the nation” (202). It is no paradox that the cry for women to bear and sacrifice their sons always competed with, and often drowned out, the more immediate need for them to enter the factories. Shrieks calls to moral order are almost always a sign of vulnerability (or, as Grayzel writes, “anxiety”) rather than a sign of stability. This was most certainly the case in wartime Britain and France. In some ways, then, the historian’s distinction between disruption and continuity is a false one. What Grayzel terms a “remarkable” continuity in the political symbolism of the patriotic mother is, to a significant extent, a response to the myriad threats to that order that the war posed.

The real contribution of Grayzel’s work lies in its sophisticated analysis of the myriad ways that every public discussion about women’s relationship to the war was eventually transformed into a valorization or defense of motherhood. Grayzel cites numerous wartime novels written by men and women alike whose female characters endure every possible tragedy and outrage and who persevere, in whatever diminished state, to the extent that they can still play the role of sacrificing mother. The government campaigns against venereal disease in both countries cast women in the role of moral guardians, safeguarding men and their innocent families from the perils of prostitutes, women who willfully forsook their maternal role. Many feminists embraced this position, in one instance, for example, denouncing licensed brothels in France as “a gross insult to woman and the family of which she is the guardian” (144).

Yet Grayzel is not content to simply show the pervasiveness of the patriotic mother figure in wartime discussions about women’s behavior. In a deft demonstration of how cultural symbols do not have lives of their own, despite some post-modernist claims to the contrary, Grayzel shows how the very equation of feminine patriotic duty with motherhood could sometimes work either unintentionally, or occasionally intentionally, against the very moral order it was intended to shore up. The most harrowing example was the problem of how to
handle pregnancies resulting from German rape. Though no reliable statistics exist of how many such rapes or pregnancies actually occurred, the figure of the innocent French or Belgian woman violated by the savage enemy and bearing his “poisoned fruit” in her womb operated as a powerful symbol of female and national vulnerability both on the continent and in Britain.

The child of a German rape exposed the potential contradictions of linking women’s “natural” role as mothers with their patriotic duty toward the nation. If women served the state by producing children, then what was to be done with a child born of the enemy? Some advocated abortion on the grounds that such a child was irredeemable and would serve as a constant reminder of its mother’s defilement. The French government tended to support the anonymous delivery of such children in Paris where they would become wards of the state, forever ignorant of their paternity. Others, however, including many feminists, invoked the redemptive power of motherhood that could overcome the taint of conception and transform the unfortunate infant into a true child of France. Fiction from the period reveals no consensus about which women were the true patriots: those who kept their misbegotten child in the name of all-powerful motherhood, those who handed their children over to the state, or even those who killed themselves (though rarely their child) as an act of patriotic and moral sacrifice. The one case of infanticide recounted in the book ended in a courtroom acquittal, but Grayzel notes that “discussions . . . remained vague on the question of whether [the defendant] was a victim of rape or had manipulated public sentiment as an excuse for getting rid of an unwanted child” (62). Though the figure of “the mother” dominated every discussion of women’s relationship to the state, what motherhood meant in the context of the war was by no means self-evident or predetermined.

In many ways, the ceaseless invocation of patriotic motherhood as women’s rightful path to public glory was simply a sustained effort to prop up a gender order that was increasingly threatened by the social upheaval of the war. Social conservatives watched anxiously as growing numbers of married as well as unmarried women took jobs in munitions factories and other heavy industry becoming the primary (in some cases the sole) breadwinners for the family. They bemoaned the decline of “true womanhood,” as women took over leadership positions in labor unions and civic organizations vacated by men and pressed their respective governments for the right to vote. The 1918 government trial of French feminist, socialist, and pacifist Hélène Brion reveals, as Grayzel notes, “how women’s dissent from gender norms and feminism itself during the war could be seen as potential threats to the social order” (188). In what was briefly a cause célèbre in the spring of 1918, Brion, a schoolteacher, was accused of defeatism in the form of repeated preaching against the war in direct defiance of government orders. Brion defended herself on the grounds that as a feminist she could not support war that “is the triumph of brute force” (182). Perhaps more importantly, Brion argued that because all citizenship was based on rights and women had no rights, they had no patriotic duty. Brion's conviction (though her sentence was later commuted) vividly demonstrates what might befall women
who eschewed the cultural norm and professed what Grayzel calls “ungendered patriotism” (167).

In Women’s Identities at War Susan Grayzel has produced a model of what gender history should be: not only a sophisticated analysis of how gender orders our society, but how such a system responds to the stresses of historical events and how it shapes the lived experiences of real men and women. Impressively broad in scope and deeply researched, Grayzel’s book demonstrates that if women were consistently figured as mothers, what that actually meant in a particular national or historical context was anything but predictable.

Although Home Fires Burning and Women’s Identities at War explore different national settings and pose different historical questions, there is a great deal to be learned in examining them side by side for what they suggest about the enduring power of cultural symbols and meanings even in the face of cataclysmic social and political upheaval. Bearing in mind the volumes of official praise and adulation heaped on French and British mothers of soldiers, especially those who lost sons and husbands to battle, how are we to understand, for example, Berliners’ resentment, even hostility, toward soldiers’ wives who received compensation for their sacrifice? Or German women’s anger at a ration system that granted extra portions to mothers of many children? Did the symbolic meaning of the eternally sacrificing patriotic mother not translate to the German setting? Did it not function at the level of figuring out who got what kind of food for her family? What, indeed, is the relationship between the material circumstances women endured and the symbolic “Woman” or “Mother” so prominently apparent not only in novels, plays, and posters, but in public policy as well? These two important studies offer no simple answers to such questions, but together they suggest ways that historians might go about finding them.

Katrin Schultheiss
University of Illinois at Chicago


The German Democratic Republic (GDR) had been widely considered the most stable of the Soviet Union’s allies. Yet, in less than six months beginning in the autumn of 1989, the seemingly solid East German regime went into crisis and in quick order the old GDR was absorbed into the Federal Republic of Germany. In such a rapid and unpredicted transformation, one would have expected to see the sort of massive working class upheaval that marked the Solidarity movement in neighboring Poland. Yet, Nothing of the sort occurred. “Why not?” is the question that provides the focus of this superb study.

Linda Fuller utilizes the insights of feminist scholars while retaining an
attachment to the concept of class. This latter preference makes her approach “decidedly un-postmodern,” doubtless a relief to many scholars. Believing that social change comes from deeds, the focus of this admirable study is, not surprisingly, on what people in the GDR did rather than what they thought, believed, felt or wrote. Relying heavily on a wealth of interviews conducted both before and after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the author constructs a wonderfully nuanced treatment of an extremely complex issue.

To understand why the vast majority of the GDR’s working class sat out the political transformation of 1989–1990, commonly known as the Wende, Fuller argues one must “stand in [the] shoes of GDR workers.” To accomplish this delicate task, the author conscientiously examines the arenas of labor process, workplace politics and class. This is a key strength of this book as too many volumes have been written which sought to impose preconceived (theoretical) models upon the (actual) experiences of East German workers.

Workers’ experience as wage laborers in the GDR was a critical factor in molding their later non-involvement in the Wende. East Germany’s labor process was marked by hard work performed under conditions of disorganization, dishonesty, lack of discipline, and pay based on performance. As the author notes “The pervasive dishonesty of the labor process, in which workers were unavoidably complicit, both mocked and obscured their solid accomplishments, contributing to a debilitating loss of self-respect” (55). The outcome of such a system was inevitably “frustration, inefficacy, self-contempt, indifference, and demoralization” which “fostered a withdrawal from and a distaste for politics among large sections of the working class” (56). Under these circumstances, the majority of GDR workers remained passive observers rather than active participants in changes taking place around them. That is, the labor process had conditioned workers to be suspect of noble sounding political pronouncements regardless of their origin. Indeed, the labor process had conditioned the working class response to all politics even in times of crisis.

Nor did workers’ experience with workplace politics prepare them to participate in wider political activity. Trade unions in the German Democratic Republic were structured to limit rather than expand members’ access to a wide range of practical and technical topics. Thus in 1989–1990, most workers found themselves at a distinct disadvantage compared with intellectuals when discussions took place over restructuring the GDR, whether it be their workplaces or the broader society. In addition, the overly centralized trade union bureaucracy meant few workers had any experience actually doing politics. With the rank and file denied any role in the selection of union officials, the average worker found their creativity and energy smothered “under a pall of resignation, indifference, timidity, and cynicism” (73).

In a more indirect fashion, workplace politics crippled political activism by poisoning the relations between union officials and their members. Thus, many who in other circumstances could have been organic leaders of the working class found themselves distrusted and with only marginal influence. When the crisis hit GDR society, many union officials refused to participate both because of
their own burnout and an awareness of their limited support among the ranks. In her careful examination of this dynamic, the author has identified a key reason behind working-class passivity that has been neglected by many others who have chosen to cling to such simplistic explanations as “German deference to authority.”

A final major factor in molding East German working class consciousness was their long-standing relationship with intellectuals. As GDR intellectuals were the driving force behind the Wende, the early interaction between workers and their more educated fellow citizens holds part of the key to understanding why most of the former chose to sit on the sidelines during 1989–1990. Workers tended to see all intellectuals as more or less the same. Little distinction was made between those of differing views since all were seen as members of the same privileged class. Worse, as Fuller comments, “despite the official cloak of class harmony, workers did not fully trust or respect intellectuals, and harbored a fair amount of hostility towards them” (103). These two groups lived in different, and from the vantage point of workers, unequal worlds. Further, the structure of GDR society was such that workers and intellectuals had little contact with each other. This merely increased the alienation workers already felt from their encounters with the labor process and workplace politics.

None of this was preordained, as the author’s concluding chapter that compares the GDR with Poland makes clear. Sweeping away the glib generalities which so often pass for analysis, Fuller shows that both radicalization and passivity are the product of a complex interaction of forces, so that “neither activism nor noninvolvement is the immutable condition of those who have suffered most under current social arrangements and who must be at the forefront of any efforts to alter them in significant ways” (174). Where Was the Working Class? Serves as an invaluable guide to both those who wish to understand the events of 1989–1990 and others who seek to understand how working class consciousness is molded by concrete life experiences. All who wish to comprehend the complexities of working-class consciousness would be well served by reading this fine work.

William A. Pelz

Institute of Working Class History, Chicago


According to Angus Maddison, the last millennium turned out well economically; world population increased twenty-two fold, per capita income, thirteen fold, and Gross Domestic Product (GDP), three hundred fold. In 1000 AD, the average infant could expect to live to age twenty-four, today, to age sixty-six. In recent centuries, the most rapid growth has been in Western and Central Europe, North America and Japan, but in the last fifty years, a “Resurgent Asia”
demonstrates that catch up is possible. Not all the news is good. Growth has been unequal. In the last eighty years, the gap between the richest regions and the rest of the world has grown; in 1820 it was 2:1, in 1998 7:1.

