

**Solidarity or Survival? American Labor and European Immigrants,
1830-1924.**



Review Author[s]:
Gerald Friedman

The Journal of Economic History, Vol. 48, No. 1. (Mar., 1988), pp. 214-215.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0022-0507%28198803%2948%3A1%3C214%3ASOSALA%3E2.0.CO%3B2-Y>

The Journal of Economic History is currently published by Economic History Association.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/journals/eha.html>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is an independent not-for-profit organization dedicated to creating and preserving a digital archive of scholarly journals. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

While appreciative of the value of craft solidarity for cigar makers in their conflicts with manufacturers, Cooper is sensitive to its limitations as well. As she notes: "The tension between solidarity and exclusivity lay at the core of unionists' work culture and would make the issue of organizing the unorganized a central paradox throughout the life of the CMIU" (p. 115). This exclusivity expressed itself first in racism toward Chinese cigar makers in California and later in an opposition to organizing women cigar makers. Cooper shows persuasively that the failure to unite with female workers had devastating consequences in terms of the evolution of the industry and the fate of the union.

The middle chapters explore the growth of class conflict in cigar making and the consequent shift of work from small shops employing skilled male craftsmen to large-scale factories employing semi-skilled women working in a team system entailing a more developed division of labor. In this section, Cooper shifts the level of analysis effectively and examines two centers of the new cigar making—Detroit and southeastern Pennsylvania.

In the next chapters, Cooper returns to themes of work culture and labor protest, showing how women cigar makers developed their own sense of solidarity without the craft and union traditions that underpinned the experiences of men. She shows the role of domestic concerns among women, without slighting the importance of the work place in molding women's consciousness. She explores the interrelations of men and women and generalizes about the significance of the patterns she has uncovered: "Gender tragically divided cigar makers from each other and limited their ability to resist and transcend their respective subordinated positions. But they [male and female cigar makers] also shared much, and it is equally important to stake out and name this common ground" (p. 319).

All in all, Cooper has crafted an effective analysis that should stimulate others to employ both class and gender as analytic tools in historical study. This synthesis of perspectives can only make for a richer and more nuanced history.

THOMAS DUBLIN, *University of California, San Diego*

Solidarity or Survival? American Labor and European Immigrants, 1830–1924. By A. T. Lane. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1987. Pp. xii, 230. \$34.50 cloth, \$9.95 paper.

Since the first European settlement the lure of high wages and relatively good living conditions has drawn immigrants to the New World. Between 1830 and 1910, for example, nearly 30 million immigrants entered the United States, with nearly 9 million arriving after 1900. Often without skills or knowledge of American labor markets, these immigrants dominated markets for unskilled labor in construction, manufacturing, and even farm labor in some parts of the United States.

By inflating the supply of labor, large-scale immigration impeded efforts by workers to raise wages through collective action. This threat to organized labor has justified claims that unions opposed immigration. In *The Indispensable Enemy* (1971), for example, Alexander Saxton shows how caucasian workers in California responded to falling wages by verbally and physically attacking Chinese immigrants, ultimately provoking passage of the first effective legal restrictions on free immigration into the United States, the Chinese Exclusion Acts.

By focusing on union efforts to restrict the supply of labor, Saxton and others have emphasized what some economists have called the "monopoly" view of unionism. In his study of the development of organized labor's attitude toward immigration, by contrast, A. T. Lane, shows that American labor had another tradition as well, one of internationalism, solidarity and sympathy for immigrants seeking asylum in America. Using literary evidence drawn from union records and publications, Lane shows that

most of organized labor as late as the 1890s opposed restrictions on immigration. Loyalty to the principle of solidarity, Lane argues, overcame concern for the economic costs of immigration to native workers. Opinions changed quickly after 1900, however, with organized labor moving to the forefront of the opposition to free immigration. Focusing on debates within the American Federation of Labor, Lane argues that this change resulted from growing challenges to the position of organized labor. Stagnant wages, intensifying technological change, and the increasing use by aggressively anti-union employers of immigrant labor as strikebreakers all convinced union leaders that union survival depended on a reversal of labor's traditional support for working-class solidarity and unimpeded immigration.

By showing the importance of an ideological tradition favoring international solidarity and linking changes in labor's policy to economic conditions as well as racial and ethnic prejudice, Lane provides a valuable corrective to earlier studies of union attitudes toward immigration. Valuable as it is, however, Lane's study is limited by his failure to model explicitly the place of immigrants in American labor markets. Lacking such a model, Lane never successfully explains why economic conditions that had little effect on labor's policy towards immigration before 1900 led organized labor to oppose immigration after 1900. Unskilled immigrants, he argues, were a threat to organized labor because they competed with union members as substitutes for their labor. He ignores, however, the benefits skilled workers reaped from immigration. Immigrants, for example, produced commodities consumed by union members who benefited from the fall in product prices caused by the use of relatively cheap immigrant labor. And, even more important, skilled workers benefited directly from a fall in the wages of unskilled workers employed as helpers and assistants, workers who were complements rather than substitutes for craft unionists. In the apparel industry, for example, skilled (and usually native-born and unionized) garment cutters benefited from a fall in the wages of (usually foreign-born) sewing-machine operators because this could increase demand for their labor. While hurting the economic position of unskilled native workers, who were rarely unionized, immigration may thus have aided nineteenth-century skilled workers protected as they were by their skills and market power.

A full explanation of the attitude of organized labor toward immigration should show how technical progress and changes in management strategy effected the relationship between skilled labor and unskilled immigrant workers around 1900. By failing to do this, Lane cannot provide a convincing explanation of the changing attitude of American labor toward immigration. Even so, Lane's work is a valuable contribution to American labor history. By recognizing that organized labor's attitudes toward immigration did change, and by showing the importance of economic factors in these changes, Lane provides an important addition to the growing literature on the place of immigration in American labor history.

GERALD FRIEDMAN, *University of Massachusetts, Amherst*

Out of Work: The First Century of Unemployment in Massachusetts. By Alexander Keyssar. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986. Pp. xviii, 469. \$49.50 cloth, \$14.95 paper.

This is an overdue and important book. Most of Alexander Keyssar's attention is taken up with the period between 1871 and 1908 and to fulfill the subtitle's claim he gives a brief 22-page overview of the period 1820 to 1870, and a fuller, but still rather light, discussion of the period 1908 to 1922.

During the late nineteenth century, Massachusetts was a major industrial state, the Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics of Labor began at an early date (1871) to collect unusually detailed data on matters relating to the experience and condition of industrial workers, and the Commonwealth fostered a progressive and influential political attitude