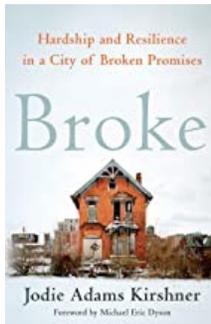


BOOK NOTES



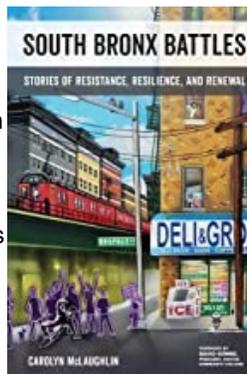
***Broke: Hardship and Resilience in a City of Broken Promises* (St. Martin's Press), Jodie Adams Kirshner**

Broke is a work of journalism that is equally at home with critiquing government policy and novelistic character development. It was the 2020 winner of the Working-Class Studies Association Tilly Olsen Award for Creative Writing.

Focused on Detroit before, during and after it was forced into bankruptcy in 2013, Jodie Kirshner reveals the impacts of negligent and often malignant government policies at all levels by telling the stories of seven Detroit residents during and after the bankruptcy. Lola, for example, commutes two hours a day to her suburban job. Reggie loses his life savings trying to make a habitable home for his family. And Cindy fights drug abuse and prostitution. The *New York Times* reviewer praised it for “showcasing people who are persistent, clever, flawed, loving, struggling and full of contradictions.” Another reviewer says: “What *Broke* really tells us is how systems of government, law and finance can crush even the hardest of boot-strap pullers.”

***South Bronx Battles: Stories of Resistance, Resilience, and Renewal* (U. of California Press), Carolyn McLaughlin**

Interweaving the voices of community residents, community organizer Carolyn McLaughlin presents what the publisher calls “the comeback story of a community that was once in crisis but now serves as a beacon for other cities to rebuild, while keeping their neighborhoods affordable.” The book first shows how the South Bronx became the poorest Congressional District in the country and how people began to fight back in the 1960s. Though setbacks accumulated across the decades, by the 1990s community residents began to see their efforts paying off – efforts that achieved many remarkable successes in the first two decades of this century. McLaughlin ends with a brief chapter on “Lessons Learned” that high poverty areas in other parts of the country should find useful. Fordham historian Mark Naison says, “No one has done more to build human services in the Bronx than Carolyn McLaughlin. A must-read for students of urban politics and those who love the Bronx.”



***Chocolate Cities: The Black Map of American Life* (U. of California Press), Marcus Anthony Hunter and Zandria F. Robinson**

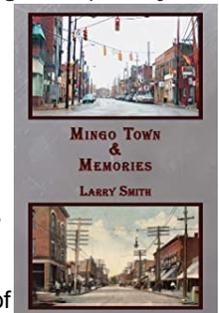
Across the United States, Black people have built “a dynamic network of cities and towns where Black culture is maintained, created, and defended.”

Chocolate Cities challenges the map most sociologists and the rest of us have of where Black life thrives. It uses film, fiction, music and oral history to map the black American experience of race, place, and liberation from Emancipation to now. Robin D.G. Kelley praises it: “Hunter and Robinson overturn the dominant social science imaginary that see ‘inner’ cities only in crisis, chaos, and decline. There is a sociological imagination constructed from the eyes, ears, hearts, memories, songs, and prayers of real city folk, those Black communities who cling to their village, continually remake their culture, and build power to beat back the chaos imposed on them.” Mary Pattillo says, “*Chocolate Cities* kicks up enough funk to provoke a major paradigm shift in research on Black places.”



***Mingo Town & Memories* (Bottom Dog Press), Larry Smith**

This new collection of Larry Smith poems is a portrait of a working-class town and its way of life in middle America. Richard Hague says these poems “lets us overhear the private griefs and joys of immigrants old and new, of millwrights, coal miners, victims of floods; of college students; Vietnam era survivors, of mothers, wives, and union women in what becomes a kind of chorus of working-class America. He stands on back stoops and front porches reading over the shoulders of folk caught up in the paradoxes of Americans 'so lost yet at home with their lives.”