Maddison’s millennial compilation of economic time series is the culmination of a long series of studies in which Maddison and his students have estimated GDP and GDP per capita for most of the world over extremely long periods of time. In many respects, the chain-type indexes that Maddison and most contemporary students use to measure long-term growth are superior to the fixed-weight measures used by older analysts, but no methodology can transcend its sources. However readjusted, dependable time series require an accurate starting point and reliable knowledge of prices and the composition of output. Our best historical time series come from Western Europe and its “Western Offshoots” (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the US). Carefully derived estimates of GDP per capita for industrialized nations from 1870 to 1998 are the heart of Maddison’s project. Using weaker data and analogy he and his students have extended these estimates back to 1820 and, employing still weaker estimates—more a wing and a prayer—he then extends the series back another eight hundred years. The process is similar for other regions with the qualification that elsewhere the starting point and the base series are less reliable while the data on early centuries is just as tentative. If it could be avoided, no one would cross a bridge as shaky as Maddison’s estimates. But if a traveler must attempt a bridged passage—well, no current secular time-series is anywhere near as reliable.

Maddison’s time series and his interpretation of them differ significantly from time series constructed by Simon Kuznetz, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and by Paul Bairoch, in the eighties and nineties. Maddison argues the deep historical roots of Western growth. Western economic superiority was a multifaceted achievement, a product of the West’s conquest and settlement of vast unoccupied areas, its prolonged participation in international trade, and its openness to technological and institutional innovation. Western Europe gradually recovered from a low point in the year 1000 AD to overtake China by 1400 AD. Maddison disagrees with Kuznetz’s depiction of accelerated growth—an era of merchant capitalism—from the fifteenth to mid-eighteenth centuries. Stressing slow but continued growth between 1000–1500 AD, Maddison focuses on the role of Venice in opening up and maintaining international trade, an entrepôt role subsequently embraced by Portugal, the Netherlands and England. The relative commercial openness of Europe is an important and still poorly understood aspect of Western growth. Maddison gives short shrift to Bairoch’s recent assertion that much of Asia was as or more prosperous than Europe before 1800 and that Asian decline was largely due to the intervention of European merchants and states. Extending the roots of growth further in the past, Maddison dates the origins of modern accelerated growth on the continent and in the United Kingdom as beginning in 1820 and not in 1760 or 1780.

To challenge Maddison, scholars will have to play his game: painstakingly explaining methods, meticulously using statistical data, and systematically employing the most up-to-date national and regional analyses. The controversy has
only begun. Asian economic historians are reevaluating the evidence from case studies and newer and higher estimates of Asian GDP will surely emerge. Moreover, Maddison and the compilations that he uses ignore the problems of comparing relatively tiny European nations with huge and diverse empires. Kenneth Pomeranz had argued the need to compare specific regions of China with England and such structured comparisons might yet identify alternative Asian paths.

Although presented in greater detail in earlier studies, Maddison’s discussion of the last fifty years is still highly interesting—partly because it is the most solidly-based portion of the study. Despite his emphasis on its deep roots, Maddison sees the Western hold weakening. The remarkable growth of Western capitalism in its “golden age” between 1950–1973 was unequalled. As factors in the golden age Maddison stresses the creation of a new kind of liberal international order (with the Organization of European Economic Cooperation [OEEC], International Monetary Fund [IMF], World Bank and the General Agreement of Trade and Tariffs [GATT]), governmental commitment to encouraging high levels of demand and employment, unused potential in Europe and Asia, and the diffusionist role of the US. Since the golden age, only “Resurgent Asia,” including China, Malaysia, South Korea, and Taiwan have been able to exceed 1950–1973 growth rates. In “Resurgent Asia” Maddison also includes Indonesia, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka; the recent Asian economic crisis may today favor a somewhat narrower definition. If he may have cast his Asian net too wide, Maddison is not taken in by the “Internet Revolution.” He challenges prophets of a new golden age by emphasizing the decelerating growth and slowing technical progress that remain characteristic of Western economies since 1973.

Maddison’s story is not one of interrupted progress. His analysis of the former East European command economies, particularly of the economies of the orphaned states of the former Soviet Union, is alarming. Declines in growth and dramatic increase in the percent of the population below the poverty line send warning signals that the Western world ignores at its peril. Maddison also underlines the volatility of impoverished continental Africa which has thirteen percent of world population but only three percent of GDP, the most rapid demographic expansion—and the lowest life expectations. African dilemmas are underscored by a growing external debt crisis that further complicates future prospects.

Regarding this important contribution to long-term historical analysis, one inevitably foresees its misuse, the econometricians who will combine Maddison’s long-term estimates with still less reliable series to spin farfetched theories and the historians who will treat his crisp columns of guesstimates as gospel. These are the inevitable dangers of the long view. Maddison carries out a necessary enterprise with prodigious skill and amazing persistence. Properly used, Maddison’s findings should help provide a much-needed long perspective for economic historians.

Michael Hanagan
New School University

On November 20, 1997 labor historians from several European countries and North America gathered for a three-day colloquium in Roubaix, France to discuss their research on skilled European workers from the sixteenth through the twentieth century. The location was quite fitting; Roubaix is located in the northeast corner of France near the Belgian border. From the sixteenth century on the textile, coal, and later steel industries further to the south in Lorraine, made this one of Europe’s most important industrial regions. Today it is one of Western Europe’s most de-industrialized regions. The call for papers published in both French and English explicitly cites unemployment and industrial decline at the dawn of the twenty-first century among the reasons to study industrial skill over the last four centuries. This fine collection of eighteen articles (fourteen in French and four in English) and a brief introduction by the editors is the fruit of that gathering. Individual papers explore how skill intersected with patterns of labor migration, the ongoing process of skill formation and construction, and labor markets. Taken together, the papers offer a rich base of comparison across time and space. Unfortunately, limited space prevents discussion here of all of the contributions.

In their introduction to the volume, editors Gérard Gayot and Philippe Minard define industrial skill as a social construction. Criteria include specialization, length of apprenticeship, proof of competence, the production of substantial surplus value, and scarcity. They point out the often murky lines between technical know-how and social recognition of skill. Changing social, political and industrial landscapes continuously cause skill classifications to change.

One of the more striking examples of the social construction of skill is the highly gendered nature of the dynamics surrounding the representation of skill. Even when they possessed scarce technical skills women were rarely granted the social recognition and material compensation that male skilled workers enjoyed.

The seventeenth-century Italian female laceworkers discussed by Corinne Maitte in her essay possessed technical knowledge so rare and desired that they were recruited to work in France by Colbert’s agents. However, they did not enjoy the prestige associated with skilled workers in Italy because they lacked social and institutional recognition and had no guilds.

During the First World War, state intervention in the French metallurgy industry led to widespread changes in skill classifications. Informal notions of skill, rapid mechanization, the absence of male trade unionists drafted into the army, as well as prevailing gender logic led to reworked definitions of skill. For the most part, these classificatory schemes as well as those emerging out of the collective bargaining agreements of the mid 1930s excluded women from skilled worker status. Catherine Omnès shows however, that some women metalworkers were recognized as skilled by a pragmatic state and arms industry during the labor-starved years of the First World War.
Several articles explore skill and migratory patterns. Serge Chassagne concludes from his exhaustive study of the migratory patterns of indigo cotton dyers that there existed an important European-wide labor market in skilled labor in the early modern period. The article by Leo Lucassen and Boudien de Vries focuses on the role of skilled labor in large-scale migration patterns. Starting in the late sixteenth century over half a million people joined the million and a half inhabitants then living in the Dutch Republic. The revolt of the Netherlands against Spanish Habsburg rule beginning in 1568 had triggered large scale migration from the south to the north. They were joined by political and religious refugees from the Iberian peninsula and labor migrants from Germany and Scandinavia. The city of Leiden alone grew from twelve thousand inhabitants in 1581 to more than sixty thousand by 1670. Behind the flight of refugees and the general attraction of employment possibilities was a migratory pattern constructed around the need for skilled labor. Using marriage records that listed place of birth and occupation, Lucassen and de Vries identify Leiden as the center of a textile-worker migration system in which skill played a central role. Networks arose connecting textile producers with supplies of skilled fullers, dyers, and finishers through long distance migration. While these skilled workers were drawn from afar to live and work in Leiden itself, merchant capitalists put-out lower-skilled spinning and weaving operations to low wage, rural areas in the surrounding countryside.

The essays by Chassagne and Maitte call attention to the importance that early modern governments from the Venetian Republic to the French monarchy placed on scarce skilled labor. Mercantilist-minded governments sought to stem the emigration of skilled workers with the threat of draconian legal penalties including capital punishment. At the same time they sought to lure valuable skilled labor to their own lands. The nearly uniform failure of measures to stem the tide of skilled labor emigration underscores the importance of these workers and the generous conditions offered by foreign governments; when such workers returned home-as they did frequently-they were welcomed with relief and gratitude on the condition that they could convince authorities that they had not sold the “secrets” of their craft.

The notion of trade secrets also figures in several of the essays focusing on the construction and transmission of skill. Well into the nineteenth century master artisans sought to preserve their relatively privileged positions by tightly regulating access to their trade. One of the ways this was done was by jealously guarding trade “secrets” from their own apprentices. In his essay on the transmission of artisanal skill in nineteenth century Germany and Belgium, Sven Steffens describes a “pedagogie of privation.” In a sort of cat and mouse game, apprentices would try to “steal” secrets through observation of select tasks, while the masters sought to erect formal and informal prohibitions on such “spying” including demanding large amounts of “extra-professional” tasks which removed apprentices from the physical location of work and were often designed to humiliate as well.

With the onset of the second industrial revolution vigorous debates arose
among employers and the state about how technical instruction would be produced and transmitted in a changing industrial environment. One area of debate concerned the respective roles of shop-floor apprenticeship on one hand, and formal schools run by governments or industrial groups on the other. In the rapidly changing industrial environment of the second industrial revolution, employers and politicians often agreed that formal instruction must accompany on the spot training but often differed as to who would control this system.

Philippe Marchand’s study of late nineteenth century Tourcoing focuses on the high priority industrial employers placed on formal industrial education outside of the workplace. Beginning in 1889 they set up evening courses in spinning, weaving, mechanical repair, electrical training applied to textile production, geometry for machine design, etc. But the French state eventually institutionalized its own role in industrial training with the 1919 Astier law requiring the establishment of obligatory professional instruction. Gérard Bodé’s essay discusses the ways that German technical schools, especially those in the contested regions of Alsace-Lorraine served as inspiration for French industrial education. Jonathan Zeitlin explores the highly contingent set of historical factors that worked against reform of the British system of vocational education and training in the metallurgy industry. Even though employers and observers lucidly identified problems and proposed solutions, vested interests and particular historical junctures frustrated attempts at reform.

Labor historians have often viewed the decline of worker-controlled apprenticeship programs and the rise of employer-controlled industrial instruction as part of the struggle over shop-floor control. But the essays of Marchand and Renaud Cayla suggest that employers saw the value of on the spot training that sometimes involved apprenticeship even as they worked to regularize classroom instruction.

Curiously, none of the essays offer a sustained discussion of the role of skill in the labor struggles of the second industrial revolution. Struggles for worker control over the labor process figured prominently in turn of the century labor strife particularly in France and Great Britain. The changing balance of forces between labor and capital at this time was often reflected in struggles over conceptions of skill and the titles and material rewards that accompanied them. In the 1970s and 1980s British and US historians produced numerous monographs about such struggles in France and Britain. Could the absence of these struggles in this collection reflect different conceptions of labor and social history on the part of European and Anglo-American scholars?

