

Book Reviews

Chinua Achebe. *A Man of the People*. Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1967. Pp. 150. Paper \$11.95.

A gifted and recognized writer, Chinua Achebe's career began in Nigeria as the director of external broadcasting. Currently a Literature Professor at Bard College, Achebe's acclaimed novel *A Man of the People* takes place in an unnamed African state that just gained its independence and is based on a corrupt political system. The main protagonist is Odili Samalu, a schoolteacher who finds himself caught up in a fraudulent election when he decides to run for political office.

It is through Samalu's transformation from a schoolteacher to a politician, that Achebe explains how the state oppresses its citizens, favors the elite, and creates a hierarchical chain of corruption. The state's oppression is managed through the control of public opinion and freedom of speech, obtained through the manipulation of the media and political power. Threats to the state, such as Samalu's participation in a liberal party, are considered direct challenges to this system that ignores its citizen's yearning for equality. As a result of challenging the system, Samalu's community loses its water system, receives bribes to encourage his early exit from the race that eventually leads to the loss of his job. The state's victory over the people's wills is a representation of corruption, exploitation and pessimism, all contributing to the exploitation of its citizens' rights for the elite's personal gain.

Although a fictional story, Achebe's description of events before they became a tragic reality in many parts of Africa, allows historians to comprehend how much politics in African states have changed in the past forty years. Instructors and students interested in learning about the challenges in newly independent African states will find this novel indispensable because it will broaden their understanding of the effects European decolonization had on the lives of the people, their politics and the roles played by each individual.

Juan Meza

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Daniel E. Bender. *Sweated Work, Weak Bodies: Anti-Sweatshop Campaigns and Languages of Labor*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2004. Pp. 292. Paper \$23.95.

Daniel Bender's erudite synthesis of sweatshop labor from 1880 to 1930 offers a thorough history of the contested meaning of sweated work. Focusing on debates concerning the denigrated bodies of Jewish garment workers, homework versus shop work, and sexual difference in the workplace, this book allows insight into the race, gender, and class related constructions that coincided with the development of the term "sweatshop."

Bender asserts that late-nineteenth century working conditions caused middle and upper class observers to accuse Eastern European Jewish immigrants of racial and bodily decay. Their perceived physical inferiority and immorality became defining characteristics of the sweatshop, a word engendered with fears of racial and civil decline in the U.S. Jewish immigrants utilized much of the same metaphors and imagery to describe their working conditions, not to subsume their racial inferiority, but in order to expose a system that exploited immigrant labor. As labor unions joined these debates, they too described the sweatshop as an immoral and unhealthy alternative to the efficient modern factory. Into the early twentieth century, Jewish garment workers, reformers, and unionists soon commended the Jewish community for becoming a "people who had emerged from the sweatshop" (97). Despite advancing Jews in an American social order, these groups codified a definition for the sweatshop; it came to represent the dangers of modern capitalism and the malignance of immigrant labor.

Moreover, Bender elucidates the ways in which female Jewish workers transcended class distinctions, cementing the commonality of language constructed by male garment workers, reformers, and unions. In producing a common definition of the sweatshop, these reformers perpetuated concerns about the immorality of women's work and the ideals of the male breadwinner: women wanted to be viewed as legitimate workers, and both male and female workers emphasized familial paternalism in order to combat the sweatshop. Similarly, reformers and medical analysts produced evidence stating that men and women each experienced work in different ways and used these findings to criticize

gender-integrated sweatshops. Both men and women turned to radical organizations like the Communist Party in order to challenge the sweatshop on the terms of race, class, and gender. However, women sought out these leftist organizations more often than men due to their exclusion from more moderate, male dominated labor unions.

In analyzing the common language used by laboring Jewish immigrants and outside observers, Bender successfully highlights the multifarious complexities of class relations in the United States. Women workers who felt stripped of political and workplace power often used gender — not class — ideologies to deride shop floors and union participation as “sea[s] of masculinity” (169) in which female participation was impotent, if not banned. The book also reveals how the term “sweatshop” was a cross-class construction. Middle-class reformers did not dominate the debates of workers’ conditions; laborers themselves took an active role in the negotiating process. They came to share a commonality in the terms and ideas used to describe sweatshops with factory inspectors.

