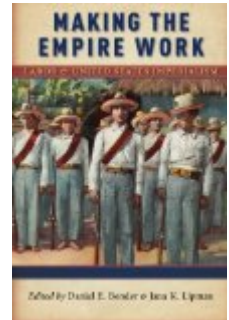


**Daniel E. Bender, Jana K. Lipman, eds..** *Making the Empire Work: Labor and United States Imperialism*. Culture, Labor, History Series. New York: New York University Press, 2015. 384 pp. \$35.00, paper, ISBN 978-1-4798-5622-0.



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Labor and overseas expansion have been topics of long-standing interest to historians of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. Captains of industry figure in both literatures—the adversaries of the labor movement on the one hand, the beneficiaries of empire on the other. Indeed, we need not look further than the ceaseless contemporary working-class jeremiads against the trusts' rapacious expansionism to know that people at the time saw a close relationship between labor and empire. Surprisingly, few scholars since have brought the two topics together. Daniel E. Bender and Jana K. Lipman's edited volume, *Making the Empire Work: Labor and United States Imperialism*, seeks to fill the lacuna by combining recent approaches to the political history of US empire with fresh work on transnational labor history. *Making the Empire Work* persuasively argues that workers must be at the center of how we conceptualize empire.

In their introduction to the volume, Bender and Lipman situate the United States as part of a "global imperial system," and point out that the

labor migrations and patterns of labor control on which the US imperial state was built crossed the boundaries of other empires, as well as those of ostensibly sovereign nations. They "define empire by its geographic boundaries *and* by its labor systems" (p. 4), arguing that, from workers' perspectives, the distinction between formal and informal empire was essentially meaningless. "The US imperial system," they write, "included formal colonies, corporate capitalism, military bases, and interactions across empires." People sought work wherever it was to be found, regardless of political boundaries. Jamaicans might have found work in Florida or Costa Rica. African Americans might work in Mississippi, the Philippines, or even Togo. Filipinos labored in California, on the high seas, and in Hawaii, among other places. And so on. Bender and Lipman assert that "the routes followed by labor migrants represent a kind of imperial geography" (p. 5). This is an expansive definition of empire, and one ably demonstrated by the case studies in the volume.

Of particular interest to historians of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era will be contributions from Julie Greene, Moon-Ho Jung, Christopher Capozzola, Andrew T. Urban, Cindy Hahamovitch, Andrew Zimmerman, and Jason Colby. Taken together, these authors suggest broad continuities between the mid-nineteenth and the mid-twentieth centuries, and illuminate connections and crossings among British, Japanese, Spanish, German, and US empires.

Greene's excellent contribution opens the volume by laying out an agenda for scholars working at the intersection of labor and empire in the United States. First, she reminds us that industrialization and territorial expansion were closely linked processes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Next, she emphasizes the continuities between the Indian Wars of the 1870s and the overseas expansion of 1898 and beyond, calling for new studies of military labor across this period. She highlights the diverse and contradictory class formations of white and African American soldiers. Finally, she observes that US Progressive reformers looked to the overseas empire "for lessons about what strong state intervention could accomplish." In this sense, she argues, "the classic tensions of progressive political culture—between democracy and social control"—derived as much from an imperial context as from a narrowly domestic one (p. 51).

Focusing on a particular labor strike by Japanese and Filipino sugar plantation workers in Hawaii in 1919-20, Jung describes repressive responses from sugar planters and US officials. The backdrop of the repression, Jung argues, was an inter-imperial rivalry between the United States and Japan which had intensified over the previous decades. During the 1910s, US military intelligence reports from the Philippines tracked Filipinos' ties to Japan, constructing a "racial narrative of the Japanese as agitators engaged in a global conspiracy to undermine US sovereignty" (p. 77). Rather than attending to the local contexts for

radicalization, colonial leaders in Hawaii responded to the multiethnic labor movement by insinuating that it was the work of foreign agitators. This narrative justified expanded surveillance and tighter labor control.

Like Jung, Capozzola explores a specific strike that took place in a US territory. During the Philippine Scout Mutiny of 1924, Filipino soldiers protested low wages and disrespect. Military officials treated the incident as insubordination, punishable through the court martial, while soldiers saw their action at least in part as a labor protest. As in the case described by Jung, colonial officials saw more than a local protest over wages and unfair treatment, instead fearing that the event was a sign of "a globally coordinated resistance to colonialism itself" (p. 91). Empire in both cases created a demand for low-wage workers, and imperial thinking shaped official responses to worker demands. Capozzola points out that US rule in the Philippines depended on Filipino labor and that labor politics were central to "the ongoing contest over the terms of colonial rule" (p. 85).

While Capozzola and Jung describe labor in overseas territories, Urban writes about California, showing how imperial ideals of domesticity influenced debates over Chinese immigration exclusion in the late nineteenth century. White settlers hoped that white women could work as domestics while "awaiting the opportunity to marry" (p. 189). If Chinese men did domestic jobs, they reasoned, women would not come West, settlers would not produce families, and civilization would not prosper. But by the turn of the twentieth century, middle-class white women began defending Chinese immigrants. Progressives recast Chinese servants as a resource that could benefit middle-class families by relieving them of unwanted burdens. Ultimately, Urban suggests that consumer self-interest shaped middle-class views in the era of exclusion.

Hahamovitch's essay on guest worker programs ends in the post-World War II period but is

anchored in the nineteenth-century history of indentured servitude. Hahamovitch's essay pairs well with Zimmerman's piece on labor reforms in German East Africa in the early twentieth century. Both essays distill key arguments from the authors' longer works, and together demonstrate the importance of inter-imperial approaches to the long history of free labor in the post-emancipation era. Hahamovitch shows that US guest worker programs built on the fragments of British colonial labor regimes, while Zimmerman argues that German colonial leaders looked to the post-emancipation US South for methods to immobilize ostensibly free labor.

Colby uncovers how US diplomats and United Fruit Company (UFC) officials launched a public relations campaign in the 1910s to cast themselves as a progressive and benevolent force in Central America. In the 1910s, they sought to "appropriate a mantle of Progressivism" in order to "cultivate labor quiescence" and deflect US domestic criticism about monopolistic business practices (p. 292). Their narrative of benevolence bumped against anti-black racism in their host countries in the 1920s when Central American nationalists objected to UFC recruiting West Indian migrant workers. In response to nationalist protest and labor unrest in the 1920s, UFC again highlighted their role in bringing civilization and progress to the tropics. As with other essays, Colby shows that progressivism lasted longer outside of the boundaries of the United States.

For classroom use, this collection would work well in conjunction with Alfred McCoy and Francisco Scarano's edited volume, *Colonial Crucible: Empire in the Making of the Modern American State* (2009) and *Workers across the Americas: The Transnational Turn in Labor History* (2011) edited by Leon Fink. *Making Empire Work* sounds an important call for scholars to contend with heterogeneous networks of power in the histories of global labor migration. The volume distinguishes itself through nuanced analyses of power, and

pushes us to consider workers not as a side show but as the defining feature of US imperial geographies.

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