Overall, this is a superb collection of essays. The explicit and implicit comparative framework of the volume as a whole should serve as inspiration for further comparative reflection on skill in a globalizing world of free market capitalism and regional blocs of capital.

Keith Mann

Cardinal Stritch University

In quoting from a contemporary observer who noted that by virtue of their very nature it is “a small distance (that) women must travel to become nurses,” (145) Katrin Schultheiss sets up the main argument she advances in her analysis of the French politics of the professionalization of nursing in the Third Republic. In her discussion of the competing discourses of modernization, secularization, labor militancy, and feminization, which combined in intricate if at times oppositional ways to shape and inform the debate on women’s place in public medicine and nursing, Schultheiss cautions against simple explanations and narrative arcs. This, the reader is told, is not simply the story of women’s search for political recognition within the masculine public sphere; instead, it is one that outlines women’s multi-pronged struggle for standardized training and professional status during the fin-de-siècle period. But the history and politics surrounding nursing’s emergence at this time is bound up with other themes common to this period, from the rise of working-class consciousness among public workers, to the modernization of medicine as a discipline, and Church-state conflict. In viewing the micro and macro-level debates which enveloped nurses as a symptom of France’s bumpy path to modernity, Schultheiss suggests that nursing acts as an important lens through which to observe larger struggles over gendered sacrifice, social citizenship, and political belonging at this critical juncture in French history. Despite varied attempts to repackage nursing as an occupation in which working and later middle-class women might eek out a place as actors and agents independent of time-honored institutions like the family and Church, traditional visions of womanhood and femininity competed with modern ones, ensuring that maternalism would continue to define prescribed social and political roles for women.

Schultheiss is careful to outline the distinctiveness of her approach to the history of nursing. Hers is not a social history of nurses’ lives, their personal experiences or struggles for acceptance; instead, it is an analysis of the different corporate bodies which sought to define and regulate women’s entry into and conduct within public hospitals, teaching facilities, and state institutions. Linking nursing to the issue of modernization in general, and laicization in specific, Schultheiss employs three case studies from Paris, Lyon, and Bordeaux to outline the varied attempts at either deriding or defending the place of religious women in state medicine, and reformers attempts to standardize nursing education and practice in public hospitals and wards.

Focusing first on secular Paris during the 1870s and 1880s, when government officials and anti-clerical reformers sought to establish state control over the profession by eliminating the influence of Catholicism from public institutions, Schultheiss provides a glimpse into the vitriolic nature of religious strife and the contradictory ways in which it informed local-level decision making. Despite sustained attempts by republican politicians to replace religious women
with secular staff, pre-established notions of gender sometimes succeeded in supplanting modernizing impulses. Anti-clerical physicians, obvious proponents of laicization, at times seemed unable to believe that even well-trained lay practitioners possessed the same degree of selflessness required to nurse the sick and dying. For religious women, professional integrity was based on a vision of sacrifice that gained significance because it was a symbol of their dedication and service. As Schultheiss suggests, “because the nuns had no families of their own, they alone could serve as surrogate mothers to the ill and impoverished patients” (27). Laywomen, it was feared, could not transcend their maternal womanliness to meter out care in a professional manner.

Despite conflicts in defining and delimiting prescribed roles for women nurses, Parisian legislators and reformers managed to attract considerable numbers of lay practitioners, who gradually outnumbered religious women in the city’s institutions. In shifting the focus to Lyon and Bordeaux, Schultheiss questions whether the influx of lay practitioners and the creation of nurse training facilities forced changes in the vision of femininity which defined the laicization debate in Paris. If the issue of female religiosity was a stumbling block for some republicans, in Lyon it was used as a model for state-sponsored training. The hospitalieres of the Hospices Civil of Lyon represented the best of both worlds. They observed the dedication to service and selflessness that had defined religious nurses, even engaging in regular prayer sessions and accepting a lifelong commitment to serve, yet they remained under the authority of a secular administration. In this way, their devotional commitment to the profession ensured that they were minimally compensated yet masterfully organized and trained under the watchful eye of secular authority. Republican reformers were often their greatest defenders, since the hospitalieres of Lyon upheld the highest standards of care, blended secular and religious maxims, and, most importantly, remained subservient to traditional authority. In this way, the secular sisters of Lyon maintained gender norms at the same time that they expanded them (with minimal conflict) into the secular arena.

The newly-educated nurses of the Bordeaux training hospitals, brought into being by the reformer Anna Hamilton, represent the third step in Schultheiss’ assessment of secularization and the ways in which reformers sought to reconfigure female knowledge in the workplace. Reformers in Bordeaux planned to move beyond the peasant and working stock of women and girls who formed the backbone of the hospitalieres in order to attract and educate a new cohort of professionally minded middle-class women—the secular garde-malades. Trained on the ward and in classrooms, these nurses learned and mastered what reformers marketed as an important sphere of female scientific knowledge. As an important part of the ongoing professionalization of medicine, the Bordeaux nurses represented a logical step in the standardization of nursing training and procedures, providing enlightened and efficient care for their patients. Taken to its logical conclusion, the Bordeaux reform movement even sought to revise the structure and functioning of hospitals and clinics so that nurses might assume advisory and administrative roles within the institution. Despite a reluctance to en-
ter into the political fray in the anticlericalism debate, the garde-malades represented a significant threat to the status quo and found themselves at the center of controversy as challenges to another corporate body and its ambitions—hospital doctors.

As in Paris and Lyon, this battle over acceptance and professional identity played itself out in the realm of gender. Although Anna Hamilton sought to underscore her nurses’ essential femininity by reminding critics of woman’s natural capacity for caring and sympathy, the Bordeaux nurses derived their identity from their professional status and ability, upsetting the balance of class, gender, and professional hierarchies carefully constructed in the hospital environment. In the final analysis, Schultheiss maintains, the modern garde-malades were even less embraced than the religious women they were designed to replace.

In the last two chapters of her book, Schultheiss shifts the focus away from recruitment and training practices toward a more theoretically informed discussion of the class and gender inequalities and interests at work in the maturation of nursing as a corporate body. Returning to Paris and other large metropolitan areas affected by the mounting labor militancy sweeping the nation as a whole, the issue of laicization takes a back seat to the struggle for professional self-definition and the difficulties in forging collective opposition due to the pronounced class differences that continue to mark the discipline. With the advent of professional training, nurses schooled in Bordeaux and other facilities stood increasingly apart from their fellow hospital workers, both male and female. Searching for ways to gain greater respect and recognition for nursing as a skilled profession within the public service, the large numbers of peasant and working class practitioners slowly lost ground to the trained nurse, whom reformers celebrated as a blueprint for modern, educated, independent, womanhood. That labor organizers and syndicalists, including male nurses and hospital workers, were unable to mobilize any real opposition to the pace of change had everything to do with the fact that feminization and professionalization had become conjoined; opposing the one meant resisting the other.

In the years leading up to and following World War One, as middle-class women entered into the field en masse by flocking to the colors, their presence further challenged existing definitions of the nature of the craft and the disposition of its practitioners. Nursing became imbued even more overtly with notions of maternal sacrifice and womanhood, raising fears over a declining birth rate, which could only be overcome through the reconfiguration of femininity to include nursing as an acceptable extension of women’s work. Maternalism in a sense became democratized while fastened securely to women’s political struggle for self-definition and independence.

While Schultheiss lays the foundation for consideration of the problems that plagued women’s quest for corporate status and political independence in a careful and erudite manner, one wonders whether the issue of nurses’ lives and experiences would enhance such a nuanced discussion of the politics of professionalization. In charting the indeterminacy of categories within modernity, it seems like a logical extension of the analysis to include some discussion of the
question of internalization—to what extent did the women themselves seek to redefine these categories? Also, and perhaps most important of all, did any of these new recruits themselves operate at cross-purposes with the very reform movement that sought to define nursing experience for all trained practitioners? In answering these questions, Schultheiss would have succeeded even more persuasively in demonstrating that the path from women’s nature to nursing as a profession was a long road indeed. Nevertheless, advanced undergraduate and graduate students interested in French politics, modernity, and women’s/gender history would be well equipped to take up Schultheiss’ challenge.

Jennifer V. Evans
Carleton University


To Be a Worker: Identity and Politics in Peru is about the struggle of the Peruvian working class during the 1970s and 1980s. During the 1970s—under the regime of General Juan Velazco Alvarado and General Francisco Morales Bermúdez—and during the 1980s—under presidents Fernando Belaunde Terry and Alan García—a number of labor rights were granted in Peru. However, during the 1990s—with Alberto Fujimori’s democratic and later dictatorial government—labor rights almost disappeared completely and the overall situation of the Peruvian working-class decayed drastically. In this book, Parodi’s primary concerns are workers’ daily lives and their role in Peruvian politics. Consequently throughout the book he analyzes the origin of their social identity, their relation to income and to the unions. His principal case of study is Metallurgical workers.

The book’s structure is tripartite, its main core was written before 1984 and two amendments have been added. Catherine Conaghan makes the first update in the introduction; the second is made by the author himself and revises the answers he gave to his main concerns in the first edition. Both revise the analysis of Peruvian politics since the first publication. In the introduction to the book, Conaghan presents the development of Peruvian politics from the book’s first edition until the publication of the present English translation. Both Conaghan and Parodi at the end of this new edition present the loss of labor rights under Fujimori’s government. During this period, unions lost their power and workers turned their support to Fujimori’s candidature in the 1990s presidential elections and his consequent reelection campaign of 1995. During Fujimori’s reign, the left was constantly portrayed by the government and media as synonymous to the various guerrilla movements operating in Peru at the time (The Shining Path and the Movimiento Revolucionario Tupac Amaru, MRTA); as a result it lost representation in Congress and public opinion turned decidedly unfavorable. The English edition, published in 2000, finds Fujimori still in power. Therefore, it does
not address the ongoing transformations in the Peruvian public arena since October 2000, such as the rebirth of many civil and political organizations, the ouster of Fujimori, the election of Alejandro Toledo, and the subsequent revival of labor rights with the birth of a new Peruvian Left.

The first part of the book, “A History About Workers, a Union, and Politics” addresses the social meaning of the Peruvian working class. The author analyzes the relations among workers and company management and among unions and political parties. As complex as Peruvian identity can be, Parodi’s analysis illustrates how Peruvian workers form their identities in complex and nuanced ways. In order to comprehend the complex nature of identity formation in Peru one must take into account a number factors such as race, national and regional origin, and education. Parodi deals with these issues and presents us a complex but illuminating panoramic of Peruvian workers. Even though his detractors criticize his narrow case study, it can be seen as a contribution in the understanding of working-class status in Peru.

In part two, “In His Own Words: The Many Lives of Jesús Zúñiga”, Parodi presents a worker’s biography. In part one Parodi places us in the working-class milieu, now he narrows the perspective into one worker’s life story, Jesús Zúñiga (a metallurgic worker). Through Zúñiga’s words, one can understand the complex dilemmas of a migrant worker in Lima, the internal political and social system of the metallurgic companies and the unions. Zuniga’s story in many ways reflects the most popular dreams and fears of much of the Peruvian population. It seems, as Parodi states, in several parts of the book (in fact that was the title of the first edition) that being a worker in Peru is something relative. Workers do not want to stay workers, especially migrants; their goal is to have their own business and become self-employers.

