

Mann's final chapters attempt to link theory and practice in not entirely convincing fashion. He concedes that more conventional economic and historical interpretations could explain the effects of working-class behavior on wages in his three examples. In his quest for a deeper reading of the evidence and use of theory to enliven historical scholarship from a radical or Marxian perspective, there is much to admire. At the same time, readers have to cope with jargon and stale theoretical debates. For those who believe there is still life in the limbs of the body of theory Mann invokes, his study will be provocative and stimulating. For the rest there are still three good case studies in labor history to appreciate.

*Union-Free America: Workers and Antiunion Culture*, by Lawrence Richards. The Working Class in American History Series. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008. x, 245 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliographic references, index. \$40.00 cloth.

Reviewer Martin Halpern is professor of history at Henderson State University. He is the author of *Unions, Radicals, and Democratic Presidents: Seeking Social Change in the Twentieth Century* (2003).

Lawrence Richards argues that labor historians, fascinated by struggles for unionization, have neglected the large number of workers who have been hostile to unions. Richards's focus is the 1970s and 1980s, a period when the unionized percentage of the labor force was declining rapidly. His goal is to explain why workers told pollsters in that period that they would vote against a union at their workplace in a secret ballot election. He acknowledges the roles of employer hostility and an unfavorable labor law environment in contributing to labor's difficulties but argues that workers' anti-unionism, derived from an anti-union culture, was an important factor, too.

Richards's introduction and the book's cover illustration highlight Nissan workers' rejection of the United Auto Workers union in Smyrna, Tennessee, in 1989. The workers cheered their anti-union vote as a victory for "Americanism," as they waved American flags and held aloft a "Union Free and Proud" sign. Although Richards asks, "Why were these workers so opposed to organized labor?" (2), the book includes no analysis of the Nissan episode but addresses the question only in a general way and through other case studies.

Documenting evidence of anti-unionism in American culture from the late nineteenth century onward, Richards spends nearly half of the book treading familiar ground. As other scholars have, Richards notes that unions gained support as representatives of low-paid workers

and advocates for the underdog in the 1930s but lost legitimacy due to union flaws, a postwar anti-union offensive by business, the rise in union workers' incomes during the economic boom, and the emergence of new advocates for the underprivileged. The chief problems with this section of the book are the assumption that articles in mainstream publications such as *Reader's Digest* accurately convey what workers were thinking and insufficient attention to contrary evidence.

Richards examines two local union representation campaigns in which workers voted against unions. The most interesting part of the book is the analysis of workers' rejection in 1980 of the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers' Union (ACTWU) by a vote of 318 to 105 at a Charlottesville, Virginia, textile mill. He argues that the company defeated the union "because its message to employees was geared to reinforcing an image of organized labor that most of them already held" (123). The anti-union arguments included the idea that the union was an outside influence that would undermine the cooperative environment at the company, interfere with workers' personal relationships with their supervisors, force workers to strike, and waste workers' dues money without increasing their wages because of the nature of the industry and the weakness of the union. Richards acknowledges that the company punished union activists and issued threats, but he sees the workers' own anti-union proclivities as more important in explaining their votes. Although the portrait he gives of workers' thinking is persuasive, Richards gives insufficient weight to a labor law environment that permitted company interference in workers' representation decisions and the resulting impossibility of disentangling an independent worker viewpoint from a contaminated process.

To demonstrate that anti-union culture was not limited to the South, Richards analyzes the unsuccessful campaign of District 65 to represent New York University's clerical workers. In June 1971, District 65 won 385 votes, 115 workers voted for a more conservative union, and 926 workers voted for no union. The reader learns that District 65 did significantly better in a 1970 vote before the administration shifted from a neutral to an anti-union stance and gave a big wage increase. Richards contends, however, that the campaigns on all sides were shaped by worker prejudices against unionism, and the arguments were thus quite similar to those that would later be made in Charlottesville. The handling of the evidence in the NYU story is less adroit. For example, Richards quotes at length from an anonymous anti-union letter by an individual who claimed to be a clerical worker without providing evidence that the letter had any influence or was actually written by a clerical worker.

Richards's third case study is the competition between the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) for the right to represent the nation's schoolteachers. Richardson argues persuasively that both organizations to a degree drew on anti-union ideas to appeal to teachers. However, Richards's acknowledgment that the NEA by the mid-1980s "would come to openly embrace the 'union' label" (155) and was proud to assert that it conducted more strikes than the AFT undermines his thesis that the period was one dominated by anti-union culture.

Jarring to this reader were Richards's contention that "the very idea of unionism . . . embodied a masculine ideology" (83), the use of the term "workingman" (179) to refer to all workers, and the assertion that the NEA's condemnation of AFT racism constituted using "the race issue" and "the racist image of organized labor" rather than substantive criticism (171-72).

*Virtual America: Sleepwalking through Paradise*, by John Opie. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008. xviii, 260 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$45.00 cloth.

Reviewer Gregory Summers is associate professor of history at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. He is the author of *Consuming Nature: Environmentalism in the Fox River Valley, 1850-1950* (2006).

In the growing age of virtual reality, many commentators have offered critiques of the American preference for the imagined world of video games, chat rooms, and "Second Life" avatars over the actual world of real-life people and places. These new digital technologies, embraced largely by the youngest generations of Americans, have been blamed for everything from rising violence and childhood obesity to the breakdown of the family. And yet, because few such critics have bothered to look back at the long tradition of imagined realities in American history, their complaints often ring hollow and somewhat cranky.

In *Virtual America*, John Opie offers a rare exception to this rule: a study of "how we Americans have historically dreamed about creating a better life in daily ordinary existence" that takes virtual reality seriously but also offers a substantive critique of the sense of placelessness it has created (xii). Opie is well qualified to write on the topic. An emeritus professor of history at the New Jersey Institute of Technology, he has been a longtime student of place, region, and environment in American history, authoring books such as *Nature's Nation: An Environmental History of the United States* and *Ogallala: Water for a Dry Land*. Although *Virtual America* is, in Opie's words, "neither a philosophical work nor a