***Hinterland: America's New Landscape of Class and Conflict* (U. of Chicago Press), Phil A. Neel**

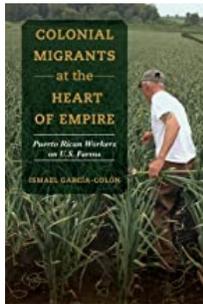
According to the publisher, *Hinterland* takes us from the “glittering, coastal hubs” of the so-called creative class to “the darkness of the declining heartland or on the dimly lit fringe of sprawling cities” as well as to hinterlands in other countries like China. Drawing on his own experience of protest in the U.S. and elsewhere, Neel finds anger and violence beneath the surface of everyday life in the hinterland and explores whether “the



pending rebellion” will be toward a more just society or an reactionary ethnonationalist one. Arlie Hochschild says of it: “Neel takes us on a breathless tour of ‘economic geography’ . . . all the while asking where, under capitalism, the United States and the world is going. Ambitious, polemical, brilliant, this book reminds us of the very urgency of his question.”

Colonial Migrants at the Heart of Empire: Puerto Rican Workers on U.S. Farms (U. of California Press), Ismael Garcia-Colon

This book begins with the 1947 Farm Labor Program that helped move hundreds of thousands of Puerto Rican migrant workers on to U.S. farms, thereby creating a variety of Puerto Rican stateside communities. According to the publisher: “A labor history and an ethnography, *Colonial Migrants* evokes the violence, fieldwork, food, lodging, surveillance, and coercion that these workers experienced on farms and conveys their hopes and struggles to overcome poverty. Island farmworkers encountered a unique form



of prejudice and racism arising from their dual status as both U.S. citizens and as ‘foreign others.’” According to Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, the book “brilliantly examines the experience of Puerto Rican migrant farmworkers in the United States within an immigration regimen that categorizes them as racially inferior citizens and inefficient, expensive workers.”

Homestead Steel Mill – the Final Ten Years: USWA Local 1397 and the Fight for Union Democracy (PMPress), Mike Stout

Mike Stout is a well-known activist and rock singer/songwriter in the Pittsburgh area, but he was also a key figure in United Steelworkers Local 1397’s Rank-and-File Caucus at U.S. Steel’s Homestead Works before it closed in the 1980s. This book chronicles the rise and accomplishments of the Caucus from 1977, when Stout first entered the mill, to after the mill closed. Local 1397 became well known for expanding the fight beyond the mill itself – campaigns against other steel mill shutdowns, against U.S. imperialism in Central

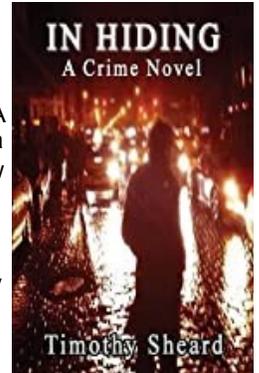


America, and with local civil rights and environmental groups. These are recounted in the book, but at its core *Homestead Steel Mill* is about how the Rank-and-File Caucus organized to win the leadership of the local

union and the way it engaged union members in democratizing the union and its activities. Even years after the mill was closed, the union continued to fight workers’ grievances through arbitration and retained enough worker loyalty to be a continuing force in Pittsburgh area politics. Steve Early endorsed the book, saying: “If every local union had the fighting spirit of 1397 in its heyday, the U.S. labor movement would be in far better shape.”

In Hiding (Hard Ball Press), Timothy Sheard

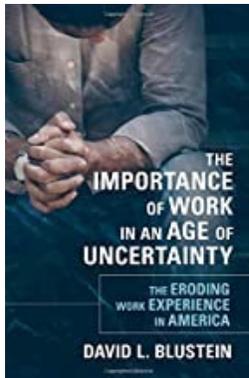
The creator of the Lenny Moss mysteries, Tim Sheard creates a new character in *In Hiding*: Peter Davies. A complicated personality damaged by a difficult childhood, Davies goes to New York City in search of the woman he loves and ends up uncovering a sex trafficking ring. The publisher calls it “an unflinching look at the sex industry and the harrowing journey of a man searching for love in the worst of all places.” One reviewer says Lenny Moss would be pleased to have Pete Davies as a friend.