The last part synthesizes the central arguments of the book and also gives an update on the status of the Peruvian working-class and the life of Jesús Zúñiga. By examining Zúñiga’s testimony, the author contributes useful insight into the transformations that worker’s lives have undergone on several levels such as family, goals, employment and housing since the first edition of the book. Finally, the reader can find a practical appendix at the end of the book with a Selected Political Chronology of Peru from 1968 to 1995.

Laura Balbuena-Gonzalez
New School University


“The formation of the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) marked a high point in the world working-class movement . . . the last chance for a worldwide social transformation created by the working class,” argues Victor Silver-
man in *Imagining Internationalism in American and British Labor, 1939–1949* (13). While it is difficult to share Silverman’s sanguine view of the world federation, which was created with high hopes by Soviet, American (Congress of Industrial Organizations [CIO]), and British organized labor in 1945 only later to come solidly under the control of the communist bloc, his study offers a fascinating and sophisticated account of foreign policies perspectives among both elite and rank and file trade unionists and their efforts to shape the post-war world.

The foundations of this brief, utopian experiment in international labor cooperation were, Silverman admits, remarkably shaky. Bitter battles between Socialists and communists marred post-World War One efforts to mold a functional international labor organization. During World War Two, exiled trade unionists temporarily banded together across the lines of nationalities to provide valuable support for the European underground. Yet these same individuals discriminated against exiled Chinese sailors who sought the protection of unionization. Likewise, Polish refugees in Britain during the war often found themselves victims of the “xenophobia” of English trade unionists. The resolutely anti-communist American Federation of Labor (AFL) presented another challenge to international labor unity with its refusal to have any contact with communist-leaning unions, which the federation saw as “unfree” puppets of the state. Prospects for international labor unity, hence, appeared dim.

Nevertheless, the wartime alliance between Britain and The Soviet Union helped transform, according to Silverman, a general sympathy among British trade unionists for the Soviet Union into “tremendous enthusiasm for cooperation in reordering the world” (65). While Trades Union Congress (TUC) leaders may have had their misgivings, the grass-roots passion pushed them toward collaboration, culminating in the founding of the WFTU. American labor—at least its CIO component—was also caught up in the “positively mystical vision” of world labor fellowship. CIO leaders came to see the WFTU as the international fulfillment of its pluralistic, “New Deal-like corporative” philosophy. With the support of the US state department, the CIO joined TUC and Soviet labor leaders in forming the WFTU, the planned “new bureaucracy of peace” (179).

The joint founders of the new organization, Silverman argues, saw it as a vehicle to democratize the world, offering working people a hand in shaping international affairs. Ideally, the organization would also spread its message to the less developed world, for instance, by challenging the remnants of colonialism and spreading trade unionism.

The inner-contradictions and divisions in both the American and British labor movements, however, handicapped the work of the WFTU from the start. In the United States, the AFL refused to join the organization. It instead launched attacks on the WFTU and moved to develop its own anti-communist operations in Western Europe. Likewise, while anti-communism may not have been an overriding force among American workers, a deep cynicism about the Soviet Union lingered. In California, for instance, women workers refused to allow visiting Soviet workers the use of their restrooms. “Girls complain to me that
they don’t like to have those dirty Russian stewardesses in their rest rooms,” reported a company guard (125). CIO ambitions to spread American markets—along with the virtues of trade unionism also ran afoul of Soviet-bloc unionists in the WFTU. But it was the cold war hysteria of the late 1940s that ultimately undermined the CIO’s experiment in labor internationalism. As the mood of the country turned sharply in the direction of anti-communism, with an “urgency bordering on desperation,” CIO leaders purged communists and pulled out of the WFTU (179).

By 1948, leaders of the TUC—never enthusiastic about their partnership with Soviet trade unionists—also sought to leave the WFTU. Even as members, British trade unionists could never fully reconcile their contradictory impulses toward internationalism with the vestiges of nationalism and desire for empire still very much alive for many English workers.

For Silverman, the story—as is the case with so much labor history—is one of opportunity tragically lost. Despite the myriad of evidence he presents suggesting that the federation was a structurally unsound concept, destined to wobble then collapse, he still laments its promise and failure. I remain unconvinced that the WFTU offered a window to a better world. Still, I appreciated the author’s careful comparative treatment of two labor movements, his discussion of labor ideology, and his efforts to unravel the difficult complexities of working-class views of the world. The book is a major contribution to a growing literature on labor and foreign policy.

One other concern: Professor Silverman offers a comparative perspective, treating both American and British labor. But the Soviets also shaped the WFTU. Indeed, we will lack a full understanding of the operations and motivations governing the world federation until the Russian side of the story can be told. One suspects that the story told from the Soviet angle might challenge the idealized view of the world federation crafted with such care and talent by Dr. Silverman.

Ed Wehrle

Eastern Illinois University


In this wide-ranging and often fascinating study of trade unionism in the longshore sector of New York, San Pedro, and New Orleans and the steel industry in Atlanta and Youngstown, Bruce Nelson sets out to pursue three central areas of inquiry. The first is an investigation into the “relative importance of employers and workers in shaping racially segmented hierarchies in the workplace” (xxv). The second is an examination of “the relationship between organized labor and the struggle for black equality and the role of trade unions in diminish-
ing or—in some cases—deepening racial inequality” (xxv). Third, he tackles “the question of working class agency. What did workers want? What forces shaped what they could ‘do and dream’” (xxv)? Nelson delivers on part of this ambitious agenda, spending more time on the second area of inquiry than on the first and third. He carries out the second task most effectively, coming down hard on the unions he studies—the American Federation of Labor’s (AFL) International Longshoremen’s Association (ILA) and the Congress of Industrial Organization’s (CIO) International Longshoremen’s and Warehousemen’s Union (ILWU) and United Steelworkers of America. Indeed, the book’s strongest contribution lies in its careful demonstration of these unions’ multiple shortcomings when it came to black equality.

With regard to the first task, however, Nelson devotes relatively little attention to employers’ actual roles in shaping racially segmented hierarchies. The book draws upon few corporate or legal records and subjects few corporate policies to sustained exploration. In contrast, Nelson repeatedly, and convincingly, turns to the responsibility of white workers in the shaping of those racial hierarchies—the issue that animates most of the book. But the lack of attention to corporate practices renders it impossible to answer Nelson’s question of the “relative importance of employers and workers in shaping racially segmented hierarchies.”

On the third area of inquiry, Nelson is one of the last to remain true to the explicit vocabulary and agenda of the new labor history of the 1970s and 1980s. Employing throughout the themes of “consciousness” and “agency,” he insists that white workers “made themselves.” They “acted on their own behalf, and like all historical actors they bear some moral responsibility for the choices they made” (xxxviii). But where labor historians might have once celebrated workers’ agency, Nelson finds it contaminated with racism. To some extent, this book can be read as an auto-critique of Nelson’s first award-winning book, Workers on the Waterfront, whose West Coast longshore protagonists were often presented in heroic terms and where racism, Nelson recalls, was presented as “an unfortunate obstacle to labor solidarity” rooted in the “economic interests of the dominant classes” (xxii). Where Nelson found “class consciousness” on the West Coast docks in the 1930s when he wrote over decade ago, today he finds a “racialized class consciousness” (120).

Nelson’s case studies bear out the centrality of racism in white unionists’ outlook and behavior. That conservative, white members of the corrupt and gangster-ridden ILA in New York would discriminate against black members is not surprising. But Nelson also shows that otherwise progressive West Coast ILWU organizers in New Orleans in 1937–1939 often held negative and demeaning views of the black workers they sought to organize and that even the union’s top leadership—Harry Bridges in particular—appeared willing to sacrifice black workers’ interests when it seemed to him organizationally advantageous or imperative to do so. As for what workers wanted and dreamed of, the book’s third area of investigation, for Nelson the answer is readily provided by the scholars of working-class whiteness. White workers got the “wages of white-
ness," he insists, in the form of psychological and material benefits for themselves, their neighbors, and children. Nelson uncritically accepts the whiteness literature’s terminology and questionable assumptions about the non-white status of a variety of European immigrant groups and invokes whiteness—as an explanation for white workers’ behavior. Nelson focuses considerably more on union practices than he does on white workers’ aspirations and dreams. The result is that the arguments regarding union culpability in maintaining discrimination are often more persuasive than those dealing with white workers’ motivations and consciousness. The shorthand of “whiteness” does not compensate for the absence of considerable first-hand testimony from whites themselves that is a prerequisite for an understanding of their outlooks.

*Divided We Stand* seeks to make a definitive and distinctive historiographical contribution. Nelson accepts the charge that labor history has had a “race problem,” as Herbert Hill, Nell Painter, and others argued in the 1980s and 1990s. “My own sense,” he writes, “is that, for at least a generation, there was a widespread, and largely unconscious, tendency to portray the working class as white... either to minimize the importance of race in writing the history of American workers or to assign it a distinctly secondary role as an explanatory factor” (xxii). If that was true for the 1970s through the mid-1980s, this seems to be an historiographical charge inapplicable to labor history today, given the virtual outpouring of scholarship on labor and race over the course of the late 1980s and 1990s. If Nelson and his generational cohort missed what he now sees as the most important issue of race, much of the subsequent generation did not. Nelson appears dissatisfied, however. “[T]oo often scholars and labor activists have sought to envelop race in the language of class, the ‘magic bullet’ of broad-gauged social-democratic policy agendas, and the invocation of the ‘common dreams’ that allegedly animated progressive social movements before the emergence of ‘identity politics,’” he charges. “But given the ways in which race is encoded in working-class identities and definitions of self, there can be no economic cure for the malady that is ‘whiteness’” (293). One “major lesson learned in the course of writing this book,” he concludes, “is that economism can neither illuminate our history adequately nor point the way toward a better future” (293). Few labor historians would disagree. But then, economism is hardly rampant amongst their ranks these days. Those Nelson accuses of advocating economism and of longing for the good old days of working-class unity lie largely outside the domain of labor history proper (he names that notable non-labor historian Todd Gitlin, for one). Whatever one thinks of social democratic tendencies or the critique of identity politics today, surely the matter is more complex than reducing these controversial political issues to pure and simple economism.

If *Divided We Stand* is about the agency of one group of workers—whites—it is much less about the agency of another group of workers—blacks. Nelson is more concerned with what white workers wanted and dreamed of than what black workers wanted and dreamed. Indeed, he concerns himself relatively lit-
tle with the key phrase in the book’s subtitle: the “struggle for black equality.” In his chapters on New York, for instance, many of the black longshore workers’ protests against employment and union discrimination go unaddressed (the crucial records of the New York State Commission Against Discrimination, which contain considerable information on those struggles, are not consulted). In his discussion of San Pedro, neither black longshoremen nor the community they inhabit are brought into focus. During the World War Two era, hundreds of blacks sought waterfront jobs in southern California for the first time. Nelson shows that white unionists never fully accepted them and that massive post-war layoffs according to seniority wiped out black gains. When reinstatements began, whites were called back, often regardless of actual seniority. Some blacks protested, forming an informal Afro-American Labor Protective Society, and sued apparently numerous times, to little avail. Readers learn little of the Afro-American Labor Protective Society, the actual legal cases—these would presumably be at the core of blacks’ struggle for equality—or of blacks’ perspectives on strategy and outcome. In the chapters on steel, a number of black activists receive greater coverage, but in the case of Youngstown, Nelson’s interests are with union left wingers and white backlash, not the independent, oppositional black caucuses that he mentions briefly. Although we learn of divisions among black workers—there “would be no unified black response to the problems of racial discrimination,” Nelson observes in a footnote—this is not a subject of analysis (372). In many ways, the “struggle for black equality” remains an abstraction.

