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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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