She Come By It Natural: Dolly Parton and the Women Who Lived Her Songs (Scribner), Sarah Smarsh

Author of *Heartland* Sarah Smarsh again draws on her formative years growing up amid Kansas wheat fields and airplane factories to again challenge both the “typically male vision of the rural working class” and the limits of middle-class feminism. She does this through a biography of country-pop singer Dolly Parton, tracing her career from singing on the front porch of her family’s cabin to Nashville and Hollywood icon, and “from ‘girl singer’ managed by powerful men to leader of a self-made business and philanthropy empire.” But Smarsh focuses on how Parton’s songs over the decades “validated women who go unheard: the poor woman, the pregnant teenager, the struggling mother disparaged as ‘trailer trash.’” Weaving social commentary and personal anecdotes into biography, *She Come By It Natural* is what one reviewer calls “a love letter both to Parton and to the women who continue to see themselves in her songs.”





***The Importance of Work in an Age of Uncertainty: The Eroding Work Experience in America* (Oxford U. Press), David Blustein**

Combining extensive interviews with workers across the U.S. with social psychological research, David Blustein shows both how work fulfills people's desire to be productive, creative, and connected to others and how the nature of work is now seriously eroding –

and with devastating psychological and social consequences. According to the publisher, Blustein also provides “the rationale and roadmap for a renewed agenda toward full employment and toward fair and dignified jobs for all who want to work.” One reviewer calls the book “a labor of love, constituting nothing less than a manifesto in favor of decent work -- a goal that is as important as it is increasingly out of the grasp of many in America, and elsewhere.”

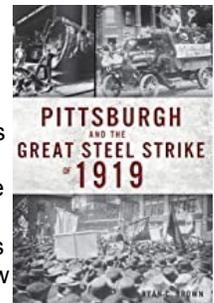
***Radical Seattle: The General Strike of 1919* (Monthly Review Press), Cal Winslow**

The five-day general strike in Seattle in February 1919 – a strike of longshoremen, streetcar drivers, telephone operators, musicians, miners, loggers, shipyard work, and numerous others – was not just a general work stoppage. It was a near-week of working-class city governance, as strikers fed people, policed themselves, and made sure babies had milk and the sick were cared for. Cal Winslow places the Seattle General Strike in a larger historical context of “early twentieth century socialist and working-class organization, when everyday people built a viable political infrastructure that seemed, to governments and corporate bosses, radical – even ‘Bolshevik.’” The publisher promises: “Reading this book might increase the chance that something like this could happen again – possibly in the place where you live.”



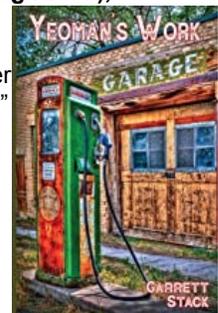
***Pittsburgh and the Great Steel Strike of 1919* (The History Press), Ryan Brown**

The 1919 Steel Strike stretched across the northeastern United States from mills in Chicago to New York, but the Pittsburgh area was still the center of the steel industry then and thus of the strike. Activist and journalist Ryan Brown keeps his focus on Pittsburgh and recounts how the strike played out there, including revolutionary violence, police beatings of strikers, and government collusion with the steel companies in breaking the strike. And as the post-World War I Red Scare began, “federal agents used the strike as an excuse to comb Pittsburgh’s immigrant neighborhoods for communists.”



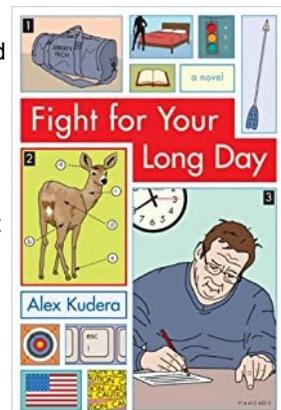
***Yeoman's Work: Poems* (Bottom Dog Press), Garrett Stack**

This debut collection of poems is about women and men with “dirt under their nails, rust flaking off their hearts.” A reviewer says, “Through generous empathy and a keen eye, [Stack’s characters] are so fully realized they might as well be sitting next to you at the diner when you read them.”