Divided We Stand articulates something of an accepted wisdom on the issue of race and labor today—the notion that trade unions often, if not always, upheld racial inequality and that white workers actively engaged in struggles to maintain or extend their privileged positions vis-à-vis African Americans. Like many of those in the historiographical tendency who draw inspiration from former National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) labor secretary turned polemicist Herbert Hill, Nelson minces no words in his negative portrayal of white racist union practices. Unlike Hill, though, he often grounds his narratives in archival research and concerns himself not merely with practice but with motivation: why white workers embraced the racial identities they did and pursued their anti-black course. On this note, he finds a formulaic answer in the “wages of whiteness.” Ultimately, Nelson is more successful in demonstrating white opposition to black advancement than in penetrating the minds of either his white or black rank and file.

Eric Arnesen
University of Illinois at Chicago


Few fields in American history are as conscious of their historiography as American labor and working-class history. The oft-cited narrative traces the roots of the field to the work of E. P. Thompson and, in particular, to his *Making of the English Working Class*. Thompson’s vision of the working class as the product of common experiences and his boundless belief in the agency of working people helped spur American historians to revisit dusty archives and collect and listen to oral histories in order to give ordinary people a central place in American history. Where the “old labor history” had been located in economics, not history, departments and focused almost exclusively on trade unions as a source of political moderation, the first practitioners of the “new labor history” looked beyond unions for the origins of American radicalism and examples of collective resistance to capitalism. David Montgomery, Herbert Gutman, and David Brody are usually described as the fathers of the “new labor history.” In *Hard Work*, Melvyn Dubofsky claims his place in that historiographic pantheon.

As important as the texts these scholars produced, was their graduate teaching. These pioneer scholars produced a prodigious number of students who, in turn, have expanded and revised the paradigms of study established by their mentors. If the first generations of “new labor historians” challenged the topics and goals of American history, the second generation altered it forever. Firmly grounded in the New Left revolt of the 1960s and early 1970s, these scholars assaulted historical pretensions of objectivity by declaring their work “radical history.” They sought not only to find the American radical tradition, but also to make history accessible and useful in community, workplace, and union struggles. They sought to create a history that was focused equally on the public and the academic by producing both scholarly books and public texts, including movies, open forums, and workshops, as well as accessible journals and books.

Thirty years on, American labor history is in a period of transition. Among the first generation: Gutman died in 1985, Brody retired in 1993 and Montgomery in 1997. And, Dubofsky hints broadly of his own retirement. Many of the second generation are now senior scholars, firmly ensconced in an academy that once looked suspiciously at their goals, methods, and radicalism. Despite their success, though, as Dubofsky puts it, labor history faces a “dwindling presence on the academic landscape.” It seems especially useful now to reflect on the roots of labor history and its uses, if only to figure out where the field is headed.

James Green’s *Taking History to Heart* and Melvyn Dubofsky’s *Hard Work* present contrasting visions of labor history’s past and its future uses. Dubofsky was one of the original new labor historians; Green a leading voice of the second generation. Both cite the importance of Thompson and both are hopeful
about the field’s future, but for very different reasons. Green, the radical optimist, points to a reinvigorated labor movement and labor history’s continuing ability to speak to public audiences. Dubofsky is more of a pessimist. Instead, he refers to labor history’s influence on other field and suggests that it exists only temporarily in the shadows cast by fields like cultural studies, gay and lesbian studies, and gender studies.

Where Green looks to the broader public as a source of the field’s strength and its continuing usefulness, Dubofsky looks to the academy. This contrast reflects the different tenor of the books. Both are exciting books, complete with tales of struggles against a hostile history field. But, Dubofsky’s work is introspective and retrospective, a series of glances back at his own career to confirm his own place in the field. Green uses his own experiences as an academic and public historian only as an example of the struggles to create radical history and to suggest the central role labor history can and has played in local struggles. Interestingly, while Green and Dubofsky followed some similar paths into the academy—both were visiting lecturers with Thompson at the University of Warwick and both studied the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) early in their careers—their visions of history are remarkably divergent. Where Green celebrates radical history as his own roots and as the best future for the field, Dubofsky has soured toward radical history, wondering if, at times, it is “bad history in a good cause.”

Hard Work is Dubofsky’s “greatest hits.” It is a collection of his essays that have been published elsewhere, along with a few bonus tracks. They provide an interesting retrospective of his work starting with his early forays into the origins of the IWW and, working chronologically, to his work in comparative history and the application of a world-systems analysis. The essays are introduced with short “liner notes” and a brief introductory essay on becoming a labor historian at the height of consensus history and the McCarthy Era. These short introductions to the essays and the opening autobiographical essay are the strength of the book, providing a fascinating look into the challenges faced by one of the field’s pioneers and his evolving sense of what it means to “make” labor history. Dubofsky describes his circuitous route to labor history at a time when they were few labor historians to read. Growing up in the ethnic community of New York, still influenced by traditions of Jewish radicalism, he was introduced to the standard authors of the American left like Upton Sinclair and Charles and Mary Beard. He came to the study of workers through his reading of Richard Hofstadter’s Age of Reform and his visits to the old Tamiment Library. He had already found his way into the academy when student radicals were shutting down campuses and a younger generation of labor historians, like Green, was organizing the first self-proclaimed radical history conferences and associations.

It is useful, as well, to have these essays collected in one place; they are, after all, reprints of articles that many American labor historians have read and re-read many times. Taken together they are a true testimony of the breadth of Dubofsky’s scholarship and his importance not simply to labor history, but also
to western, political, and comparative history. One wishes that Dubofsky had taken the opportunity to update the essays to include more of a commentary on scholarship that revises his own work. Instead, the introductory notes set an ungenerous and defensive tone, suggesting that this work builds upon his foundations and that it has not seriously challenged his own conclusions.

Green’s *Taking History to Heart* powerfully responds to Dubofsky’s criticism of radical history. Green applauds radical history as done in a way that responds directly to social problems and that provides local communities with a history that is empowering and uniting. Radical history, for Green, is “movement history,” born of social upheaval and useful for those engaged in struggles inside and outside of the academy. Green’s training in movement history began inside the classroom with revisionist historians like C. Vann Woodward. Equally important, though, were the last pitched battles of the new left revolt that left historians on both sides of the Atlantic looking for new ways of presenting activist history. For Green, that meant the journal *Radical America*, community forums, public exhibitions, history workshops, and documentary films. It also meant finding a place in the new labor studies program at the University of Massachusetts-Boston where teaching drew on the work and union experiences of students.

The production of movement history challenged not only traditions of academic writing and teaching, but also union hierarchies. Green relates his role in efforts to recount, remember, and commemorate stories of rank-and-file struggle for labor rights in Lawrence, Chicago, and the South. Such stories collectively present a counter-narrative to accepted notions of history. “Seeing the past through movement eyes” places social movements at the center of efforts to reinvigorate the labor movement and to build desegregated, democratic communities. He points to the way this movement history has been used specifically in strikes like the 1989 Pittston Coal Strike and more generally in the renaissance of social unionism in the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO).

Ironically, though, both authors, while celebrating two generations of academic revolt, are critical of the present generation. Both are wary of more recent efforts to incorporate literary and cultural studies and critical theory into the writing of history. Dubofsky is, at times, openly dismissive and antagonistic toward recent scholarship, dismissing it as “jargon” and “arcane academic language.” Despite Dubofsky’s call for attention to the diversity of working-class behavior and beliefs, he dismisses gender, ethnic, and cultural studies as fads. Green regards textual analysis as a retreat from those narratives and stories that linked academics to the public. Yet these new revisions of historical writing can enliven the study of class and resistance and might suggest new ways of presenting public history. They might also offer new directions to another generation of working-class historians.

Daniel Bender

*Princeton University*

The question “Is there a new labor studies?” dominated the discussion of a workshop on the subject of teaching the labor movement held at New School University in November 2000. Common observations about the dominance of economic paradigms, corporate influence in the academy, and the rise of area studies were addressed, and emphasis was laid on the flowering of local, identity-inspired histories, a trend that has become somewhat controversial in the larger field of labor studies. Some who are involved in concrete union organizing and nuts-and-bolts industrial relations have seen such an emphasis on place-specific cultural history as suggestive of a defeatist attitude, hallmark of a post-union society and world. In this context it was apropos of John Russo (Center for Working Class Studies, Youngstown State University) to mention the importance of recent work being done by several geographers who have paid much attention to the importance of place-specific labor activities which in shaping local landscapes have had far-reaching effects.

Andrew Herod’s *Labor Geographies* is in many ways a keystone of what some of us have come to refer to as “the new labor geography.” The legacies of deindustrialization in North America and Europe and political and economic transitions in Central and Eastern Europe have all too often elicited reference to the well-worn mantra of capital flight as the ultimate determining factor in how specific landscapes are shaped. The mobilization of labor, especially when it is manifest in attempts to fight plant closures, has been characterized as a perpetual rear-guard action in a fight against the ultimate determining variable in our world: the movement of capital. Herod reminds us that on this issue both neoclassical and Marxist theories of labor accept this basic structure. He suggests that distinct attention to the landscape-shaping activities of labor unions in local contexts offers a practical alternative to these capital-centered geographies and historiographies, an alternative which affirms human culture, agency, and identity on local, national, and global levels.

Herod’s previous work has devoted much attention to analyses of deindustrialization in the United States and labor in the transitional contexts of Eastern and Central Europe. He has edited and contributed to an earlier collection, *Organizing the Landscape: Geographical Perspectives on Labor Unionism* (Minneapolis, 1998), which includes several essays by prominent geographers dealing with instances of labor organizing and its spatial contexts and connotations. *Labor Geographies* is in many ways a bringing together of his own work of several years and a refining of it into a clear, distinct argument: the structure of the landscape makes a difference in how capitalism works, and human agents, especially when organized into unions, have demonstrated in various places their ability to shape that landscape.

This theoretical groundwork is laid in the first two chapters, after which follows a mixture of studies emphasizing the globally significant accomplishments
of unions on local levels and historical/geographical overviews highlighting the geographical differences any trans-national union organizing must take account of in pursuing such global accomplishments. The first study (chapter three) is of an initiative in the 1980s by the International Ladies Garment Workers’ Union (ILGWU) to preserve jobs in Manhattan by successfully lobbying for the institution of a “garment manufacturing preservation zone.” This zone prevented the encroachment of high rents that would have run out an important part of New York’s manufacturing base, preserving union jobs which are stable in part because of their proximity to retailing of the garments produced.

The second study (chapters four and five) traces the eventful history of the International Longshoremen’s Association’s (ILA) response to containerization, a shipping technology developed in the latter half of the twentieth century which had the potential to severely diminish dock workers’ bargaining power. Herod makes light of the many difficulties involved in the ILA’s goal of equalizing conditions in an industry unevenly developed due to port location, shipping volumes, local tradition, etc. Focusing on the port of New York/New Jersey, he follows the progression of contract disputes, losses, and gains toward the eventual development of a local-turned-national contract which led employers to develop their own larger organizations and even alter their shipping routes. That such a change in spatial protocol was possible illustrates how the scale of bargaining must be the active creation of social agents, in this case members of local chapters of the ILA.