By stating that working-class bodily disorder created internal gender divisions amongst workers and provoked cultural linkages with middle-class observers, instead unifying a movement of protest, Bender reveals how notions such as working-class identity and movements of solidarity can be far more complicated than many historians of the working class have assumed. Unfortunately, this work does have some regional and ethnic limitations. Readers may wonder how well Jewish laborers in New York’s garment industry represented national trends in working and middle class relations. Bender does not indicate if these specific experiences transcended urban or ethnic lines as easily as the boundaries of class.

Ultimately, *Sweated Work, Weak Bodies* reconstructs narratives concerning laboring bodies and the commonalities in class discourses in ways that are not only useful for labor historians, but for those who are interested in discussions of class in general.

Ryan Johnson

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Lizabeth Cohen. *Making a New Deal Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. Pp. 526. Paper \$23.99

Inspired, or more accurately, alarmed by the current backward drift towards the brutal economics of the Gilded Age, historian Lizabeth Cohen felt the time was right for a gentle reminder of the social and political conditions which converged in the years between the two world wars, igniting the labor movement and initiating the New Deal era. Reflecting upon the current losses of union membership, growing income disparity and hostility towards immigrants, this new edition of her 1990 book cautions us of what was gained and what can slip away.

Cohen centers her work on Chicago in the early twentieth century. As the second largest industrial center in the United States with a multiethnic workforce, the city's history is remarkably well-documented. Cohen states in the preface to this new edition that the specifics of Chicago's labor movement easily broaden into an understanding of the issues that faced labor nationally.

In response to such New Left historians as Stuart Ewen, who saw mass consumption as a tool of capitalism distracting workers from their own class concerns, Cohen demonstrates how working people exercised agency over consumerism, adapting the bounty of capitalism to fit the unique needs and tastes of the various ethnic communities that made up working class Chicago between the first and second world wars (1919-1939). Far from destroying class consciousness, ethnic communities adapted mass produced goods and culture to their own needs, while establishing commonalities within Chicago's working class. Everyone may have bought Victrolas, but the residents of Little Sicily listened to Caruso, while their Polish neighbors heard Wladyslaw Ochrymowicz. White Southerners had hillbilly music, and blacks the blues and jazz. Mass consumerism helped ethnic communities retain their identities while becoming a part of the larger American culture. This, according to Cohen, was a factor which helped diverse groups see themselves as part of a broader American context, bringing the working class one step closer towards a national labor identity.

A significant factor contributing to the policies forming the labor reforms of the New Deal was the failure of welfare capitalism. Originally conceived in the 1920s as an end-

run designed to undermine union organizing, businesses granted workers benefits and a greater voice in plant management. But as the economy weakened, the benefits workers had come to expect evaporated and the fragile relationship between management and workers began to unravel. Then, at the height of the Depression, FDR managed to redefine the Democratic Party as the party of ordinary Americans, replacing welfare capitalism with the welfare state. With the federal government shifting its support away from business, the growing labor movement gained force, making possible the formation of a national labor organization encompassing a broad range of working people--the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO).

Sidestepping political ideology, Cohen portrays working people as creative consumers and politically competent. Unlike their anti-capitalist European counter parts, Chicago workers saw labor unions as a means to a more just form of capitalism. Far from serving as the soul-killing tool of capitalism, mass culture provided an empowering bond that allowed workers to see themselves as members of a national labor community.

Making a New Deal offers a thoughtful response to Marxist despair, arguing that even within the context of capitalism a strong union presence did influence labor conditions. Yet, as Cohen points out, after World War II the government shifted its support back to business, undermining many of the gains won by the unions. We are warned that the success of the New Deal labor movement greatly depended on the support of the federal government. That ought to leave any activist or student of labor history chastened. For historians, Cohen's work offers a unique analysis of the social and economic components that coalesced into a viable national labor movement. In this current era of union decline, labor activists would be well served to understand the circumstances that built and later weakened the movement that brought laborers into America's middle class.

Rachel Kreisel

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Matthew Connelly. *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria's Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. Pp. 400. Paper \$35.00.

From 1830-1962, Algeria remained a colony of France. It was not until the Algerian War of Independence, (1954-1962) that the decolonization of the North African country began. This conflict is critical to understanding the history of decolonization because it opened the floodgates of independence for all of French Africa. The study of past Franco-Algerian relations is a burgeoning field as the French are only now coming to terms with the humiliation of losing their colonies. Matthew Connelly is among the few scholars in the United States who has extensively researched this war. He argues that the history of the Algerian War of Independence transcended the era of decolonization. Through extensive use of a numerous archives in Britain, Algeria and Tunisia, the author ambitiously shows that the Algerian War was very much a conflict of world opinion rather than just a battle for independence. FLN (The National Liberation Front) fighters made extensive use of press conferences and human rights reports. Through the use of the media, Connelly argues that nation-state sovereignty was transformed into a global issue. In addition, the Algerian war tactic of releasing human rights reports about French violence towards Algerian civilians revealed that besides fighting for independence, this was also a struggle over international opinion.

