

Making Capitalism Safe: Work Safety and Health Regulation in America, 1880–1940

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Taillon notes that when railroaders pressured the state, the outcome was not always progressive. The Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen, for example, used state power to help them expel African American brakemen from their ranks through an amendment to the 1934 Railway Labor Act that undermined black union representation (206). Moreover, the Big Four did act for themselves first; changing labor's playing field vis-à-vis the state was not the primary reason that they developed an effective legislative presence. Taillon, however, shows that unintended results can still be critically important.

His main argument is skillfully demonstrated and a significant achievement, but his deft handling of gender in the earlier chapters is not sustained in later chapters. The first third of the book offers important insights about gender and work culture, suggesting that women played an important role in transforming railroaders' ideas about themselves as men. His connection of the domestic world with the shop floor is an exciting development in a historiography relatively devoid of gendered analysis. However, Taillon drops this promising analysis midway through the book, transitioning into a standard narrative institutional history. Taillon suggests that the Big Four's turn to politics necessitated the devaluing of the fraternal manly ideals that had helped to launch the railroad brotherhoods, but I'm not convinced that railroaders suddenly stopped debating the meanings of railroad manhood in 1898 and even less convinced that their wives had nothing to say.

That caveat aside, Taillon has written an impressive and useful history that sweeps aside a long-standing misreading of the origins of twentieth-century unionism. He has produced a book that is indispensable not just for historians of railroad labor, but for labor historians as well as historians of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era and the development of the twentieth-century state.

Making Capitalism Safe: Work Safety and Health Regulation in America, 1880–1940, by Donald W. Rogers. The Working Class in American History Series. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009. viii, 275 pp. Illustrations, tables, notes, bibliography, index. \$55.00 cloth.

Reviewer James D. Schmidt is professor of history at Northern Illinois University. He is the author of *Free to Work: Labor Law, Emancipation, and Reconstruction, 1815–1880* (1998) and *Industrial Violence and the Legal Origins of Child Labor* (2010).

A growing literature in U.S. history addresses the accident crisis of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, an era when the violence

of industrialization threatened to overwhelm daily life. These studies have often centered on how that crisis remade the American state and the broader culture of modernity. Many scholars have investigated workers compensation, but less attention has been paid to the actual administration of workplace health and safety regulations. Donald W. Rogers's new book does an excellent job of remedying this deficit.

The book began in the early 1980s as an investigation of the Wisconsin Industrial Commission, and that genesis is apparent in its overall argument. Aimed at the debates then raging about the interplay of "state and society," Rogers comes down on neither side. Instead, he argues that Wisconsin's system was neither "captured" by modern industry, nor was it the product of "pluralistic" negotiations among business, labor, and the state. Rather, it took on a cast of "left-corporate liberalism" (6). Expanding on his initial study, Rogers looks into health and safety administrations in five other states: Ohio, California, New York, Illinois, and Alabama. In doing so, he finds that "federalism perpetuated a checkerboard of safety law programs, not a duplication of Wisconsin's 'left-corporate liberal' approach" (7). As a result, one of the Midwest's shining moments in American political history loses a bit of its luster. All in all, however, Rogers concludes that a moderately effective state-based system of regulation grew in the early twentieth century, spanning the gap between the private law resolutions of the nineteenth century and the federal programs of the later twentieth century.

Early on in the book, Rogers admirably traces the development of classical jurisprudence regarding workplace safety, duly noting the limitations on liability that common law jurists erected. Still, he valuably notes that the "due care" standard that arose across the nineteenth century did lay the conceptual groundwork for later regulations. After this initial survey, much of the narrative focuses on the politics of health and safety in Wisconsin, using coverage of the other five states as a way to judge Wisconsin's representativeness. Contrary to much of the prevailing literature, Rogers finds that Wisconsin's progressive ideals were not imitated whole-cloth in other areas. While certainly true in terms of actual administration, one wonders whether the motivations Rogers notes did obtain in other states. The political and academic progressives who designed Wisconsin's system did so "largely to secure business and labor cooperation with executive leaders' pursuit of industrial and political stability" (33). Such a viewpoint suggests that Rogers's story supports older interpretations of progressivism, which stress its mild, reformist, even conservative thrust.

In the book's most fascinating passages, the author details educational campaigns to sell safety to business and labor, noting that work-

ers themselves sometimes resisted safety administration. Organized labor, however, largely supported the measures, yet it was a change in the thrust of the labor movement that eventually helped to undermine the state-based system of regulation. The political retrenchment of the 1920s stalled the expansion of health and safety programs, but it was the Great Depression and the turn to collective bargaining that marked the turn away from non-federal regulation. As to the effectiveness of all of this for actual health and safety, including occupational diseases such as silicosis, Rogers is uncertain. Government activity occurred, but declining death, injury, and disease rates could have come from changes in industrial practice. As a result, the coming of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration in 1975 serves as a coda to the book and to the larger story as well.

In general, the book is well done, if somewhat narrowly focused. More attention might have been paid to the lives of actual workers, the activities of progressive organizations, or changes in medicine. The attention to other states is beneficial, but the story is still largely centered on Wisconsin, without much direct investigation of the social, political, or economic contexts of the other states. For instance, how might working conditions in a Jim Crow state such as Alabama have differed? Such questions suggest areas for further research, especially in states such as Iowa that were not as heavily industrialized as some others. Anyone undertaking such inquiries will want to start with Rogers's account.

For the Freedom of Her Race: Black Women and Electoral Politics in Illinois, 1877–1932, by Lisa G. Materson. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009. xv, 344 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$42.00 cloth.

Reviewer Virginia R. Boynton is professor of history at Western Illinois University. Her research and publications have focused on women's involvement in Illinois's government-sponsored war effort during World War I.

African American history during the Jim Crow era has received considerable scholarly attention in recent years, as has the history of women during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. In this important new study, historian Lisa Materson joins these two fields, while simultaneously contributing to the historiography on political culture in modern America and on Illinois and the Midwest. Drawing on a wide range of manuscript sources, government documents, newspapers and periodicals, and published primary and secondary sources, the author documents the impact of black women who migrated to Illinois