Chapter six continues to discuss these issues of scale, this time in the context of globalization. Given labor’s demonstrated agency, Herod suggests that the vision of unfettered global capitalism offered by groups such as the World Trade Organization is “only one version of globalization,” which does not take into account workers’ capacity to broaden scales of bargaining through greater ties among workers around the world. International ties binding unions in different regions and with different degrees of economic development are explored in chapter seven, a sketch of housing and infrastructure improvement programs developed by the American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD), an international program of the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) in partnership with local unions in various Latin American countries. Herod brilliantly illustrates in text and photographs how the kind of infrastructure development undertaken in this partnership, often North American style single-family homes and supermarkets, became, as was intended, a form of anti-Communist social engineering “anchoring ideology to the local built environment.”

Chapter eight, entitled “Thinking Locally, Acting Globally,” reiterates the inadequacies of theories of globalization which leave out workers’ capacity for transnational organization, mentioning the worldwide sympathy for the 1995–1998 Liverpool dockworkers’ strike and focusing on the United Steelworkers of America’s (USWA) struggle with international financier and fugitive Mark Rich. Herod tells the story of the international boycott campaign by an USWA local
in Ravenswood, West Virginia, which caused so many buyers to cease dealings with Rich’s company that it was forced to resume negotiations with the union and address the unsafe conditions in the plant which had precipitated the initial conflict.

The final study, on labor organization in former Communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, is perhaps the most difficult, as the countries it addresses have had divergent experiences both before, after, and during the transitions of and around 1989. Yet Herod is keenly aware of this, and the recognition of geographical complexity and the specificity of local experience pervades his work in this area. Of things that it is possible to generalize about regarding these countries, one is a widespread distrust of the type of centralization and state intervention that characterized the Soviet era, and another is that production of goods is, for the time being, cheaper than in nearby member-states of the European Union. Notwithstanding the active, sometimes central, roles unions such as Poland’s Solidarnosc played in the state transitions, which Herod mentions, these issues have been reason for pessimism among many. To add to the complexity, one situation that Herod also mentions as a landscape-shaping demonstration of workers’ agency is the response, at times in the form of strikes, to the deindustrialization of the Ostrava region in the northeastern Czech republic, which has experienced massive unemployment due in part to privatization. This is a complicated area, where the old Communist party remains popular in some parts (most notably, perhaps, in the city of Karvina, where it continues to win support), and one wonders whether such landscape-shaping is always for the best.

Herod’s point, however, is that just as there were local actors who brought about the revolutions of 1989, so there are still local actors, represented by old and new unions, some developing bilateral relationships with EU and North American counterparts, which are proving that the processes of transition in these parts of the world are not simply the story of capital influx and foreign direct investment. Though this chapter addresses a vast topic, Herod has demonstrated (both here and in more detail elsewhere) a deeply nuanced understanding of and commitment to this part of the world. Herod ultimately succeeds in integrating issues of vast complexity into the structure of a geography of labor which pays rightful attention to the contributions of particularities, local human agents and their unions, to shaping social, political, and economic landscapes, sometimes on a global scale. That these particularities are able to fit together and make sense while at the same time continuing to represent the complexity of the varied landscapes of our world is a grand achievement and should have us all reading (and doing) more geography in the future.

Peter Nekola
New School University


Two explosions in US working-class history are the focus of the volumes under review. The first pre-dated the emergence of the American Federation of Labor (AFL), many of whose tough-minded organizers were in the process of emerging from the Marxist-influenced First International. AFL chief Samuel Gompers referred to the 1877 labor upsurge in this way: “Made desperate by the accumulation of miseries, without organizations strong enough to conduct a successful strike, the railway workers rebelled. Their rebellion was a declaration of protest in the name of American manhood against conditions that nullified the rights of American citizens. The railroad strike of 1877 was the tocsin that sounded a ringing message of hope to us all.”

David Stowell's slim but splendid monograph *Streets, Railroads and the Great Strike of 1877* is necessarily more limited scope than the volume of conference papers edited by Schneirov, Stromquist, and Salvatore. While best read in conjunction with more comprehensive histories of 1877 by Robert V. Bruce and Philip S. Foner, its analysis of the impact of the 1877 uprising in three New York cities breaks new ground. Actually, as Stowell notes, there was no uprising to speak of in Syracuse, while “striking railroad workers in Albany took their strike into the very heart of the city itself,” and in Buffalo “the strike would reach tidal-wave proportions” (78, 98).

The story takes us beyond the worksites of striking railroad employees into the neighborhoods from which insurgent crowds mobilized against the destructive impact that the railroad companies were having on their lives. Something happened that “involved processes and sentiments in addition to those emanating from the factories,” and one must examine “the differing concerns and identities of people in the 1877 crowds,” Stowell insists. A major factor in the explosion was the longstanding resentment of urban residents over “the railroad’s deadly use of a vital urban space.” The crowds were, in part, engaging in “community uprisings” in defense of their streets and neighborhoods from the constantly dirty and noisy, often destructive, sometimes lethal impact of “trains moving down their streets—past retail stores, saloons, churches, schools, and residences” (6, 8, 11).

Insurgent crowds that surged through many cities included only a substantial minority of railroad workers. There were women, children, and adolescent boys. There were various skilled and unskilled workers, white-collar employees, professionals, and small proprietors. There was significant ethnic and racial diversity. “The widely accepted but narrowly conceived view of the Great Strike as a labor rebellion” should not obscure the greater complexity:
A person who was not a railroad striker might have participated in crowd attacks against railroads for any number of mutually reinforcing reasons: anger over the railroad’s killing or maiming of a friend, neighbor, or family member; smoldering opposition to the railroad’s disruption of the social and economic fabric of the streets and neighborhoods; support for a striking railroad worker; fear of the concentrated economic and political power of the railroads; animosity over a house set on fire from a passing locomotive. All of these motivating factors, and others, such as hostility toward the railroad’s unrivaled status as the symbol of the harsh terms of capitalist industrialization, dovetailed in the 1877 crowds (6, 144).

According to the editors’ introduction to the rich collection *The Pullman Strike and the Crisis of the 1890s*, “the crisis of the 1890s appeared as the culmination of a quarter of a century of volatile socioeconomic development and growing social unrest.” They add that the economic depression of the 1890s (following similar downturns in the 1870s and 1880s) intensified the rise of radical populism among insurgent small farmers and many urban workers, while at the same time pushing industrialists increasingly to centralize and rationalize production to restore and enhance profit margins. In response, skilled workers “began to ally with lesser skilled laborers and operatives in more broadly based and inclusive organizations,” as well as “more militant and effective forms of collective action” (3–4). Out of this context, Eugene V. Debs and others from the old railway brotherhoods broke away to form the American Railway Union (ARU). When the Pullman strike erupted, and the ARU—locked in life-or-death combat with the coalition of railroad corporations backed by the government—urgently reached out to the AFL for assistance, Gompers and his colleagues backed away, saluting the ARU’s “impulsive, vigorous protest against the gathering, growing forces of plutocratic power and corporation rule,” but considering it “folly” to join the ARU in being destroyed (191).

Robert Weir points to the 1890 New York Central strike, led by the Knights of Labor, as an instructive “Dress Rehearsal for Pullman.” Susan Hirsch, dealing with “The Search for Unity Among Railroad Workers,” discusses experiences—involving vital solidarity between Pullman strikers and the surrounding communities—in Pullman and nearby Chicago, contrasting this with the dramatically less successful developments in Wilmington, Delaware. In “A Modern Lear and His Daughters: Gender in the Model Town of Pullman,” Janice Reiff shows how decisive for the strike were the complex and often neglected issues of paternalism and women’s roles in community life and social struggle. The title of Larry Peterson’s presentation—“Photography and the Pullman Strike: Remolding Perceptions of Labor Conflict by New Visual Communication”—signals a dramatic new contribution, although the more traditional intellectual history in Victoria Brown’s “Advocate for Democracy: Jane Addams and the Pullman Strike” also adds a useful dimension. Melvyn Dubofsky’s important essay, “The Federal Judiciary, Free Labor, and Equal Rights” explores how late nineteenth-century orthodoxies of possessive individualism, laissez-faire, and Social-Darwinismism were in competition with an ethos of “civic republicanism” as-
associated with new varieties of liberal reformers—given greater weight by the “rising intensity of class conflict”—to influence legal and political thinking regarding the proper relation of labor to capital.

Shelton Stromquist sees the existence up to the early 1890s of a widespread ideology of radical “producerism,” blending the labor theory of value, an inclusive labor solidarity, and a vision of economic justice and social democracy. Under the impact of the defeat of labor radicalism and industrial unionism in 1894—with the Pullman defeat but also the bituminous miner’s strike that nearly destroyed the United Mine Workers of America—labor’s mainstream shifted in a very different direction from Debs’s open embrace of socialism. “Gompers . . . repositioned himself and the AFL to buttress the institutional stability of the trade union movement through new alliances” (194). This involved a decisive turn away from labor radicalism and toward liberal business elements: “In the years immediately after 1894 liberal reformers and trade unionists used a discourse of social harmony to marginalize class-based ideologies” (197).

As Richard Schneirov observes, prominent intellectual, Henry Demarest Lloyd, initially hopeful over the prospects of the emergence a mass socialist workers movement (to be led by Gompers!), finally lamented: “It is amazing that workingmen are not more radical than they are. In Chicago the workingmen are mystified, troubled, apprehensive, and scarcely know which way to turn” (216). He concluded that there would be more promise in what Schneirov describes as “a new tide of cross-class urban progressivism” (222), which attracted a majority of labor activists.

But this failed to resolve the problems of working-class America. David Montgomery’s concluding essay points out that many of the issues facing workers over a century ago face us today, and that radical labor vision of Debs and the ARU “of a more humane social order and economic life” requires champions in our own time (245).

Paul Le Blanc
La Roche College


Mother Jones is legendary. Her courageous and unrelenting militancy, spirited and quotable speeches, and gutsy flaunting of convention have made her a hero for twentieth century labor organizers, feminists, and social justice activists. In this captivating biography, Elliott Gorn illuminates Mother Jones by uncovering her self-created persona whom the author contextualizes in the contours of social and political history. Gorn’s arguments are constructed around two main themes: How gender identity determined Jones’ work and how historical truth and the creation of myth bolstered her causes.

Over sixty years old, Mary Harris Jones invented the character of Mother
Jones at the turn of the century. Up until that point, her life story resembled that of numerous poor immigrant working class women whose unnoticed toil left many historical gaps. By the time Mother Jones entered public life, however, and became “a character performed by Mary Jones,” the reasons for her obscurity were self-made (4). Her biographer, then, is left to search for information that his subject did not want others to know as her Autobiography of Mother Jones (not Mary Jones) suggests.

