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The Temp Economy

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The book establishes the challenge and then closes with an agenda for improving job quality in the United States. The very structure of the book makes it clear that the nation will not develop appropriate solutions to polarization and the precariousness of jobs if our analysis fails to take into account the role of institutions and firm strategy in undermining job quality. Kalleberg calls for a new social compact to support workers while allowing firms the flexibility they need to compete. The policy prescriptions build on international research, especially the experience of the Netherlands and Denmark, which combine flexibility for employers (ease of hiring and firing workers) with strong security for workers (via strong and inclusive unemployment insurance and retraining schemes). Kalleberg argues that this "flexicurity" approach could be adapted to the United States and provide a strategy to counteract the thirty-year trends his book so well documents. While the proposals he offers could indeed help build a new and more responsive system for both workers and firms in the nation, toxic national politics leave little doubt that major initiatives to do so will be out of reach for the foreseeable future.

Any academic interested in understanding the sweep of change in the U.S. labor market or conveying the change to graduate students should read and use this volume. It is a fortunate coincidence that both *Good Jobs, Bad Jobs* and Osterman and Shulman's *Good Jobs America* (see review this edition) are coming out now and devote serious attention to the issue of job quality and how to improve it. American researchers and policymakers should take in the evidence that these two important books provide and take up the issue of improving the quality of jobs for every American worker.

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The Temp Economy. By Erin Hatton. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011, pp. 212, ISBN 978-1-4399-0082-9, $26.95 (Cloth).

In *The Temp Economy,* Erin Hatton examines the historical evolution of temporary agency work in the United States from its origins to its current form. In her compelling analysis, she marshals evidence from industry publications, popular media, and legal and legislative sources to track the expansion of temporary agency work. In addition, she explores how labor market actors responded to the temporary agency industry. She connects each stage of development in the temporary agency industry in the United States to labor market factors, trends in business, and legal and legislative changes to help explain its growth. In the second half of the book, she examines the consequences of this expansion.

At the core of her analysis, Hatton argues that after the Second World War, the temporary agency industry took steps to establish itself as an influence on how companies viewed employment relationships. In the early days, their focus was on finding employment for white middle-class women interested in earning supplemental income. As the temporary agencies gained traction, they revised their pitch—discarding the Kelly Girl for the "semi-permanent" employee—to broaden their reach to the male workforce. The maturation of the industry featured a modified appeal to employers, which presented the temporary agency workers as potential replacements for full-time employees.

Hatton covers a breadth of material and offers interesting insights into how temporary agency work developed in the United States. For example, an important sidebar story she highlights is the tension between the temporary agency industry and labor unions regarding the use of temporary agency workers as replacement workers in strikes. The strength of her approach rests on her analysis of how the temporary agency industry marketed its services and adapted its approach to expand its role in the labor market.

In contrast to other books that focus on firsthand accounts from the temporary agency workforce or adopt a legal or economic perspective on the expansion of temporary agency work in the United States, Hatton's multidisciplinary approach fills a void. She brings together these various perspectives, along with an analysis of the temporary agency industry's effective approach to marketing, to offer a coherent explanation for the expanding influence of the temporary agency industry in the United States. The detailed evaluation of the

industry's campaign to expand its role in the US economy, and the specific legal, public relations, and public policy strategies it used are especially insightful.

The book, however, has some weaknesses that are worth noting. First, in some areas of the book it is difficult to determine where Hatton is drawing her own conclusions and where she is offering arguments developed by other scholars. The reader is left to refer to the chapter notes at the back of the book to clarify those distinctions. Second, the author's negative bias toward temporary agency work can overwhelm an otherwise thoughtful narrative. For example, "Temping is the quintessential 'bad' job (p. 1)." This statement overlooks the unemployed individuals for whom temporary agency work may be the only job available to pay the bills, as well as those workers who have supply side reasons for choosing temporary work. Recent scholarship recognizing that a more nuanced reality exists has shifted away from an altogether negative view of temporary agency work. For some, temporary agency work can offer a transitional step from unemployment to employment. Moreover, for some occupations, temporary work agencies help to bring some stability to an otherwise volatile labor market. In Hatton's portrayal, the temporary agency industry emerges as an all-powerful, dominant force in the U.S. economy that manipulates employers, the workforce, and labor unions. Perhaps this view overstates the industry's power to some degree. Indeed, by presenting employers with viable alternatives to full-time employees, the temporary agency industry helped undermine the traditional employment model. But other factors such as the shift from manufacturing to services and the rise of global competition were also influential.

Second, some direct evidence from the temporary industry or from the client firms who use temporary agency workers would be useful for evaluating Hatton's claims about their motivations. Third, many temporary agency companies originated in the United States are now multinational operations. While Hatton mentions this in passing, she misses an opportunity to draw comparisons between the reality of temporary agency work in the United States and the experience of other countries, such as the Netherlands, where regulations offer some security to the temporary agency workforce. Despite these shortcomings, Hatton brings together a wealth of material on temporary agency work in the United States that is a useful reference for those interested in this topic.

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A Company of One: Insecurity, Independence, and the New World of White-Collar Unemployment. By Carrie M. Lane. Ithaca and London: ILR Press, 2011. 194 pp. ISBN 978-0-8014-4964-2, $59.95 (Cloth); ISBN 978-0-8014-7727-0, $19.95 (Paperback).

A Company of One is an ethnographic study of Dallas high-tech workers who lost their jobs in the 2001 dot-com crash that probes their experiences and beliefs as long-term job seekers in casualized white-collar labor markets. Its deeper purpose is to "tell the story of an ideology and its consequences" (p. 135), namely, career management, also known in popular professional publications during the 1990s as free agency. Prevalent in the worlds of freelancers and "contract" workers, career management rests on "neoliberal faith in individual agency, the logic and efficiency of the free market, and the naturalness of the status-quo system of insecure employment" (p. 4). It exhorts "these workers [to see] themselves as 'companies of one,' entrepreneurial agents engaged in the constant labor of defining, improving, and marketing 'the brand called you'" (p. 9).

Lane is a cultural anthropologist whose focus is work and the meaning it holds, particularly for middle-class groups. She builds on such contemporary studies as those by Katherine Newman and Kathryn Dudley that examined economically battered and downwardly mobile groups in the 1980s. During three years of fieldwork (2001–4), Lane participated in dozens of meetings for unemployed professionals and conducted extensive open-ended interviews with 75 job seekers, both men and women, some several times. Her most typical informant was a married, well-educated, white male between the ages of thirty and fifty. Though much