

**GRAND ARMY OF LABOR: WORKERS, VETERANS, AND THE MEANING OF THE CIVIL WAR. By Matthew E. Stanley. Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press. 2021.**

In his review of Bruce Levine's recent biography of Thaddeus Stevens in *Jacobin*, Matthew Stanley stresses the importance of Stevens' demand for the confiscation of Confederate lands so they could be distributed to formerly enslaved people. However overly-radical Stevens' impulse proved in a moment of "revolutionary possibility" (18), it prefigured important questions that returned in future decades as workers and veterans contemplated the meaning of the war: why was it actually fought, and what kind of nation should it have made?

As Stanley demonstrates in *Grand Army of Labor*, generations of labor movements in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries fought for their own "emancipatory program" (13) through an "*antislavery vernacular*" (6), including symbols and narratives formed by "divergent memories of the Civil War *within* American labor" (10). Much of what workers actually wanted—a new political party, another currency, one big union—changed over time, and, as with the possibility of land confiscation, never materialized. Yet, through the spiraling composition and decomposition of working-class power during the era, one constant remained: the war. As Stanley relates in an interview on the podcast *Nostalgia Trap*, he was "trained as a memory historian and Civil War historian," and thus labor historians will find him a highly credible scholar for unpacking the "deep reservoir of Civil War memory that was just everywhere in Gilded Age and Progressive Era labor movements." Activating those memories wasn't merely incidental, but pivotal, to how those movements emerged and also declined.

Many of the text's chapters skillfully relate how the "events, leaders, [and] ideas" of Civil War memory anchored the farmer-labor class bases driving the "Greenback-Labor, Knights of Labor, Farmers' Alliance" (44), and other institutional movements of the late nineteenth century. Drawing on a wide range of archival materials, Stanley discusses attempts at "class reconciliation" (57) between northern and southern workers, worker-

veteran culture in the Knights of Labor, the “red memory” of socialists and anarchists (98), and the Grange, Readjuster, and Populist movements. His treatment of wartime culture in James B. Weaver’s 1892 Populist campaign, Samuel Gompers’ notion of “an army of labor” and labor aristocracy (157), and the “antislavery memory” (190) of Eugene Debs’ abolitionist arguments for socialism are particularly vivid illustrations of Stanley’s scope, which also includes the Industrial Workers’ of the World (IWW). His attention to the contested symbols of Abraham Lincoln and John Brown, among others, are among many compelling stories told across the text’s detailed chapters.

Tracing “collective memories” gives Stanley the chance to flex a wide lens on what Fink calls the Long Gilded Age, and the book’s seven efficient chapters (plus an introduction and epilogue) manage to offer readers both surveys appropriate for students and insights for specialists. Stanley explains his focus is less on “the productive relations of class per se but with industrial workers and farmers who exhibited class consciousness through participation in coordinated worker movements” (4). In this respect, readers would do well to read it alongside Robert Ovetz’s *When Workers Shot Back: Class Conflict from 1877 to 1921* (Haymarket, 2019).

Beyond being a thoughtful contribution to the venerable *The Working Class in American History* series by the University of Illinois Press, the book advances field-specific conversations about the politics of race and class with vital scholars on the period, including David Roediger, Mark Lause, and Leon Fink. Even though the text largely examines labor movements led by white men, the book continually engages with how central questions of whiteness and blackness structured tensions that contributed to success and failure of movements that tried to organize workers North and South, and how various attempts at “white reunion” (92) and black inclusion compounded increasingly fraught racial politics of Jim Crow and white nationalism.

The book also moves with special force for studies on the period because it invites the integration of histories typically segregated. For example, the first chapter boldly examines the influence of antebellum reform language on postwar worker memory, particularly in terms of attempting to interpret emancipation in economic terms with the “large-scale material redistribution” of property (27). The book’s integration of Reconstruction into an analysis that also includes the 1877 general strike, and the Populist presidential campaigns with the 1898 Wilmington Insurrection, models a productive synthesis that new studies can hopefully continue. Likewise, Stanley’s historicized analysis of “wage slavery” (69-77) discourse in the third chapter should be required reading.

One of the most powerful suggestions in Stanley’s book is the recognition that the era’s labor and populist movements can’t be fully understood except through the afterlives of slavery generally, and the Civil War in particular. Such an insight begs the question: how else *can* we think about the ceaseless—and problematic—idea of “wage slavery” *beyond* its relation to chattel slavery? How, that is, can we understand the labor wars of the Long Gilded Age in *our* terms, rather than theirs?

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