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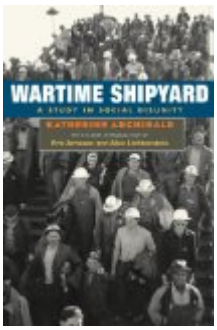
Katherine Archibald. *Wartime Shipyard: A Study in Social Disunity.* Originally published by University of California Press, 1947. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006. lxxxii + 244 pp. $25.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-252-07386-1.



Reviewed by Stephen Gilford

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In the midst of World War II, twenty-six-year old Katherine Archibald, a recent PhD graduate of the University of California's department of social institutions, left her ivory tower to work in the Moore Shipyards in San Francisco. *Wartime Shipyard* is a memoir of that two year period of her life. Enriched by her ethnographic approach and female perspective, she describes a deeply cynical workforce, distrustful of their unions, their bosses, and the political leadership of the country. *Wartime Shipyard* is a disturbing alternative view to the widely held belief that Pearl Harbor welded America's workforce into a monolithic and smoothly functioning industrial machine lubricated by the enthusiastic and often selfless patriotism of the workers on the home front. Archibald describes her years as a shipbuilder as a kind of pilgrimage by an academic liberal, who "for the first time was brought actually into contact with the working masses of America, to whom I had long since given my theoretical sympathies" (p. 5). What she learned surprised her: "Where I had confidently expected unity of purpose and activity, I found only antagonism and turmoil" (p. 6). Instead of finding a unified worker class, she found divisiveness.

A thoughtful essay by Eric Arnesen and Alex Lichtenstein, written sixty years after the original publication of the work, forms the introduction to this edition of *Wartime Shipyard* and provides a valuable context for the specifics of Archibald's personal experience. This introduction emphasizes how government and industry valued a sense of "we're all in this together" among home front workers. Although this is the rosy, or *Rosie*, view that has imprinted itself in the public mind, it was definitely not what Archibald saw in the workforce of which she was a part. Her view is corroborated by Arnesen and Lichtenstein in a quote from California historian Kevin Starr (*Embattled Dreams: California in War and Peace, 1940-1946* [2002]) that sums up the essence of Archibald's book: "'By 1943, the United States was at war with itself as well as with the Axis powers as the mobilization of American society for war was bringing into close contact disparate groups of Americans who feared, distrusted, even hated each other'" (p. lv).

Much of *Wartime Shipyard* is built around Archibald's observations of the social hierarchy within the shipyard. She includes chapters on each of the major minorities found among her fellow shipbuilders: women, Okies, and African Americans. She also provides a chapter on what she calls "the lesser minorities," each of whom occupied a defined position on the shipyard social hierarchy ladder. "The lesser minorities" include Italians, Slavs, Jews, American Indians, Portuguese, Greeks, and other ethnic groups that made up the shipyard workforce; all were suddenly working shoulder to shoulder in an uneasy partnership.

With the notable exception of women, what Archibald found was that all minorities were members of racial, pseudo-racial, or ethnic communities (p. 111). At the top of the social ladder were the shipyard elite, male workers of Anglo-Saxon, Scandinavian, and Teutonic backgrounds. At the other end were the African American workers. Between these extremes, everyone had a position somewhere along this ladder. Even though it was self-evident that the combined membership of the "minority" groups far outnumbered that of the elite group, Archibald noted that "each minority stood alone; never did I find any recognition of the desirability of a coalition" (p. 121). Each group was jealous of its place in the hierarchy and was determined to protect itself from those below. One example of the sort of divisive, prejudicial reasoning she found was this description of "'how you can spot an Okie.'" "'The Okies are a low class of people. They have a different kind of face, more dumb-looking somehow'" (p. 46). The picture of the shipyard society that emerges from this book is a stressful and divisive one with no one exempt from the struggle for status, even those at the top of the ladder. Archibald stated, "The group of the elite, however exalted, thought it was circled with a thousand watchdogs of its sovereignty appears at last as unhappy a constituent as any other in the class structure of shipyard society" (p. 127).

Archibald later described how she tried to make a point to one of the "Okie" women, someone who had been raised with an aversion to blacks, that the disrespect and discrimination she felt from the higher status Californian workers was similar to what African Americans may have felt from the whites in the yards. This set off a howl of protest, "'But I'm no nigger! I'm not black!' And sobbing now in her immense distress, she ran off to tell whoever would listen that I had said she was 'no better than a nigger wench'" (p. 64). This simple attempt to help find common ground led her fellow workers to create signs that they left on her desk and chair calling her a "nigger lover" and, in a particularly disgraceful gesture, to leave a newspaper clipping describing the lynching of an African American in Florida. On it were scrawled the words,"'One of your pals, you ought to be with him.'" (p. 64) Eventually, the virulence passed, but the intensity of racial hatred set off by so innocent a remark left a lasting impression on Archibald, further emphasizing the social fragmentation and deep divisions she witnessed all around her.

Archibald originally had thought that there was an economic basis to the prejudice (the black man competing for jobs), but she never found any real support for that view. Instead, as she made her way through the "tangled undergrowth of race prejudice," she began to understand that "hatred of the Negro was no simple product of chance perversity on the part of the white shipyard worker. It was rather a constituent of his sense of well-being and the very foundation on which his estimate of his own importance was erected.... This presumption of the black man's lesser status, which could give pride to the meek, was not to be abandoned without struggle. Little wonder, then, that anyone who threatened it, whether a rebel from the underlying group or a well meaning rationalist like myself, was fought

off more bitterly than a housebreaker or a pickpocket; for that which rebel or rationalist would steal away was no mere sockful of cash, no mere hard-earned paycheck, but the defenses of the ego without which a man is poor indeed" (p. 65).

Archibald also made it clear that those who stood low on the hierarchy ladder did not look up with awe at those who looked down on them. She quoted another one of the self-described Okies, themselves the butt of much mean spirited shipyard humor, singing what she called "this rollicking ditty" for her.

The miners came in forty-nine, The whores in fifty-one; And when they bunked together They begot the native son (p. 55).

Not surprisingly, one of the most interesting sections of Archibald's memoir is the chapter "Women in the Shipyard." In it, she described a common attitude of male workers: "The men seldom credited the women with the capacity or desire to put in an honest day's work. 'Take a look around at the women and what they're doing,' one disgruntled workman urged. 'From one end of the yard to the other, they're jawing or prettying up their faces or bothering some man and keeping him from his work'" (p. 26). She pointed out that the men found the idea of equal pay distasteful, because they felt women were not as productive and so it was unfair to pay them the same salary as their male counterparts. Archibald was careful to treat the issue of women in the shipyards in an evenhanded manner, pointing out that these feminine industrial pioneers often had no idea of the significance of the ground they were breaking. They were unaware, even uncaring, about the responsibilities that came with their new roles. Too often, the woman coming to work in the yard brought with her the attitudes and practices that had suited her previous environment, and this sort of femininity that had recently been appropriate now helped to fuel the resentment of male coworkers. *Wartime Shipyard*, a social scientist's contemporary view from the inside of the social hierarchy in one of America's shipyards during WW II, is a valuable addition to the library of those who want to better understand the internal stresses within America's home front and within society, in general, during one of the most critical periods in U.S. history. It is an insightful and candid look at racial and gender relations in one of America's most storied historical chapters.

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