use of the public arena has focused on the late eighteenth through the early twentieth centuries. A majority of the groups examined have not possessed the same longevity, either. On the other hand, Spencer fails to tie the spectacle's evolution over time to larger changes in society that affected the nature and success of the celebration's message. He does not completely ignore these linkages, but he often asserts rather than demonstrates them.

Packinghouse Daughter: A Memoir, by Cheri Register. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2000. 288 pp. $24.95 cloth.

Reviewer Deborah Fink is an independent anthropologist. Her latest book is *Cutting into the Meatpacking Line: Workers and Change in the Rural Midwest* (1998).

For Cheri Register, Ph.D. identifies her as both packinghouse daughter and academic, and *Packinghouse Daughter* probes the coupling of the packinghouse culture in which she was raised and the academic world she chose. Although providing only tantalizing peeks at the inside of the Wilson packinghouse that sustained and shaped the world of Register's family and community, the book is about how this stark reality etched itself into her mind and soul. By delving into the particularity of her roots in post–World War II Albert Lea, Minnesota, Register opens a broad and penetrating consideration of class and the intersections of diverse streams of American life. Giving us her own clear voice throughout, she is able to allow a number of other participants to speak for themselves and to thereby provide multiple takes on what she presents.

The centerpiece of the work is a 1959 strike that pitted the United Packinghouse Workers of America (UPWA) against Wilson, the most intransigent of the old-line packing companies. By recovering the logic of both union and management positions, Register explains why Wilson's appeal to property rights and personal freedom resonated in the Midwest outside of Albert Lea and why the complex and contextual character of the union arguments could get lost in detail. In fact, through the years participants have switched and adjusted various details of the events to make their stories clearer and more to the point. *Packinghouse Daughter* uncovers inconsistencies between oral tradition and "facts" and raises questions about material that had dropped out of the picture. Stripping the veneer off the standard labor history strike story, Register both complicates and strengthens her lifelong labor loyalties.

In many ways, Register had a privileged childhood. Born at the end of World War II, she experienced the window of union strength

that supported wages and provided a modicum of security to blue-collar workers. Although Wilson did not copy the benevolent patterns that Hormel established in the neighboring town of Austin, the meatpackers' master contract held the company to a basic level of decency. The Register family was occasionally forced to sacrifice immediate comforts, but also built a home and maintained a respected community presence. Gordon Register, the author's father, was elected to city and county offices when he retired from the plant; and Cheri Register went on to academic success at the University of Chicago and beyond. This was almost as good as packinghouse life got.

And yet it was not working-class utopia by any measure. The work was dangerous, and it left a great deal of human carnage in its wake. Moreover, the family wage was not. In addition to his plant job, Gordon Register drove a taxi at night; and at various times Ardis Register, his wife and Cheri Register's mother, worked outside their home as a salesclerk, a cosmetics distributor, and a seamstress. Even the limited security of that era was steadily eroding as automation replaced workers, the UPWA lost ground, and the old packing companies finally folded and died, taking the master contract with them to the grave.

Packinghouse Daughter, a deeply thoughtful work, appropriately opens more questions than it answers. What is the meaning of class solidarity when workers like Cheri Register's parents desperately wanted their children not to be working class? What would a working-class culture that parents would wish to pass along to their children look like? How different would the book have been if the author had been the daughter of a packinghouse woman? Or the daughter of an African American or Mexican worker (which would have moved the events somewhere beyond Albert Lea)? How would the story be different if it had taken place forty miles south in Mason City, Iowa, where Republican politics dominated, rather than in the Democratic-Farm-Labor politics of Minnesota? How do we understand the pervasive tension between farmers and packinghouse workers? Will we ever read books written by college-educated offspring of workers in the new-breed packing companies that took over the industry in the 1970s and 1980s?

In Cheri Register, the packinghouse culture of Albert Lea, Minnesota, has given us a superb writer who understands where she came from and the ironies of her life as an intellectual. *Packinghouse Daughter* is for packinghouse workers, undergraduates, professional historians, and other lovers of good books. May it inspire others to probe beneath the surface of personal and social history for similarly nuanced and brave understandings of the Midwest.