

This is an ambitious project that moves through waves of protest and ends by contextualizing a much changed political and economic landscape of postwar El Salvador. Chapter 5 complements new monographs on aftermaths in neo-liberal El Salvador and in the region. Through analyzing the mass mobilization against privatization of the public health system, Almeida suggests that El Salvador is experiencing what he terms a non-violent mobilization by globalization. In doing so, he offers a gleam of hope for a “new modality of oppositional struggle” (p. 176). As my own research makes clear, more often than not the discourses of the war have lost their saliency and new modes of organizing are being sought. This last case study is an apt example. One could ask, however, for a finer grained look at the everyday practices of multi-sectorial organizing, of the networks that operate in mobilization by globalization, of the “organizations of organizations”. This perspective yields insights not only on the transferred skills but also opens up a conversation on the challenges and contradictions inherited from past alliances gone awry, the struggle for diminishing funding, and so on that are the underbelly of these kinds of movements and their success.

Empirically rich, meticulously researched, Almeida provides students and scholars of social movements, revolutions, El Salvador, Central America, comparative politics, and labor studies more generally, with a comprehensive and compelling analysis of collective action through time. It is an important contribution to these interdisciplinary fields of study.

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RICHARDS, LAWRENCE. *Union-Free America. Workers and Antiunion Culture.* [The Working Class in American History.] University of Illinois Press, Urbana [etc.] 2008. x, 252 pp. Ill. \$40.00; doi:10.1017/S0020859010000143

This book begins with an intriguing premise: that dramatic declines in union density during the past fifty years – what the author, Lawrence Richards, refers to as unions’ “steady descent into oblivion” – can be attributed primarily to “worker opposition” and the pervasive influence of an anti-union culture in the United States. To be fair, he acknowledges and gives passing attention to other factors that contributed to union decline, such as employer opposition, changes in labor law, labor’s own organizational failures, changes in economic structure (de-industrialization), demographic changes, and that old saw, American “individualism”. But for this study at least, these factors reside very much in the background and receive comparatively little attention.

Richards organizes the study in two parts, the first of which takes “America’s antiunion culture” as a given and puts it on display as a cultural artifact. To be sure, he offers some historical context reaching as far back as the nineteenth century, but largely his purpose is to present the key elements of a culture hostile to unionization in which the central themes appear with some variety but little nuance in popular magazines (the *Readers’ Digest* looms large as a source), film, and television, and in the discourse of union critics from the right and left.

In the book’s second part, he presents three case studies which put this anti-union culture in motion through close examination of union campaigns: the first an unsuccessful attempt to organize a Virginia textile textile manufacturing plant, Frank Ix & Sons, in 1980; the second an effort to organize clerical workers at New York University in 1970; and the third a wide-ranging examination of the tensions between “professionalism” and “unionism” that mark the competition between the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) to organize teachers without transgressing their professional identities. The case studies are the richest part of the study, though in some respects an odd collection and not fully exploited for their interpretive potential.

The historical context for anti-unionism lay, according to Richards, in the unease of the middle class with labor radicalism and the threat of labor violence fueled by the labor wars of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and by the WWI-era reaction against immigrants and the “Red Menace”. Although the 1920s and 1930s brought a reassuring domestication of the working class and indeed positioned workers in the public mind as “underdogs”, worthy of sympathy and some degree of public protection and new legitimation for their unions, such circumstances did not persist long in the post-World-War-II environment. Despite the persistence of generally favorable ratings of unions in public opinion polls well into the 1960s, powerful undercurrents stirred within American culture that would undermine those favorable views. Contributory were the post-World-War-II Red scare, the rising standard of living of organized workers, and the increasingly bureaucratic structure of a labor movement, more secure (and in the author’s view, complacent) than at any time in its history.

A postwar anti-labor offensive portrayed “big labor” as monopolistic and anti-democratic, a leadership out of touch with its members and the public interest, controlling large treasuries to influence politics, and honeycombed with corruption. With the advent of the 1960s and 1970s, unions came to be represented as the new “top dogs” blocking the legitimate aspirations of minorities and women, a “special interest” far removed from its own reform-minded past, a strike-happy anachronism in a post-industrial service economy, seeking their own parochial advantage at the expense of employers and the health of the economy.

This account of the culture of anti-unionism, layered with endless quotations from popular media, while on the surface compelling, suffers from over-generalization and some historical inaccuracy. We are offered a “hegemonic” view of unions through media representations that purportedly tell us “how society thinks about the subject” (p. 9). A more carefully contextualized social analysis of popular fears about unions would make the case more convincingly. How widespread were they? Among what social groups in particular? Where and under what circumstances did labor find allies within the middle class? (One thinks, for instance, of the complicated relationship between social reformers and labor activists, and the influence of public intellectuals and notable political figures of different generations who offered powerful, if not unqualified, testimony on behalf of unions – Jane Addams and John R. Commons, Eleanor Roosevelt and Hubert Humphrey, Martin Luther King, Jr, and Barack Obama.)