***Fight For Your Long Day* (Hard Ball Press), Alex Kudera**

The main character of this novel is Cyrus Duffleman, an adjunct professor with five jobs at four different universities. Duffleman is at turns comic and tragic as he faces the challenges of knowledge workers and others in the new gig economy. The book was the winner of the Independent Publishers Gold Medal for Best Regional Mid-Atlantic Fiction.



Matthew C. Klein and Michael Pettis **Trade Wars Are Class Wars: How Rising Inequality Distorts the Global Economy and Threatens International Peace** (Yale U. Press), Matthew Klein and Michael Pettis

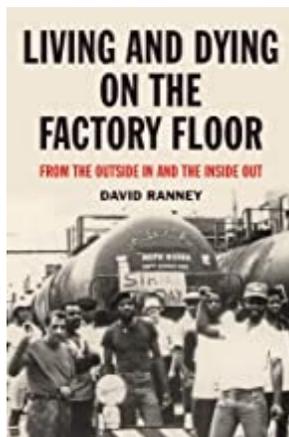


The publisher sums up this book's thesis clearly, advertising it as a "provocative look at how today's trade conflicts are caused by governments promoting the interests of elites at the expense of workers." Matthew Klein and Michael Pettis argue that trade disputes are misunderstood when they are seen as conflicts

between countries with competing national interests. Different national interests may sometimes play a role, but trading partners are generally negotiating or fighting over the different interests of multinational companies resident in different countries. And the last thing they are concerned about is living standards, working conditions, and the economic interests of workers in their own country. The publisher promises: "In this thought-provoking challenge to mainstream views, the authors provide a cohesive narrative that shows how the class wars of rising inequality are a threat to the global economy and international peace—and what we can do about it."

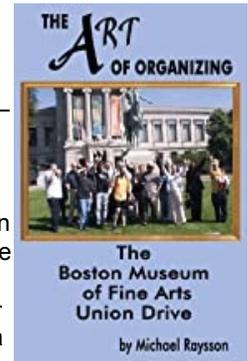
Living and Dying on the Factory Floor: From the Outside In and the Inside Out (PM Press), David Ranney

David Ranney was a young tenured professor at the University of Iowa in the 1970s when he decided to follow his radical politics into a series of factory jobs in the Chicago-Northwest Indiana area. This book is his remembrance of each one of the jobs he had across six years – including stints at a machine shop, a shortening factory, a railroad car factory, a structural steel shop, a box factory, a chemical plant, and a paper cup factory. As an itinerate worker, Ranney's experience included shop-floor actions protesting supervisor abuses, a failed effort to unionize, serious injuries, a wildcat strike, and a murder. Labor historian Jim Barrett calls it "our best account of the New Left's turn to the factory and other workplaces in the seventies. Reading in some parts like a novel, it introduces us to a remarkable cast of working-class characters, while offering a refreshingly critical look at his own experiences."



The Art of Organizing: The Boston Museum of Fine Arts Union Drive (Hard Ball Press), Michael Raysson

When a new, cost-cutting administration took over the Boston Museum of Fine Arts in 1987, it began taking away benefits that the museum security guards had enjoyed for years – including chairs for them to sit on. Michael Raysson was one of those guards, and this book recounts his fellow workers' hard-fought battle to win a union election and then another battle to oust that corrupt international union and form an independent union of their own. One reviewer said it "reads like a novel" and enthused thus: "Kudos to Michael Raysson for organizing a union, guiding workers to get what they wanted and needed and for sharing with us such an entertaining and enlightening tale."



The Party Upstairs: A Novel (Penguin Press), Lee Conell

Set in a genteel New York City apartment building, the story unfolds in one day as the building's superintendent and his grown-up daughter spark a crisis that by day's end changes everything. Growing up as the super's daughter in the basement of a fancy building in a wealthy neighborhood, Ruby was not herself economically privileged, but she enjoyed many of the advantages of her neighbors and friends, especially through her friendship with Caroline. Now graduated from college but without a job in her field, Ruby has moved back in with her parents. And on the day of the novel, Caroline is throwing a party in her father's sumptuous penthouse apartment, "a party Ruby looks forward to and dreads in equal measure."

