

politics during this era, as well as those interested in the history of rural economic and social issues, will find rewarding reading in this story of the pathway northern farm residents forged when facing the challenges of urban, industrial America.

Beyond Labor's Veil: The Culture of the Knights of Labor, by Robert E. Weir. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996. xi, 343 pp. Illustrations, bibliography, index. \$55.00 cloth, \$22.50 paper.

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Despite its status as the nation's leading nineteenth-century labor organization, the Knights of Labor attracts less scholarly attention than other working-class groups such as the American Federation of Labor, the Industrial Workers of the World, or the Congress of Industrial Organizations. Although the 1970s and 1980s brought a spate of local studies, no comprehensive survey of the Knights has appeared in almost seventy years. Yet the AFL-CIO's current commitment to inclusive organizing draws its inspiration from the Knights' creation of a unionism that crossed gender, race, ethnicity, ideological, and skill boundaries.

Previous studies of the Knights of Labor addressed its organizational structure, economic and political activities, and reform ideologies. Besides forging the nation's first mass labor movement, the Noble and Holy Order of the Knights of Labor also created a community of workers with associational ties based on egalitarianism and mutuality. Robert E. Weir's new book, *Beyond Labor's Veil: The Culture of the Knights of Labor*, provides us with a painstaking overview of this "cultural production" (xiii, xvii). Concentrating on the period of the 1880s when the order reached the pinnacle of its power, Weir constructs a fascinating cultural profile of the Knights. He cites a selected group of primary and secondary sources that includes two Knights newspapers published in Iowa, *The Industrial Leader* (Dubuque) and *The Industrial West* (Atlantic).

After a brief organizational history, Weir devotes separate chapters to the order's cultural expressions, each of which provided an interconnected element of the Knighthood mosaic: ritual, identity, and universal comradeship; religion, morality, and the dignity of work; music, socialization, and social protest songs; poetry, inspiration, and communication of principles; fiction, storytelling, and calls for reform; material culture, badges, and other graphic images; and leisure, picnics, and sporting events. Weir views the Knights' decision

to abandon secrecy in 1882 as the start of a cultural transformation. Before 1882, ritual, religion, and music functioned as personal and internal cultural exercises. After the order went public, poetry, fiction, material culture, and leisure reflected its new orientation toward more collective and community-based cultural practices. "Whereas the pre-1882 Knights sought individuals deemed worthy of Knighthood," Weir writes, "the post-1882 Order assumed all toilers were worthy and needed only a modicum of education to affirm their self-worth" (148).

Weir explains that these cultural facets of Knighthood functioned in complex and even contradictory ways. He also notes that the Knights' egalitarian rhetoric occasionally fell victim to outbursts of anti-Semitism, sexism, and racism. The order, moreover, experienced some significant internal conflict. Terence V. Powderly, head of the Knights of Labor for fifteen years, attracted his share of criticism from radicals (and from subsequent historians). Despite Powderly's leadership weaknesses, Weir finds that he reflected the views of most rank-and-file workers who shared his commitment to evolutionary reform rather than revolutionary upheaval.

Weir concludes that the decline of the Knights of Labor came at a time of emergent corporate economic control and commercialized popular control. These twin forces crushed the Knights and their vision of a society based on the principles of organized producerism and assertive reformism. Unfortunately, the author generally ignores the distinctions between the Knights' culture and the mass culture. While Weir notes the importance of the Knights' legacy as "a rich treasury of ideas, tactics, and cultural artifacts" (xix), he provides few examples of how other labor groups used this bequest.

Beyond Labor's Veil gives us a detailed examination of the cultural uniqueness of the Knights of Labor. Starting with a diverse membership base of wage earners, the Knights left their cultural imprint on communities across America. Weir's book, moreover, is the first study that comprehensively identifies and describes the cultural practices of the order. The author fails, however, to explain how these cultural symbols and images, nurtured by workplace realities, affected the lives of workers beyond the assembly halls and parade routes. Was there a link, for example, between cultural behavior and political activism? Although somewhat weakened by a narrow interior analysis, Weir's insightful and sympathetic analysis of the order's cultural patterns adds another dimension to our understanding of the late nineteenth century's largest and most progressive labor organization.

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