But, the most significant shortcoming of this cultural analysis is the author’s failure to critically interrogate how “culture” happens. Culture is treated as an actor in its own right; it arises, dominates, suffuses, and persists. It is given voice by specific commentators, but we get little sense of who creates it and by what means. Through the sheer volume of anecdotal testimony offered in Part I, the reader is left with the impression of a pervasive culture hostile to unions that is consumed by the public and workers themselves. That “culture” then becomes the decisive barrier to union growth and ultimately its nemesis. Because the shifting political context of the postwar years is dealt with in so limited a fashion, we get little sense of the political and economic forces that participated in constructing and maintaining this culture. Major business associations and their political allies, media hegemony congenitally hostile to unions, and the sophisticated army of industrial psychologists, public relations experts, and anti-labor lawyer/consultants deployed by business get no sustained attention in these pages.

The case studies in the book’s second part, constructed at the ground level from sources – company records and oral histories – that might tell a more instrumental and intimate story, offer the promise of breaking through the cultural fog. Unfortunately, they do not live up to that promise. Each in its own right is interesting enough. The attempt in 1980 to unionize the Frank Ix textile factory in Charlottesville, Virginia, one of three plants that a New York-based corporation owned, had all of the hallmarks of a classic anti-union campaign. Richards’s interest in the case lies in the success the company had in playing the

anti-union strings already present in the culture – the union as a threat to job security (a veiled threat to close the plant), the union as an outside institution with its own pecuniary interests, the union as a threat to workers' freedom and the company's viability, and the union as antagonistic to the trust and family feeling cultivated by the firm over many years. But what the case also illustrates, and Richards notes but fails to adequately interpret, is that the company's campaign was highly orchestrated, using the most sophisticated anti-union methods of the day, including a full panoply of consultants and lawyers.

Businessmen hostile to unions, as far back as the "open-shop" campaigns of the early twentieth century, used these methods to foster and disseminate the very anti-union mentality that Richards claims was already deeply entrenched among the workers. By comparison, the union organizing campaign supported by the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers' Union (ACTWU), at least by this account, seems poorly funded and comparatively unsophisticated. Culture, anti-union or otherwise, is the product of agency, and as this case suggests the most effective agents were employers and their allies. It didn't hurt their effort that the campaign was conducted in the South, comparatively non-union territory of long-standing where, as Richards notes, workers had little experience with unions to draw on.

His second case addresses this peculiarity of the first. The effort to unionize clerical workers at New York University in the early 1970s could hardly have been conducted in more union-friendly territory. Richards believes the case illustrates the impediments to organizing white- or pink-collar workers in the new economy of the later twentieth century. Once the university determined to make an all-out defense against the union's campaign, in this case led by a left-wing union of some longstanding, District 65 of the Retail, Wholesale, Distributive and Processing Workers' Union (RWDWU), the union faced an uphill battle. The university employed many of the same tactics used in other campaigns that portrayed the union as a strike-prone, undemocratic, dues-collecting, and empire-building institution that did not have the interests of the workers at heart. Why did these messages apparently play so successfully? The volatile political circumstances in 1970–1971 on the NYU campus make this a case that follows its own peculiar trajectory. But, one might argue, as Richards does, that the university's campaign illustrates the imprint of an existing anti-union culture of somewhat indeterminate origin. An alternative analysis might focus on how a carefully crafted campaign reinforced and built on an "anti-union culture" that business and its political and cultural allies had deliberately and systematically constructed over many years through increasingly sophisticated manipulation of the messages conveyed to workers and the public.

It is serious engagement with how this was done and acknowledgment of the enormous political and economic power wielded by business in the postwar era that is lacking in this study. By the late twentieth century business could play strings it had already finely tuned to manipulate public discourse and media messages that often left aggrieved workers isolated and outmaneuvered in their efforts to win union representation. Richards is to be commended for documenting in considerable detail the content of this anti-union message and its reproduction in widely disparate settings. But to elevate it to the status of a "culture" that has a life of its own goes too far. His decision to focus on "worker opposition" to unionization leads us away from the kind of historically grounded analysis we need of the political context of anti-unionism and the increasingly sophisticated power brought to bear by management in a changing legal context (Taft-Hartley, Landrum-Griffiths, a weakened NLRB) to overwhelm union organizing campaigns. In southern towns, like Charlottesville, where unions had little tradition and in the scorched industrial landscapes of northern cities where workers desperately clung to what little security they could find business and its allies could redeploy its "culture of anti-unionism" with telling effect. It is that process that needs closer, critical attention.

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