

Beyond raising these as issues, I would like to offer some speculative comments on how acknowledging the strength of these traditional cultural patterns may explain why Japanese Americans historically have exhibited a high level of "civic consciousness" while adopting an "apolitics rationale." By "civic consciousness," I am referring to the image of being a politically obedient and conservative ethnic group which shuns "politics" except to fulfill civic responsibilities; and by "apolitics rationale," I am referring to a tendency to voice an attitude of non-partisanship as well as an "above politics" stance with regard to Japanese American interests. Is it possible that having generated the image of a responsible and dutiful group, in spite of their history of being victimized by racism, that many Japanese Americans developed a rationale that is more reflective of their cultural roots of hierarchy, honor and, yes, even *enryo*, rather than one more representative of American ideals of equality, individual rights and liberty and justice for all? Was the need to be 110 percent Americans—not simply 100 percent—a manifestation of this rationale? And is a current example of this attitude the position taken by some Japanese Americans towards redress and reparations that they are above interest oriented political activism; and that injustices suffered, although an infringement on their honor, cannot be compensated monetarily, thereby keeping the government in a state of "indebtedness" to Japanese Americans? One might even be tempted to say that this would seem to be a case of the "vassals" insisting on maintaining their liege status by refusing to permit the "lord" to make amends for his abuse of authority. A way of showing one's sincerity, i.e., loyalty, by self-denial or a symbolic self-immolation. In short, whereas these traditional traits may have been extremely effective in enabling Japanese Americans to meet the economic and social challenges of their new home, as political values they may be more appropriate for authoritarian rather than democratic societies.

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OLD LABOR AND NEW IMMIGRANTS IN AMERICAN POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT: UNION, PARTY, AND STATE, 1875–1920. By Gwendolyn Mink. (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1986. 304 pp. Hardcover \$29.95.)

Gwendolyn Mink's study of labor politics and immigration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century United States is a pleasure to review (and to read) because it brings forward an intellectually challenging, structural argument. The structural factors are those of industrialization and technological change, capital accumulation and concentration, expansion of an unskilled labor force through mass immigration, and the two party system as it developed during four decades from the end of Reconstruction to the end of the First World War. Mink's interest centers on the relationship of labor, organized and unorganized, to politics and the

state. Her argument is that American labor's political stance (unlike that of labor in other industrializing nations of the same period) was fixed by the effort of skilled craft unionism to protect its economic position from the continuing influx of unskilled workers.

Led by the craft unions, "Old Labor" campaigned successfully in the 1870s and 1880s for the exclusion of Chinese immigrant workers. Since immigration was a national issue, craft unionism necessarily entered national politics; and since, in the opening struggle over Chinese exclusion, the Democratic party favored exclusion while the Republicans generally opposed it, craft unionism (and especially its leading body, the American Federation of Labor) formed *de facto* alliances with the Democratic party. By 1896 the relationship had jelled into a junior partnership, and this in turn, under Woodrow Wilson's wartime administration, boosted the AFL to semi-official participation in government power. Presumably the payoff for "Old Labor" came with adoption of the literacy test as a restriction on immigration in 1917; and, more fully, with the National Origins Act of 1924. Mink makes clear that while immigration may have initiated the AFL-Democratic partnership, it was by no means the only issue, and perhaps not the most important one, upon which collaboration occurred. Craft unions desperately needed a legislative shield against the unrelenting hostility of federal courts, staffed mostly by Republican judges. Nominally, such protection was granted by the Clayton Act in Wilson's first administration. AFL leaders also feared that the nationalizing upsurge of Progressivism (especially the Theodore Roosevelt variety) might lead to federal wage and hours laws and unemployment insurance similar to programs then being enacted in other industrial nations like England and Germany. General welfare legislation would, of course, have benefitted the entire working class. The AFL, however, opposed such legislation—publicly, on the ground that it would go against the principle of "voluntarism" and erode self-reliance among working people; actually, because of fears that it would weaken the autonomy of the AFL by extending to all workers benefits hitherto available only to skilled workers in tightly organized national unions. Certainly one of the scandals of American labor history is that the AFL resisted federal wage and hours laws and social security until well into the New Deal; and that even after the rise of industrial unionism, and after the Second World War, organized labor eagerly settled for a public health program that rested upon bargaining between individual unions and employers, thus leaving the unorganized segment of the working class to fend for itself in the matter of family health care.

The sequence of Mink's argument, then, is that organized labor's political behavior has consistently replicated the choice made by craft union leaders in the nineteenth century when they entered national politics to campaign for immigration restriction. That decision separated the working class into skilled versus unskilled; organized versus unorganized; and "Old" (meaning immigrants or their children from England, Scotland, Ireland, northern and western Europe), versus "New" (meaning those who came after about 1885 from southern and eastern Europe, and all other parts of the world). The same decision had also mandated a politics of splitting the working class by tying its unionized segment into the established two party system while resisting any movement toward a unified labor politics.