Gorn spends the first three chapters establishing the background of this historic figure. Mary Harris was born in Ireland and the culture of that colonized land shaped her later life. Jones drew on two of the most important Irish pillars—revolutionary nationalism and the Catholic Church—to strengthen her militancy. Weaving the national history of Ireland with personal narrative, Gorn uncovers interesting discrepancies and inaccuracies in Jones’ tale of herself and the historical record. Despite the pride she expressed in a revolutionary Irish heritage, Gorn concludes that the stories are untrue. There were no direct blood ties between Jones and nationalist leaders. Nevertheless, Gorn argues, Irish immigrants’ embrace of “fictive kin” might help explain her statements. The revolutionary lineage Jones conjured served well her organizing efforts in later years. In turn, though Mary Harris Jones did not admit it, Catholicism provided a foundation upon which she built the character of Mother Jones. The Blessed Mother and an education into female leadership were the church’s inadvertent contributions to her radicalism. These types of embellishments appear throughout the Autobiography and include, among other things, Jones’ false claims that she was in Chicago during the Great Fire, that she witnessed the battle in Pittsburgh during the 1877 Railroad Strike, and that she was in Ludlow, Colorado when Rockefeller’s guards murdered women and children in their makeshift tent homes. The untruths, however, provide insight into the life of this remarkable woman. Gorn argues that they “must be treated less literally than metaphorically” and are “best thought of as akin to religious testimony, to bearing witness, to a pilgrim’s story” (45).

The undercurrent of truth and myth run through Gorn’s work and make for intriguing reading. But the analysis based on the historical record is the most important contribution of Mother Jones: The Most Dangerous Woman in America. The focus of the second half of the book traces Jones’ involvement with the United Mine Workers of America, the Socialist Party, and myriad other social justice crusades. She was an indefatigable organizer and a passionate speaker who could rouse tired and restless strikers and their families.

In these battles, Jones incorporated and reinterpreted various gender symbols to spur men and women to action. For example, she played upon traditional notions of separate spheres ideology as well as feminist equality and, then, used seemingly contradictory messages to carve out her positions. Interestingly, her stance on women’s primary revolutionary role changed over time. Like many of her female contemporaries, Jones used the concept of motherhood as a rhetorical tool in hopes of transforming society. Unlike Progressive reformers and middle class Socialists, however, she moved away from supporting the idea
of women’s suffrage. By the time suffragists were gaining a hearing from mainstream politicians and there was movement for the amendment, Jones argued that “suffrage was a diversion” (230).

*Mother Jones: The Most Dangerous Woman in America* is extremely well written and well researched. However, there are two shortcomings of Gorn’s analysis. In the first three chapters, in which Gorn explores the life of Mary Harris Jones before the creation of Mother Jones, the reader is given a much better sense of her personal history than in the second half of the book. We need a more nuanced account of her non-public existence in the years when she was ensconced in labor struggles. During the period Jones was organizing the Colorado and West Virginia coalfields, for example, she had no permanent home. Gorn notes that Jones often stayed at the home of Terence and Emma Powderly and that John Walker, President of the Illinois Federation of Labor, was a lifetime friend and supporter (both emotionally and financially). How did these relationships develop over time and what did they mean to Jones’ evolving sense of herself. Another minor weakness in the work surrounds the description of William Z. Foster. Jones and Foster were each involved in organizing the steel industry after World War One. Given their respective radical heritages, it seems likely that these two individuals would have much upon which to connect. Gorn argues, however, that “Mother Jones despised the conservatism of the craft unions that Foster tried to hold together” (257). Did Foster’s syndicalist roots affect her conclusions?

These are minor concerns and Gorn’s compelling work is an important contribution to labor and women’s history. The themes around which he structures his analysis will make for lively discussion, I imagine, in upper level undergraduate courses and graduate seminars. The book would also be a good choice for an historical methods class given the careful, creative, and insightful way Gorn addresses the truth and untruth of Mother Jones’ telling of her own life story.

Caroline Waldron Merithew  
*University of Dayton*


Howard Kimeldorf’s *Battling for American Labor* explores “the distinctive industrial radicalism of American labor” during the Progressive Era (5). He takes to task the whole tired notion of an ideological battle for American workers waged between the conservative American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the radical Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) that has interested generations of scholars since at least the time Eugene Debs said there was a clear “choice between the A.F. of L. and capitalism on one side, and the Industrial Workers of the World and socialism on the other” (3). Kimeldorf states that too much of
the labor history of the early twentieth century has been told as simply an ideological war for the hearts and minds of American workers. This smart book deals with two case studies of groups of workers who, over time, start out in the IWW fold and eventually join the AFL. This story traditionally has been told as the growth of either “job consciousness,” a case of “false consciousness,” or the growing conservatism of American workers. Kimeldorf suggests a fresh way of looking at this important issue. Rather than seeing the workers as having changed, he suggests that, through a careful study of the workers’ actions, it was the AFL who in fact was transformed because of the workers.

Kimeldorf argues that unskilled American workers were basically syndicalists in practice though not in theory and that their unions likewise developed syndicalist practices. This philosophy “represented a fluid mix of organizational practices that combine the institutional brawn of pure and simple trade unionism with the mobilizing muscle of contemporary working-class insurgency to produce a kind of ‘syndicalism, pure and simple’” (15). Therefore, the IWW and the AFL were not as far apart as many have suggested. Both practiced what Kimeldorf calls different types of syndicalism: the AFL, a business syndicalism; the IWW, an industrial syndicalism. These styles “represented alternative routes of class formation that led craftsmen and less skilled workers toward opposite ends of the same syndicalist continuum (17). In short, he argues that “the IWW and AFL . . . often functioned as flip sides of the same syndicalist coin . . .” (18).

To demonstrate this we follow Philadelphia longshoremen and New York City culinary workers on their journey from the IWW until they merge with the AFL. In May 1913, three thousand Philadelphia longshoremen joined Local 8, Marine Transport Workers’ Industrial Union of the IWW and went on strike. Philadelphia’s docks were unique in the maritime world, as anti-union railroad companies directly owned many. And, more importantly, Philadelphia’s dockworkers were much more diverse than dockworkers in Boston or New York. “. . . [T]herefore,” writes Kimeldorf,” lacking any history of membership exclusion based on race or ethnicity, workers of different colors and nationalities competed on a more or less equal footing, often managing to secure regular, if intermittent employment” (25). The union was successful because they developed a program which suited the dockworkers. As a union of unskilled workers, they used the only weapon they had to hold the companies to the agreement: the direct action of a strike or threat of a strike. Even after government repression, AFL union raiding, hostile ship owners’ actions, and the use of racial tension to try and pry the union apart, the members stayed loyal to the union. They did so, Kimeldorf suggests, because the union remained true to the syndicalism of the workers and respectful of the rank-and-file’s “disruptive capabilities” (50). Direct action was their weapon. The IWW Local held on until 1926, when the workers joined the AFL’s International Longshoremen’s Association (ILA). Historians have argued that Local 8 was somehow unique to last as long as it did. It must have been more of an AFL style union, goes the story. But, Kimeldorf persuasively argues that it was the ILA who changed and became much more like Local 8, so much so that by 1926, at least, the discussion to join the AFL union was
not so odd. In 1925, the ILA had all but adopted Local 8’s agenda and program. At the same time, former IWW people led ILA Local 116. And, unlike other ILA locals, Local 116 continued a tradition of racial inclusion pioneered by the IWW. There was another reason for the shift, involving the effectiveness of the workers’ weapon, the strike. When Local 8 struck, ship owners could simply bypass the port and go elsewhere. As members of the ILA, with locals in all the Eastern ports, those ships could be boycotted in other ports. Industrial syndicalism had gained an organizational voice, giving workers the best of both worlds: what Kimeldorf calls “syndicalism, pure and simple.”

New York City’s culinary workers’ journey was in many ways similar though not as direct as the dockworkers. Both started with the IWW, but the culinary workers went through a handful of unions before eventually settling on the AFL. They joined the International Hotel Workers’ Union (IHWU) in 1911. Again, these workers relied on direct action. “The kitchen staff,” writes Kimeldorf, “consisting of cooks, chefs, and their helpers, were the shock troops of industrial syndicalism, ready to strike at a moment’s notice” (89). Kitchen staff could disrupt the entire system. In 1912, a strike at the city’s major hotels brought out thousands of workers. By the end of 1912, IHWU had fifteen thousand members. This renewed union “now embraced all the key elements of industrial syndicalism” (112). Unlike Philadelphia’s dockworkers who stayed with the IWW for years, New York’s culinary workers jumped from union to union. “Labor solidarity, mass mobilization, and unrestricted direct action,” writes Kimeldorf, “were never exclusive property of the IWW” (114). What drove them was the striving for a “more organizationally sound expression of industrial syndicalism” (114). What is clear is that in both case studies presented, the paths of the IWW/radical unions crossed those of the AFL: “the IWW’s decentralized ‘modern unionism’ began to converge with HRE Local 1’s increasingly militant shop floor orientation” (127). Eventually, “the mass of less skilled culinary workers thus made their way from the IWW to the AFL in search of a more stable institutional expression of industrial syndicalism” (150).

America’s unskilled workers responded best not to ideology, but to a union that best represented the practice of industrial syndicalism: membership inclusiveness; mass mobilization; and reliance on workers self-activity rather than contracts to enforce workers’ rights. “While the Wobblies themselves might come and go,” writes Kimeldorf, “their practice of industrial syndicalism would continue to influence culinary unionism in the years ahead” (113).

This is an important book for labor historians. It drops the fashionable romanticism scholars too often have of the IWW in favor of a more social scientific approach that studies observable actions and organizational development. If there is a fault, and it is minor, it is that in his rush to leave romanticism behind Kimeldorf misses an opportunity to say something important about ethnicity and radicalism. Surely, there were key connections between the two that I think would have made his argument that much stronger. In the end though, this book recasts the history of Progressive Era labor in important ways. “In choosing between the AFL and its industrial rivals,” writes Kimeldorf, “the
longshoremen and culinary workers were guided neither by a Gramscian ‘war of ideological position’ nor a Perlmanian ‘revolt of the stomach’ but rather by the experience of workplace struggles that drew them to the union whose logic of collective action best ‘fitted’ their own class capacities rooted in the organization of the labor process”(155). While Kimeldorf is persuasive about “syndicalism, pure and simple” in these two case studies more work still needs to be done to see if this was unique to these groups of workers. Kimeldorf has provided future labor historians with a useful research direction that I hope they take up.

Richard A. Greenwald
United States Merchant Marine Academy


On September 11, 2001, the terrorists who attacked the World Trade Center targeted a city that has long been a symbol of high finance, speculation, and investment—the capital of multinational capitalism. Yet among those killed in New York were hundreds of working-class men and women, people whose labor has long been essential to the functioning of Wall Street. The causalities included electricians, dishwashers, and janitors, as well as “pink collar” workers such as secretaries, typists, and file clerks. Joshua Freeman reminds us that these laborers played an important role in shaping the politics and society of modern New York as did the financiers, brokers, and lawyers so central to our image of the global metropolis. Freeman begins his book with a criticism of the “astonishing blindness” to working-class life in the “vast literature celebrating postwar New York” (xiv). Working-Class New York goes a long way toward the rewriting of the history of New York with workers at the center.

Joshua Freeman has written a book befitting his topic. It is as diverse, ambitious, and argumentative, and as exciting as New York City itself. Working-Class New York is a singularly important book, one of the best analyses of a twentieth-century city to date and a richly provocative reinterpretation of postwar political and economic history. It is not just well-written, but gripping, a rare quality in academic publishing these days.

