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Black and Blue: African Americans, the Labor Movement, and the Decline of the Democratic Party

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potential cause because if workers and organizers had had the will, he argues, they would have found the means to overcome the inherent biases of the system and would have established a third party. Similarly, the federal structure of the two countries was not an obstacle to the creation of a labor party. In fact, it provided a field of experimentation and was a springboard to success at the national level. Archer's rejection of race and immigration, state repression, the courts, and prosperity as factors in the creation of the Australian Labor Party is based on their relative importance. Here Archer is on less certain ground, since he does not provide a metric with which to sort through alternatives. A case in point is his rejection of U.S. prosperity as a possible determinant. The assertion is that while wage levels were the same on the two continents, American workers were more dissatisfied with their earnings relative to internal (within-country) reference points than were Australians. The analysis does not move beyond this stage. Are we interested in levels or rates of change of wages? How large does the gap between expectations and take-home pay have to be to make workers dissatisfied? Does the degree of satisfaction rise with take-home pay or is the relation non-linear? Are the reference points stable over time?

The overarching line of reasoning has two main drawbacks. First, it treats each determinant separately. One can easily picture immigration interacting with religion, and state repression with the legal system, as common causes in the establishment or not of the third party. Archer also sidesteps the likelihood of endogeneity. How did the adoption of the labor party in Australia affect court decisions and state repression? If the relation was bi-causal, there may be a bias in Archer's reading of the evidence.

That said, the virtues of the book override the drawbacks, and the depth and scope of argument are impressive. The richness of the approach is exemplified in Archer's nuanced discussion of the many dimensions of liberalism. In both countries, liberal values were about equally prevalent across three groups of interest—the middle classes, union leaders, and intellectuals—although Archer is hard-pressed to explain why these values would have mattered to workers in either country.

The book makes a valuable contribution to debates on U.S. exceptionalism. More generally, it demonstrates the strengths of comparative history.

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Black and Blue: African Americans, the Labor Movement, and the Decline of the Democratic Party. By Paul Frymer. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007. 224 pp. ISBN 978-0-691-13081-1, \$50.00 (cloth); 978-0-691-13465-9, \$24.95 (paper).

Black and Blue: African Americans, the Labor Movement, and the Decline of the Democratic Party is an important contribution to the interdisciplinary literature on race and the U.S. labor movement. Its evidence is fresh and stimulating, its arguments original and compelling, and its conclusions matter. This is a book not only scholars but also activists should read. The first part of the title—*Black and Blue*—captures the explanatory challenge: how to explain the bruising beatings that the struggle for racial justice, the labor movement, and black workers in particular have taken in recent decades, with 400,000 African American union jobs lost since 2000 alone. Frymer comes to this project with a rare skill set. He brings academic training in both law and political science and practical experience in the trenches of labor litigation, a combination that yields new insight and significant findings.

First, the book is a timely reminder that the labor movement, notwithstanding its historic failings and current limitations on racial matters, is *the* most effective voice for wage-earning Americans, including African Americans. That helps explain why, even after the hemorrhaging of union jobs in recent years, more blacks belong to trade unions than to civil rights organizations. And it helps explain why polls find African Americans to be more pro-union than any other section of the U.S. population. Because the labor movement is also the most integrated major institution in American life, with the possible exception of the military, the daunting obstacles it now faces in organizing should concern those interested in racial justice. Its weakening receives too little attention as a source of the rise of concentrated poverty, the worsening of overall inequality, and the decline of social mobility in the United States.