Divided into four parts, Connelly's work explains Algerian history from the outside in. Part one focuses on the failure of French and American modernization in Algeria and North Africa as well as North African ambivalence to French rule. Part two explains how Algerian rebels internally fought for independence. The most critical part is the third section where Connelly shows France, the United States, Algeria and Tunisia coming together in hopes of diplomatically ending the war. The Battle of Algiers moved from Algeria to New York City when FLN leaders made their way to the United Nations to wage a public opinion war against France. Within the UN building, the United States, Tunisia, Britain, Algeria and France squabbled over U.S. military aid and public opinion. The last part focuses on how the decolonization of Algeria impacted Cold War policy across the globe.

Connelly constantly shifts his study across continents and attempts to make connections between Algeria and the rest of the world because historical events do not occur in isolation. To better illustrate Algeria's relationship to other nations, the book includes a map of Algeria and its neighbors illustrating how the war not only spread across the country, but how the conflict extended to neighboring Tunisia and Morocco. In addition, Algeria's geographic location was of strategic importance for Western Europe and the United States during the Cold War. Connelly's study is foundational for understanding the history of European decolonization as well as the global dimensions of the Algerian War of Independence. Students and scholars researching and teaching World History will find his book invaluable.

Lucy Tambara

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Gilbert G. Gonzalez. *Culture of Empire: American Writers, Mexico, & Mexican immigrants, 1880-1930*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004. Pp. 245. Paper \$22.95.

Culture of Empire is an insightful analysis of the United States as an imperial power in Mexico. Gonzalez, a Chicano/Latino Studies professor at the University of California, Irvine, focuses on three specific areas: the economic conquest of Mexico by the United States, American literature illustrating the mysterious land south of the border, and Mexican immigration. Gonzalez notes that the economic colonization of Mexico was the first U.S. attempt at imperialism, which was executed in the late nineteenth century virtually without public knowledge or protest from anti-imperialist groups, because it was a peaceful conquest. Mexico was seen as a nation with abundant and profitable mineral resources, as well as other raw materials and American businesses did not hesitate to exploit the land and take advantage of the cheap labor. Their justification for crossing the border was an American variation of the white man's burden to civilize an inferior people through the promotion of democracy and capitalism. Gonzalez further argues that ethnic Mexican communities in the United States today are a result of American imperialism in the nineteenth century, when Mexicans began to migrate to the U.S. sent north by American businessmen as inexpensive workers.

Americans who ventured south in the mid- to late-1800s wrote narratives romanticizing old Spanish Mexico, inspiring increasing numbers of Americans to visit the strange, exotic and romantic land. As a result, thousands of Americans made the journey to Mexico via horse and wagon, and eventually the railroads.

Travelers influenced by pamphlets and novels noted that Mexicans were rich in culture, dance, music and crafts; however, they were intellectually inferior to Americans. In adding insult to injury, Mexicans were also seen as dirty, lazy, undesired, undependable, and backwards. This was characterized as the “Mexican Problem.” American businessmen, who by 1900 controlled Mexico’s mining operations, key agricultural regions, railroads, and oil production, treated lower class Mexicans accordingly bad. Elite Mexican businessmen fared slightly better but were characterized as children with money in their pockets, who could not be allowed to make decisions without white approval. American businessmen often transported their Mexican workers to the U.S. where they continued to receive low wages while establishing communities. Sadly, migrants encountered the same scrutiny in the United States by Americans as they did in Mexico by Americans.

Schools and other educational training facilities in the United States were influenced by American writers who depicted Mexicans as mentally below average but having excellent handy-man skills. Boys and girls were segregated by gender and taught to do menial jobs. While boys were taught carpentry and other artisan trades, girls were trained as future domestic servants in housekeeping and childrearing.

Gonzalez presents an interesting argument for the emergence of Mexican communities in the U.S. today. However, he neglects to mention the monumental impact of Mexican immigration to the U.S. during the Revolution. But readers who are new to Chicano or Latino Studies might find his work informative and stimulating. He certainly succeeds in historicizing the plight of Mexican immigrant communities in the U.S. today.