The world of New York’s workers was large and bewilderingly diverse at the end of World War Two, the starting point for Freeman’s narrative. In 1947, thirty-seven thousand firms in New York were involved in manufacturing, employing nearly one million workers. Firms representing 420 of the 450 census categories of manufacturers could be found in the metropolitan area, and no single industry dominated, although apparel, printing and publishing, and food production were larger than most. Most New York manufacturers were small; only a few hundred factories employed more than five hundred workers. Distribution firms—shipping and trucking—employed thousands more. And by 1950, a
growing share of the New York working class was employed in the rapidly growing service and retail sectors.

Freeman richly describes New York workplaces and working class neighborhoods, from Washington Heights to Brownsville. But the heart of his book is the political history of New York’s working class. Freeman argues that the dominance of blue-collar workers in New York gave the city’s politics a distinctive cast. The “New York labor movement,” Freeman contends, “led the city toward a social democratic polity unique in the country in its ambition and achievements” (55). New York “became a laboratory for a social urbanism committed to an expansive welfare state, racial equality, and popular access to culture and education” (55). Most of the story that unfolds in Working-Class New York is that of the rise and fall of that social democratic polity.

The key players in Freeman’s social democratic New York were trade unionists and activists on the political left, particularly those affiliated with the Communist Party (CP). The CP and its leftist allies, in Freeman’s telling, created the infrastructure for New York’s political experiment. Left unionists demanded and won subsidized housing, accessible public arts programs, civil rights, and affordable higher education. Even as the labor left was marginalized by the anticommunist crusade of the late 1940s and 1950s, New York leftists remained central players in liberal and labor politics and continued to set the terms of New York politics for years after their formal political institutions had largely been destroyed.

With great effectiveness and subtlety, Freeman recounts the achievements of labor-leftists and liberals in the postwar city, although he is attentive to the weaknesses and limitations of worker-built public policy and urban institutions. Particularly valuable are Freeman’s case studies of union-sponsored medical programs and labor-backed cooperative and public housing initiatives. Postwar New York had the nation’s most extensive system of public hospitals, a large number of labor-funded clinics, and a health insurance program (for those workers who were union members) that rivaled the best health provision systems in the world. And despite the city’s high real estate costs, workers found affordable rental housing largely because of worker-supported rent control laws, the building trades unions’ staunch support for public housing (which created jobs as well as subsidized homes for workers and the poor), and a cooperative housing movement that was the largest in the country. Freeman estimates nearly one-third of the housing units built in New York in the quarter century after World War Two were government subsidized, in large part because of the city’s powerful labor-liberal-left political alliance.

New York’s experiment came under siege beginning in the 1950s and especially in the late 1960s and 1970s. New York’s working class shrank as industry decentralized. Blue-collar workers scattered to the outer boroughs and suburbia, taking advantage of their hard negotiated pay raises and of government subsidies for private housing. Racial politics grew acrimonious. New York’s postwar left-laborites may have aggressively promoted civil rights for African Americans and Puerto Ricans, who composed a growing segment of the city’s population,
but when minorities grew more assertive politically, white New Yorkers fled or fought. In two brilliant chapters, Freeman focuses on two 1960s political collisions that signaled a new era for New York’s working class: the bitter clash over race and schooling in Ocean Hill-Brownsville—where black community activists collided with the largely Jewish American Federation of Teachers; and the bloody attacks by “hardhat” construction workers on student antiwar protestors. Compounding the crisis of the late 1960s was the economic collapse of the 1970s, as New York’s social democratic experiment foundered on the shoals of stagflation, massive urban disinvestment, and the collapse of the city’s finances.

There is so much to learn from Working-Class New York that it may seem churlish to offer criticism. Perhaps the book’s only significant fault is its relentless emphasis on New York “exceptionalism.” While it goes without saying that New York’s history is distinctive, Freeman nearly always emphasizes New York’s singularity at the expense of potentially illuminating comparisons. For example, Philadelphia’s manufacturing economy was nearly as diverse as New York’s (if on a smaller scale) and was likewise dominated by small firms. In nearly every postwar city in the north, building trades unionists, like New York’s, supported large-scale public housing and urban renewal projects. And Freeman’s assertion that New York’s labor-civil rights alliance against discrimination “distinguished working class New York from national norms” (68) overlooks similar robust alliances in union-dominated cities like Detroit and Chicago. But these are small quibbles about a book that is in nearly every respect an extraordinary achievement. Working-Class New York will set the agenda for every historian of postwar urban America, the labor movement, and social-democratic politics. Its narrative sets a high standard for future labor and political histories. And it offers a powerful historical context for the ongoing struggles for equality and democracy among the beleaguered American working class. Who could ask more of a book?

Thomas J. Sugrue
University of Pennsylvania


The US government’s ideological and foreign policy imperatives during the Cold War years, argues historian and legal scholar Mary Dudziak, had a paradoxical effect on the trajectory of civil rights reform. International pressures would “simultaneously constrain and enhance civil rights reform” (11). On the one hand, the anti-communism of the Cold War era silenced the more radical opponents of American race relations, capitalism, and colonialism, leading to a “narrowing of acceptable civil rights discourse” (13). On the other hand, racist violence and the persistence of Jim Crow made it hard for government officials to portray the
United States as a democratic, free, and open society, one that was vastly supe-
rior to the totalitarianism of the Soviet bloc. That proved to be a problem, how-
ever, as the Soviets and Americans competed for the allegiance of growing num-
bers of nations undergoing a process of decolonization. Civil rights activists
skillfully took advantage of the opening provided by the Cold War, aggressive-
ly and sometimes successfully advancing their campaign for civil rights.

If some of Dudziak’s arguments are familiar, many (if not all) of her exam-
pies are not. Non-white foreign diplomatic personnel working in the United
States regularly encountered the ritual humiliations of Jim Crow initially de-
vised for African Americans. In 1947, Haiti’s secretary of agriculture was denied
hotel accommodations on account of his color in Biloxi, Mississippi; in 1961, the
ambassador of Chad, en route from the United Nations in New York to Wash-
ington, D.C., was refused service in a diner along Route 40 in Maryland (152),
an experience that was repeated numerous times as other non-white diplomats
made the same journey. Although President Kennedy was shocked that these
diplomats would drive—“‘It’s a hell of a road,’ he said, ‘... but why would any-
body want to drive it today when you can fly? ... Tell them to fly!’” [168]—State
Department officials were deeply concerned and embarrassed over the hostile
press coverage and supported state legislation to abolish discrimination in pub-
lic accommodations in Maryland.

As problematic as the treatment of foreign diplomats was, it hardly com-
pared to the public relations crises created by white Southerners’ violent efforts
to keep blacks in their place and halt the advancing civil rights movement. The
lynching of Emmett Till, the hasty convictions of black men by all-white south-
ern juries and their subsequent executions, white mob violence in Little Rock,
Arkansas, to block school integration, white attacks on Freedom Riders, the vi-
olence in Oxford, Mississippi over James Meredith’s attempt to register at the
University of Mississippi, and police attacks against peaceful black Birmingham
protesters—all became legitimate grist for the Soviet Union’s propaganda
mill, which capitalized on these events as “America’s ‘Achilles heel’” (37). The
overseas press provided extensive coverage of American racial violence, much
to the State Department’s dismay. By the early 1960s, “most Americans” had
come to agree with Secretary of State Dean Rusk that American race relations
and racial discrimination had become a “foreign policy matter” that gave the
communists a “valuable propaganda weapon” and the United States “a bad
name” (187).

The United States aggressively responded to the bad press it received at the
hands of the Soviets and the non-white nations. Dudziak’s chief contribution lies
in her treatment of how US government officials handled civil rights issues be-
fore a critical global audience. Her attention is focused on the “particular story
about race and American democracy” (13) told by the federal government. The
diplomatic corps and the US Information Agency (USIA) in particular were on
constant alert to respond to all negative coverage of American race relations
abroad, especially those articles and photographs that were “damaging to US
prestige” (142). In the early 1950s, the USIA released its pamphlet, the Negro
in American Life, which featured slavery, Jim Crow, and racial prejudice and violence as part of a broader "story of redemption" (49) in which current black advancement was contrasted to America’s earlier sins. The State Department also sponsored overseas speaking tours by a variety of African Americans who emphasized the themes of progress and the tremendous distance blacks had come since slavery. Following the Supreme Court Brown vs. Board of Education ruling in 1954, the government, via the Voice of America, declared a victory for the democratic process; to counter foreign condemnations of the Little Rock crisis, the USIA peddled its Louisville Story, emphasizing a more peaceful example of school integration. Later, the USIA’s “documentary” films The March (dealing with the 1963 March on Washington) and Nine from Little Rock attempted to “manage the stories of these critical events” by portraying the former as an “illustration of American democracy” and the later as an “episode in the inexorable democratic progress toward equality” (219).

While Dudziak carefully explores USIA and other federal government efforts to massage or manipulate the narratives of American racism and civil rights, she devotes less attention to assessing their actual impact abroad. The responses of individual diplomats and officials to what they perceived to be the impact of this crisis or the effectiveness of that response are recounted, but these are just impressions. Perhaps the complexities of Cold War politics render it impossible to disentangle the role played by campaigns aimed at controlling discourse from other economic, political, and geopolitical efforts. But a fuller evaluation of the government’s efforts requires knowing more about the groups and non-western nations the US government sought to convince through its presentations. Dudziak is on firmer ground in her detailed explorations of the considerable anxiety civil rights crises created for policy makers concerned with foreign policy, anxiety that prompted them to intervene more forcefully on the side of gradual reform.

Like some other scholars of late, Dudziak senses a loss in the narrowing of the range of legitimate debate over civil rights and American society during the Cold War. In a series of compelling if sometimes familiar examples, she reconstructs the steps taken by the government to silence the most radical black critics of US racism and foreign policy—including W. E. B. Du Bois, William Patterson, Paul Robeson, and Josephine Baker. Their silencing, Dudziak argues, “can be seen as part of the broader effort to safeguard the image of America, and maintain control over the narrative of race and democracy” (77). The “long arm of US government red-baiting silenced critics of US racism overseas” (12).

The impact of these harsh restrictions on foreign nations’ perceptions of American race relations is unclear. It is unlikely that the absence of leftist voices had much if any impact, given the extensive coverage of American racism by the Soviet Union and the presence of foreign journalists in the United States. For Dudziak, not only did an earlier black critique of colonialism fall victim to the Cold War politics of anticommunism, but so too did the black left’s advocacy of “broad-based social change,” its “linking of race and class,” (13) and its “broader critique of the American economic and political system” (252). The validity
of its vision in the late 1940s and 1950s is largely unquestioned, its demise pre-
sumed to be a function of repression, not of its own political inadequacy; in this
picture, the small left, of whatever color, bears little responsibility for its col-
lapse. Assessing anticommunism’s role in narrowing acceptable debate and con-
straining civil rights reform, one could argue, requires a close examination of the
debates being narrowed and the proposals for reform being constrained. These
are minor concerns, however, in a book whose main purpose is to explore how
the US government sought to manage its image abroad in an era when civil rights
crises and racial violence threatened to undermine its position in its ideological
and military competition with the Soviet Union. On that score, Cold War Civil
Rights succeeds.

Eric Arnesen
University of Illinois at Chicago