Frymer's most original contribution, however, is a structural and situational analysis of how American political institutions perpetuate racial inequality in the workplace. In particular, he shows how the Wagner Act and National Labor Relations Board excluded questions of racial injustice from their purview. When finally the vacuum was filled by the 1964 Civil Rights Act, it channeled matters of racial discrimination to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and the courts. And where the NLRB had compounded racial inequity, Frymer shows, the EEOC and courts have compounded class inequity. His

case studies expose how the two regimes clash, with troubling consequences for workers who need their help. In his words, “two vectors of power involving labor and civil rights, created in different historical moments, conflict with each other, leading to unintended consequences” (p. 9). Frymer thus offers a fresh vantage point on the tragic story of the New Deal found in much recent scholarship across fields, which has shown how the odd coalition between northern labor and southern white supremacists in the Democratic Party in time undermined the welfare state’s viability by taking the issue of racialized inequality off the table and giving southern elites *carte blanche*. Frymer deepens understanding by revealing how, in shaping the development of federal agencies, that anomalous alliance deformed their missions with lasting consequences for both black workers and labor unions.

Thanks to the paralyzing divisions in both the Democratic Party, hence Congress, and the AFL-CIO, the courts came to play an outsized role in negotiating racial change in what Frymer aptly terms “legislation through litigation” (69). The analysis of this process in Chapter 4 is the most sophisticated and original of the book’s case studies. Unlike many labor scholars, Frymer recognizes both the signal victories black workers gained through litigation, and the fact that leading civil rights organizations only turned to suing discriminatory unions when the unions themselves and Congress refused to grant other relief. Courts were the only route left, and they yielded desperately needed changes otherwise unattainable. Indeed, the courts deserve much more scholarly attention as powerful quasi-legislative bodies with independent drives and far-reaching impact. “The legal state,” Frymer argues, “has been far more stalwart than the administrative state” (129).

Yet, even as he underscores the gains black workers wrested from the courts, Frymer also draws attention to litigation’s unforeseen consequences. Judges cared little about the vital role unions played in checking the growth of economic inequality and in providing black workers with tools to defend their rights on the job. The penalties they imposed in discrimination cases often devastated unions’ treasuries, as the decisions also weakened the collective bargaining and seniority systems on which black and white workers alike rely to defend their interests. In effect, judges enabled African Americans to join institutions the courts themselves were helping to eviscerate. The most suggestive evidence for Frymer’s overall argument is the contrast between the NLRB’s and the courts’ handling of racism in union elections. Where the courts tended toward either/

or conclusions, the NLRB situated racism within complex, unequal relations of power rather than abstract ethics—and therefore rendered more sophisticated judgments and pro-worker results.

All told, Frymer deftly exposes the fallacy of the still sadly common arguments that pit “class politics” against “identity politics.” His work demonstrates that U.S. labor law had a built-in racial agenda, stemming from the contradictions of the Democratic Party coalition and the implicit rules by which American political institutions work. To imagine that race-neutral “universalism” characterized either the New Deal or the AFL-CIO, as some nostalgic social democrats have, thus does violence to the historical record. At the same time, however, Frymer provides an alternative to the prevailing scholarly answer to that willful amnesia: whiteness studies. For all its contributions to a relational understanding of racial identities and politics, most work in this vein, he rightly observes, has neglected employer and state power and instead adduced flawed psychological and cultural explanations of whites’ behavior.

Like not a few authors, Frymer has a tendency to overestimate the novelty of his intervention, or at least to render it imprecisely, in the manner that the rewards of academic competition encourage. He is surely not the first to take analysis of racism beyond the realm of individual psychology and to situate its perpetuation in institutions. In history and sociology, to say nothing of black activism, others have been doing this for decades, beginning with W. E. B. DuBois, whose brilliant contributions Frymer mischaracterizes (p. vii). What is new in this book is not the fact of attention to American political institutions but the way Frymer reveals how specific features of their development have undermined attempts to grapple simultaneously with race and class.