Jonathan Vera

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Nicoletta F. Gullace. *“The Blood of Our Sons”*: Men, Women, and the Renegotiation of British Citizenship during the Great War. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002. Pp. 198. Paper \$31.95.

The Blood of Our Sons explores the British experience on the home front during WWI. Nicoletta Gullace analyzes cultural and social practices as she intertwines feminism and political history to examine how WWI helped British women to gain political recognition. The “book traces the way the cultural construction of gender actually shaped the law” (10).

Gullace illustrates the importance of the 1918 Representation of the People Act abolished all restrictions for male voters over age twenty-one and allowed women over age thirty who met certain property qualifications to cast a ballot for the first time. Perhaps because women were not fully enfranchised until 1928, the 1918 act has not received much scholarly attention.

Gullace examines women’s personal experiences of the war and how their life changed because of it. She shows how nationalism during a time of war could benefit women in showcasing their abilities at home. Prior to the war, some suffragettes used violence to express their political views. Now the British government’s propaganda machine convinced the British people that violence perpetrated by the Germans justified war against them and the broadening of the franchise at home. Gullace’s examination of British propaganda posters is especially successful in showing that it was women’s war related work that turned them into eligible voters. By proving their worth, women were recognized as an integral part of British society who deserved equal rights.

The Blood of Our Sons is an excellent brief history of the British women’s suffrage movement during World War I. It is suitable for both undergraduate and graduate courses. Social and cultural anthropologists will find it useful to explain how war can change a society’s view on a group of people.

Linda Zavala

David Pietrusza. *1920 The Year of the Six Presidents*. New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2007. Pp. 544. Cloth \$28.95.

David Pietrusza presents a detailed overview of the 1920 election, focusing on the six past, current, and future men who would occupy the office of the Presidency. For students of political campaigns and back room deals, this examination of Harding, Coolidge, Wilson, Hoover, and the two Roosevelt's (Theodore and Franklin Delano) is a narrative of intrigue and interaction among these fascinating political players who were involved in this election.

After an introductory portrayal of the numerous political players in the 1920 election cycle, Pietrusza produces a work with twenty-six chronological chapters, beginning in 1919 with the death of the initial presumptive Republican frontrunner, Theodore Roosevelt. His topics include the battles for the nomination of each party, the multi-balloted conventions, third party candidates, the newly enfranchised women votes, the role of African-Americans, and culminating with the unanticipated lopsided win by the Harding – Coolidge ticket. Pietrusza delves into the twists and turns of the 1920 political landscape, highlighting Wilson's political and physical incapacitation due to the failure of senatorial approval for American participation in the League of Nations and his massive debilitating stroke. He then reviews how the country was poised and moved towards an isolationist, prohibitionist, free market, and anti-socialist environment championed by the eventual winner Warren G. Harding.

Pietrusza explains little known details, such as the potential ticket (advanced by more than a few) of a Herbert Hoover – Franklin Roosevelt run for the White House and the personal attributes of each candidate. This analysis of both the Chicago Republican convention and the Democratic San Francisco assembly is punctuated with pointed comments from Baltimore publicist H. L. Mencken. Tidbits, such as endless ballots in the July heat of Chicago endured by Republicans searching for a concusses nominee, while a Harding compensated Columbus, Ohio glee club endlessly serenades the wiry delegates throughout never-ending night sessions, provide spice to the work. A chapter titled “Warren Harding is the best of the second-raters,” lifted from a newspaper editorial, summarizes the tone of this book.

With the Republicans needing ten ballots, and the Democrats suffering through forty-four rounds of voting, the convention events provide ample plot material for this book. With a chapter dedicated to the African American participation in this election, most voting Republican, Pietrusza reviews topics such as lynching and how the words of Coolidge were reassuring to the minority group. Sixty-seven pages are dedicated to end notes, where the author uses mostly newspaper articles from the period, interspersed with source material gleaned from a variety of books that have dealt with the subject.

Pietrusza, the winner of the Casey award and a member of the Board of Directors of the Calvin Coolidge Memorial foundation, has authored more than thirty books, chronicling both the histories of baseball and presidential campaigns. His previous work on the election of 1960, evaluates the three men who would eventually occupy the presidency, and this book follows in that vein. The reader may be challenged to find an argument or a position, other than a stinging critique of FDR. For those interested in presidential campaigns, *1920 the Year of Six Presidents*, provides a wealth of data assembled in a long but readable work.

Howard Gaass