

## Civic Labors: Scholar Activism and Working Class Studies

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dead cover post-1945 events that are often neglected. The biographical portion is an extraordinary effort to tell the stories of the men and women who served in uniform. For some there is only a name and residence; for others there is considerable information on both civilian and military life, with quotations from letters or interviews. This section will appeal primarily to genealogists.

*Civic Labors: Scholar Activism and Working-Class Studies*, edited by Dennis Deslippe, Eric Fure-Slocum, and John W. McKerley. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2016. The Working Class in American History Series. x, 287 pp. Photograph, notes, index. \$95.00 hardcover, \$28.00 paperback.

Reviewer Gregory R. Zieren, a former interviewer with the Iowa Labor History Oral Project, is professor of history at Austin Peay State University. His research and writing have focused on Gilded Age economic and labor history.

*Civic Labors* is a collection of nearly two dozen articles and introductory essays written mainly by historians of the American working class. In the University of Illinois Press, the editors of the collection found the ideal publisher because the work fits perfectly in its Working Class in American History Series. No other major university press has made as enduring a commitment to labor and working-class history. As of last year, the series encompassed 125 titles with publication dates starting in the 1970s and continuing to today. *Civic Labors* belongs in the group because so many of its contributors wrote monographs for the series; the contributors' work, in turn, inspired others through their writing, teaching, and activism in labor, civil rights, and women's rights.

One clear attraction of *Civic Labors* for Iowa readers is its regional focus. Many of the contributors have careers based in midwestern universities, especially in Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Illinois. This is significant because involvement in civic labor means studying the past as historians while remaining engaged in the present locally in fights for labor representation and other social justice struggles. Peter Rachleff, for instance, taught at Macalester College in Saint Paul, Minnesota, and became well known in labor circles for his support for striking packing-house workers at the Hormel plant in Austin, Minnesota; Ralph Scharnau, from the University of Dubuque, devoted a career to labor and Iowa history and then became an activist defending faculty rights at the university from new management determined to make faculty submissive to their restrictive policies. H. Shelton Stromquist at the University of Iowa, James Barrett at the University of Illinois, and Stephen Meyer at

the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee all crossed the lines between historians studying the past and activists engaged in fights for representation and fairness in the present. The pre-eminent scholar in the collection is the late David Montgomery, Farnam Professor of History at Yale University and doctoral dissertation supervisor for several of the scholars represented in *Civic Labors*. The origins of the book can be traced to a scholarly celebration for Shel Stromquist in 2011 held on the campus of the University of Iowa. Montgomery was a keynote speaker, a scholar held in virtually universal esteem by labor and working-class historians generally. The event was one of the last academic events before his death later that same year. Perhaps no labor historian in the post-World War II era contributed as much to the field as Montgomery.

One topic that unites labor and community activists with academically trained scholars is oral history. Five essays in the collection relate in some fashion to the promise and perils of oral history, from the ambitious attempt to find voices for a 1911 dockers' strike in Liverpool, England, to the State Historical Society of Iowa's Iowa Labor History Oral Project. In the late 1970s that venture started collecting oral histories from veterans of Iowa's labor movement; it continues today to record interviews and manage a collection of about 1,200 subjects.

The wide range of topics might suggest a lack of coherence or a mere collection of unrelated essays. But the editors of *Civic Labors* tried to bring intellectual consistency to the topics at hand. For the most part the essayists are senior, experienced historians who can look back on careers devoted to the causes of labor, the working class, and the quest for social justice for ordinary Americans. They are scholars and teachers and writers, but they have devoted a good portion of their working lives to the quest to help and understand others outside academia by using their time, talent, and skills for that broader agenda. There are no outspoken conservatives among the writers of *Civic Labors*. Critics, therefore, might point to the extracurricular work of these scholars and their left-oriented publications and declare that liberal bias in higher education is alive and well. But criticism like that fails to consider the most important characteristics of scholar activism. The writers in question in this book have devoted substantial effort to organizing, documenting, encouraging, and sustaining movements to help their fellow citizens improve their lives. Many of the essays testify to that level of engagement. Rather than evidence of bias, another interpretation would assert that their work is evidence of commitment, a moral quest, and a belief in a higher standard.

The final essay in the collection is David Montgomery's. He celebrates the achievements of the activists and wonders where the next

generation will apply its energies. Some of the essays in *Civic Labors* point to ongoing struggles for fair treatment and a decent living standard. Iowa is no longer the industrial powerhouse it once was in coal mining, meatpacking, and agricultural implement manufacturing. The essays in this collection point to future battles in new arenas for workers of all sorts and the scholar activists who will continue the struggle, much as those represented in this fine collection have done.

*The Capital Times: A Proudly Radical Newspaper's Century-Long Fight for Justice and for Peace*, by Dave Zweifel and John Nichols. Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2017. xv, 319 pp. Illustrations, appendices, note on sources, index. \$25.00 paperback.

Reviewer Frank Durham is associate professor of journalism in the University of Iowa School of Journalism and Mass Communication. His research interests include journalism history and media framing analysis.

Full of clear, engaging writing and photos depicting a century of progressive activism by the *Capitol Times*, this history of the Madison (Wisconsin) daily afternoon newspaper recalls a time when there were giants on the Left in America. Much more than nostalgia, however, the essays in this volume offer a meaningful history of the newspaper's glory days. This well-written account by the newspaper's longtime former editor Dave Zweifel and current associate editor John Nichols celebrates the iconic media outlet's career as a local newspaper with a national voice and, especially, a *progressive* voice. As the authors make clear, one need not look further than the 2011 occupation of the state capitol by anti-Scott Walker protesters to see that liberal legacy alive and kicking in Madison today.

In the book's introduction, Zweifel and Nichols describe the "*Cap Times*" as a newspaper with a "soul." Then they proceed to show it. By using the vast resources of the Wisconsin State Historical Society and their own files, the authors have researched a detailed narrative that I enjoyed for its "energetic morality." If that term seems odd, the look in the eye of progressives, both early and late, shown in the book's dozens of documentary photographs will make it clear. At that core level, the authors succeed in bringing to life the time when William T. Evjue could define progressivism in his editorials and take it to the ballot box, too.

Offering detailed accounts of aggressive reporting and pointed editorializing, the authors describe the positions to which Evjue staked the *Times*, detailing one signal liberal moment after another, both in their engaging narrative and through photos. Evjue left the conservative *Madison Wisconsin State Journal* in 1917 to oppose war profiteers and the U.S. entry