There are also a few important matters to which this pleasingly brief book might have devoted more attention. Frymer neglects the pivotal role of conservatives in shaping this history at every stage, particularly since the 1970s, which in turn leads him to view the courts, arguably, in too static terms. When he writes that “of all the institutions examined in this book . . . the courts arguably emerged the least ‘black and blue’” (p. 129), one wonders whether he is missing the likely sea change to come as two decades of conservative judicial appointments and aggressive organizing by the Federalist Society and conservative legal foundations take full effect. Readers are also likely to wish for more attention to variations between unions. With African Americans accounting for one-third of the labor movement’s contemporary membership, which unions are addressing racial

inequity best and how might explanation of their success deepen the already rich analysis of *Black and Blue*? Finally, Frymer's arguments suggest the need for more attention to party politics as they have evolved since the New Deal and the Great Society. How does the takeover of the Republican Party by its heavily southern-based right wing help to account for the growing hostility to working-class interests on the part of national political institutions? And what of the Democratic Party? Frymer's subtitle suggests that it is nearly dead and gone, but the electrifying grassroots mobilization that helped Barack Obama to win the presidency suggests otherwise. How might the Democrats' recent renewal—to which both civil rights and labor forces contributed—add new questions to the agenda set by this fine book?

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Research Methods and Information Sources

The Analysis of Firms and Employees: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches. Edited by Stefan Bender, Julia Lane, Kathryn L. Shaw, Fredrik Andersson, and Till von Wachter. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008. 400 pp. ISBN 978-0-226-04287-9, \$90.00 (cloth).

The eleven chapters in this volume are from the 2006 National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) Conference on the Analysis of Firms and Employees (CAFE). The book brings together researchers who are at the nexus of labor economics, industry studies, and industrial organization. It is subdivided into four sections: "Human Resource Practices and Firm Productivity," "Firm Differences in Human Resource Practices," "The Effects of Ownership Changes on the Organization of Production," and "Globalization, Trade, and Labor Markets." The contributors focus on a wide range of theoretical and empirical issues. Two themes, however, resonate throughout the book. First, each chapter addresses, in a unique way, the often complex interaction between firms and employees (for example, the relation between firm performance and the organization of work). Second, each chapter uses novel data collection strategies and innovative empirical methods (for example, firm-level case studies or linked employer-employee data bases).

The starting point for this volume is the observation that an empirical analysis of firms and employees can take place at two distinct levels. First, researchers can use large-scale, nationally representative data sets, which may combine administrative or survey data on firms and employees. These data are typically produced and held by national statistical agencies. Second, researchers may, on their own, develop either specialized surveys for collection of personnel information on a group of firms or single-case studies. Data from the latter are typically proprietary. Each empirical strategy can have strengths and weaknesses. This volume shows the rich variety of data and economic insights that can be produced by combining the two approaches.

The first three chapters address important issues surrounding human resource practices and firm productivity. The first chapter, by Fredrik Andersson, Clair Brown, Benjamin Campbell, Hyowook Chiang, and Yooki Park, constructs measures of human resource practices in the U.S. electronics industry. The authors combine Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics data with R&D surveys. They compare the HR practices of low-R&D and high-R&D firms and show how interactions between HR practices and R&D affect productivity. They find a positive association between performance and buying new skills, an effect that is especially pronounced for high-R&D firms. The second chapter, by Stephen V. Burks, Jeffrey Carpenter, Lorenz Götte, Kristen Monaco, Kay Porter, and Aldo Rustichini, combines longitudinal personnel data from a single large U.S. trucking company with a panel survey of newly hired workers. This in-depth study investigates the intricate relations among HR practices, incentives, productivity, and employee turnover. The third chapter, by Marc-Arthur Diaye, Nathalie Greenan, and Michal W. Urdanivia, uses a matched employer-employee survey on computerization and organizational change in a set of French companies. The authors investigate the effect of subjective performance evaluations on employee effort when work is done either individually or in groups and teams. They show that the evaluation interview both attracts high-productivity workers and affects productivity.

The second section in this volume investigates firm-level differences in human resource practices. The chapter by von Wachter, Bender, and Kathryn Shaw investigates linked employer-employee (LEE) data over time for all workers in the German car industry matched to their establishments. The authors probe initial wage differences and career paths of workers and investigate the conditions under which these differences persist or dissipate.