



Matthew E. Stanley. *Grand Army of Labor: Workers, Veterans, and the Meaning of the Civil War.* The Working Class in American History Series. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2021. 322 pp. \$110.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-252-04374-1.

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While the literature examining the American labor movement during the period between Reconstruction and World War I has expanded considerably in recent years, Matthew E. Stanley's *Grand Army of Labor: Workers, Veterans, and the Meaning of the Civil War* brings a fresh and original approach to the field. Stanley asserts that "representations of the Civil War ... were crucial to the development of class consciousness in the United States" in the decades that followed the war (p. 4). Of course, as is always the case with collective memories, they were contested, and "two competing and sometimes coinciding narratives" emerged within the labor movement during this era, one of which emphasized the revolutionary aspects of the Civil War while the other emphasized the war's legacy of reform (pp. 5-6).

After presenting his thesis in the introduction, Stanley provides a thorough examination of the US labor movement during the half century that followed the Civil War. He examines virtually all the major national labor organizations of the era. The leaders of the short-lived National Labor Union (NLU), which was founded the year after the war ended, "linked their campaign to the Union cause," notes Stanley. NLU president William H.

Sylvis deemed the NLU to be a "great anti-slavery movement" (p. 29). The Knights of Labor, which soon replaced the NLU as the leading labor organization, "unceasingly invoked 'slavery' and 'masterhood' to describe their oppression" (p. 75). The United Mine Workers of America spoke of "slave pens," "white slavery," and "a new bondage" in justifying the many miners' strikes that occurred during the 1890s (p. 161). The more conservative and less inclusive American Federation of Labor (AFL), however, eventually interpreted and appropriated the meaning of the Civil War in a way that encouraged reconciliation among white veterans to the exclusion of African American laborers.

Similarly to me, Stanley views the labor movement of this era as not being confined to industrial laborers and miners but as including farmers and farm laborers as well. Accordingly, he examines farmer organizations, such as the Grange and the various Farmers' Alliances as well as late nineteenth-century agrarian third parties, including the Greenback-Labor Party, the Union Labor Party, and the People's (or Populist) Party. These organizations promoted sectional reconciliation, as shown in 1892 when the Populists nominated James B. Weaver, a former Union general from

Iowa, for president and James G. Field, a former Confederate major from Virginia who had lost a leg during the war, for vice president. The agrarians' promotion of sectional reconciliation, however, came at a cost. "The Populist use of 'reunion,'" Stanley contends, "revealed and perpetuated hallmarks of whiteness that were antithetical to interracial alliance" (p. 147).

Stanley also provides insights into the major labor leaders of this era. Knights of Labor leader Terence V. Powderly's understanding of such terms as "wage slavery" was influenced by his being "the son of an abolitionist mother" and having been "weaned on anti-slavery" (p. 81). AFL president Samuel Gompers came to view the Civil War as a nostalgic event that ultimately strengthened national harmony, which to him served as a model for achieving harmony between labor and capital and among white workingmen. The labor leader whom Stanley devotes the most analysis to, by far, is Eugene V. Debs, who led the American Railway Union's Pullman Strike in 1894 and became a Socialist after that strike was crushed by federal troops and he was jailed. Debs drew and cultivated connections between himself and Abraham Lincoln. Stanley twice notes that Debs likened himself to "a latter-day abolitionist," a stance that undergirded his opposition to "wage slavery" as well as World War I (pp. 3, 190). Not surprisingly, Debs stood as the era's white labor leader who tried to strike the greatest blows against the practice of white supremacy.

By viewing the American labor movement of the Reconstruction through Progressive eras through the lens of Civil War memory and its uses, Stanley has made a unique contribution to the literature. Much of his factual narrative follows familiar, well-trodden ground, and the book is copiously researched in both primary and secondary sources. The real value of *Grand Army of Labor* lies, however, in its analysis and perspective, which shed new light on well-known figures and events. Moreover, in an era when Americans are

hotly contesting the memory and legacy of the Civil War in ways that have significant social and political ramifications, Stanley's book certainly carries relevance for some of the challenges facing the nation today.

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