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Daniel Nelson. *Farm and Factory: Workers in the Midwest, 1880-1990.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995. ix + 258 pp. $29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-253-32883-0.

Reviewed by William A. Sundstrom (Department of Economics, Santa Clara University)
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Daniel Nelson's latest book delivers both more and less than it promises. On the plus side, the book is actually more general than the title would suggest, providing a useful survey of much of the literature on twentieth-century American labor history. Although many of the book's examples are drawn from Midwestern industries and cities, much of the literature cited is not geographically specific. In this sense, the book is a worthy sequel to the author's *Managers and Workers* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1975), updating, extending, and broadening that book's coverage. The greatest virtue of Nelson's work in the past has been his attention to both the management and labor sides of the employment relationship, as well as the political context of industrial relations. *Farm and Factory* shares these virtues, synthesizing a wide range of secondary sources from labor, social, and economic history. The book contains less original historical research than many of Nelson's previous efforts, although it makes extensive use of his own work on such topics as company unions and rubber workers.

On the minus side, Nelson (Department of History, University of Akron) never makes a compelling case for the distinctiveness of the Midwest's labor history, which would justify the book's regional focus. Admittedly the region's industrial composition was unlike that of other regions, with its unusual mix of agriculture and heavy industry. But Nelson claims that these quintessential Midwestern sectors had relatively little influence on each others' labor history. Thus it might be argued that the evolution of the institutions and politics of labor in the Midwest was largely shaped by industry rather than location. Contrast this implication of Nelson's book with Gavin Wright's *Old South, New South*, (Basic Books, 1986) another book about a regional labor market during the twentieth century. In it, Wright depicts a southern labor market that was truly unique in its institutions and development, in large part because of its isolation.

This is not to deny that Nelson has identified some aspects of the Midwestern labor experience that had a unique regional character. The socialist and farm-labor political coalitions associated with such names as Robert LaFollette, for example, appear to have been a home-grown Midwestern phenomenon; but at the same time, Nelson notes that such coalitions were short-lived and had little lasting influence. Nelson also notes that union density was higher than average in the Midwest, which became the crucible of the twentieth-century industrial union movement. Again, however, it is not clear whether this was the product of some peculiarly Midwestern predisposition toward unionism or merely an accidental consequence of the region's industrial structure. Such a question could be sorted out with careful comparative analysis, contrasting the industrial union movements in the Midwest and, say, the Middle Atlantic regions for similar industries. But Nelson's book provides very little in the way of comparative research.

Farm and Factory is arranged in sections chronologically. The first period covered, 1880-1900, sets the stage. In 1880, about half of Midwestern workers were engaged in farming, and farm employment increased in numbers over the next two decades. At the same time, the period witnessed a dramatic increase in the relative importance of industry. Because the demand for agricultural labor continued to grow, the industrial labor market depended largely on immigrant workers for its supply, rather than rural-urban migrants. The immigrant character of industrial employment was not, of course, unique to the Midwest at this time.

The book's first chapter, on farming, includes the first installment of what was for me one of the book's most fascinating recurring themes: the nature and evolution of women's work. Nelson's book demonstrates how much scholarship over the past two decades has been devoted to the area of women's labor history. In the case of farming, Nelson describes the gender division of labor, how it differed across different farm products, and how by the second half of the century the increased complexity of the farming business (and perhaps the increased educa-

tional attainment of farm women) resulted in many farm wives assuming the role of business manager. Later in the book he examines the feminization of clerical work, and the postwar growth of women's labor-force participation.

Nelson's attention to clerical and service-sector labor is welcome, given the traditional emphasis of labor history on industrial work, but after a promising discussion of office work near the turn of the century in Chapter Three, the remainder of the book devotes only a handful of pages to the service sector and clerical or white-collar employment. No doubt this lacuna reflects shortcomings in the secondary literature that Nelson draws upon, as well as Nelson's view that the character of office work was subject to less dramatic technological and institutional changes over the course of the century. Be that as it may, "farms and factories" are indeed the book's central focus; the rest of the Midwestern labor market is treated as a residual category that soaked up a growing share of the work force as employment in agriculture and industry shrank relatively and, eventually, absolutely.

Nelson's history of labor and labor management in the mass production industries of the Midwest is fairly conventional. He highlights the role of the federal government in creating a political and legal environment that facilitated the rise of industrial unionism: the protective legislation of the NRA and NLRA and the subsequent wartime boost given to unionism by war production demand and government intervention. Nelson's narrative of the sit-down strikes, the escalation of hostility between labor and capital during the thirties, and the rivalry between the AFL and CIO also suggests the importance of historical contingency in creating the system of labor relations that would persist over the decades that followed.

The book's final chapters describe the brief postwar "golden age" of economic prosperity and relatively stable industrial relations between Big Business and Big Labor. Nelson provides a multifaceted picture of the demise of this golden age. Economic change was clearly one challenge: competition from lower-cost regions and foreign producers placed pressure on the region's bread-and-butter manufacturing industries. To this conventional deindustrialization story Nelson adds another critical factor in the demise of union influence in the Midwest: rising racial tensions as the Great Migration brought large numbers of black workers into northern cities. The generally progressive stance on racial issues of the CIO unions alienated a large portion of the rank and file during the tumultuous sixties, with the consequence that "[r]ace, more than any other issue, undermined the unions' carefully nurtured influence outside the workplace" (p. 187).

In his concluding chapter, Nelson traces the roots of the Midwest's woes during the 1970s and 80s to various "institutional constraints" put into place beginning in the 1930s, which served to reduce the regional economy's flexibility and innovativeness. "By the 1970s Midwestern workers faced the worst of both worlds: some producers had become obsolete, while others continued to innovate in traditional ways (mechanizing operations, for example) that limited employment opportunities" (p. 203). This claim is provocative, and echoes some of the criticisms of U.S. institutional rigidities to be found in the work of authors like Sabel and Piore or Lazonick. But Nelson provides only the sketchiest defense of this view. Is it not possible that the Midwest was just a victim of bad luck, its economy more dependent on Rust Belt industries than other regional economies for largely unavoidable historical reasons? To shore up his claim of institutional failure, Nelson would have to show what other regions did differently to avoid the Midwest's difficulties. Again, the absence of a comparative approach precludes his doing this.

In sum, *Farm and Factory* would serve as a solid textbook in twentieth century U.S. labor history, in spite of its regional focus. The coverage of union and non-union developments, the evolution of personnel management, the role of politics and government, and non-traditional sectors and workers (including women and minorities) is, to my knowledge, unavailable anywhere else. This breadth of coverage, of course, comes at the cost of diminished depth. One particularly misses a compelling account of how the Midwest's sad economic fate at the end of the century was the product of the region-specific historical evolution of its labor institutions and politics.

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