Clearly the author's intent is to contribute to that ancient but still vital debate over, "Why no labor or socialist party in America?"

Mink's contribution is in fact a substantial one. In arguing for causal connections between the politics of organized labor and the impact of mass immigration, she is breaking new ground. She brings forward evidence of the determination with which many AFL leaders pursued immigration restrictions from the Chinese Exclusion Act to the National Origins Act forty years later; and she is impressive in showing the internal consistency of the AFL's political stance including its "nativism," its so-called "voluntarism," and its political conservatism.

Mink also breaks new ground—although somewhat less decisively—in pointing out the importance of race and racism as causal factors in the behavior of organized labor. This is an area not yet satisfactorily mapped either by old or new historians of the working class. Mink's study leaves no doubt that labor union advocates of Chinese exclusion invoked racist arguments to popularize their demands. But when it came to general immigration restriction, the rank and file membership, much of it still less than two generations from immigrant status itself, balked at endorsing a policy that seemed to repudiate its own social origins. This resistance partly accounts for the long delay between Chinese exclusion and the enactment of general restriction. It took approximately twenty-five years for labor leaders like Samuel Gompers to persuade their membership that racist denigration—readily accepted by Euro-American workers of the "Old" immigration with respect to Asians—could legitimately be applied also to the "New" immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe.

Mink's argument helps to illuminate a complex sequence in working class history, but it is not without internal problems. Most troublesome is what seems to me an underestimation of the depths and historical duration of white racism as a cultural and ideological phenomenon in the Euro-American population. She writes, for example, that "skilled workers" attempted to protect their economic interest against the influx of mass immigration, their "job-conscious unionism became suffused with ethnic and race consciousness" (p. 38; see also pp. 79-80). The implication appears to be that white working class racism was animated, or rendered effective, by the struggle of skilled trade unionists against mass immigration. What strikes me as more likely, however, in the United States at least, is that racism preceded working class opposition to immigration and dictated the forms such opposition would take. Otherwise it would be difficult to explain why anti-Chinese hostility made its appearance in the West while there was still a massive labor shortage. Or, why some of the most violent anti-Chinese outbreaks emanated from unskilled workers organized in industrial unions.

A closely related difficulty is Mink's conceptualization of nativism. She uses this term broadly to designate opposition to immigration. Yet opponents of Chinese immigration who, like Denis Kearney, were themselves recent immigrants and champions of continuing European immigration, can hardly be described as nativists; they were racists. A comparable point applies to craft union leaders like Samuel Gompers. Always receptive to immigration from western or northern Europe, they remained virulent against non-whites, whether immigrant or native-born. It would be more accurate to describe their stance as "racist *and* economic exclusionist"

rather than merely as nativist. Mink's handling of this part of her argument tends to equate the experience of Asian immigrants with that of the "New" immigration from Europe. While it is true that Gompers and other restrictionists transferred racist epithets from Chinese immigrants in the 1880s to "New" European immigrants in the 1890s, this phase was relatively short-lived. Within two or three generations, the "New" immigration—like the "Old"—had arrived at a level of functional assimilation which opened the way to industrial employment, political engagement and trade union membership. No such entry was available to Asians, regardless of their duration in America, at least until the Civil Rights Movement after World War II. In this respect, the Asian experience more closely resembled that of American Indians, Afro-Americans and Mexican-Americans than it did that of any Euro-Americans regardless of whether they or their forebears had come with the "Old" immigration or the "New." Even in our own time, the popular success of movies like *Deer Hunter* and *Rambo* remind us how readily the dominant culture can assimilate descendants of the "New" immigration into apple-pie Americanism, while continuing to hold Asians (and their descendants) outside the pale.

Such ambiguities of conceptualization are difficult to avoid, given the constant overlapping of class, race, and ethnicity in America. And certainly they are negotiable, if the intent (as Mink's obviously is) is to clarify rather than to obscure. In this case, they do not detract from the larger importance and effectiveness of her study. Her work broadens our understanding of working class political history and provides an intellectually acute critique of the complex literatures that have arisen in history and political science around the problems of organized labor and the functioning of the American party system. We remain in her debt because she had undertaken, with substantial success, one of the most difficult tasks of historical scholarship—that of explanatory construction.

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DARKNESS. By Bharati Mukherjee. (Markham, Ontario: Penguin Books Canada Ltd., 1985. 199 pp. Softcover \$5.95.)

To read Bharati Mukherjee's *Darkness* is to live dangerously: the language in these twelve stories is first a fist, then a flower. This two-fisted linguistic power compels visceral as well as intellectual responses in the reader. Mukherjee must be aware of the irresistible force and fury in these stories because she states, in a fascinating "Introduction" to this collection, that "For a writer, energy is aggression; urgency colliding with confidence . . ." (p. 1).

Mukherjee's writing here is aggressive; she combines impeccable restraint with linguistic mastery to issue the complex challenge in *Darkness*. The collection is,