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A Company of One: Insecurity, Independence, and the New World of White-Collar Unemployment

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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

of the book was written in 2003–5, Lane was drawn by the next financial crisis back to her research in 2009 to conduct follow-up interviews with nine of her primary informants. This proved fortuitous because it allowed for a longer test of career management's resilience and gave her informants a longer perspective as well. The 2009 interview data are incorporated in the book's epilogue.

Lane bores into the career management ideology throughout the book. The ideology begins with the now familiar declarations about the new realities: Loyalty is a thing of the past, all jobs are by nature temporary, layoffs are natural, and finally, all this is good because it reflects the ideals of the free market. Moreover, it portrays the ex-employee's new insecurity as an empowering alternative to dependence on a single employer, and it prescribes explicitly individualistic, apolitical, pro-market strategies to help the individual reposition for success. This "rhetorical reframing of insecurity neatly transfers the burden of maintaining the social contract onto the shoulders of the individual worker, who is expected not only to bear that burden but to welcome it as an opportunity for self-reliance" (p. 51). It's a version of *What's the Matter with Kansas?* in high-tech Dallas.

Believers in this worldview define themselves against "the losers . . . those outmoded men and women who failed to cast off the dependent mindset of the 'organization man,' who foolishly looked to paternalistic employers to provide them with job security. . ." (p. 9). Lane attempts to compare career management with past versions of the American creed of self-reliance (e.g., Calvinism and standard meritocratic individualism), but her rummaging through the stew of individualistic ideologies mostly reveals how slippery these belief systems are. Her accounts of how career management extends earlier versions of the ideology or even amounts to an historic cultural shift among white-collar workers become confusing. But these comparisons aside, Lane's analysis of the current ideology and its delusions is penetrating and on the mark. Career management's belief in corporations and individual employees as "equivalent entities" (p. 51), for instance, effectively yields a yellow-dog contract for the white-collar worker, where "employment is a contract entered into by equals, in which either side is free to walk away" (p. 52). Lane brings the reader to the realization that the current doctrine of the corporation-as-person is undergirded by its obverse, the idea of the person-as-corporation envisioned in the career management worldview.

In the middle chapters Lane examines how job seekers go about looking for work and managing their time and emotions. They structure everyday life, she finds, as if it were a corporate job. Among the "rituals of unemployment" they devote the most attention to are networking events, of which the author finds hundreds, just in Dallas alone. Often run by unemployed managers, the events are not surprisingly "modeled after a corporate meeting," and reinforce the ideas of career management "while negating other alternative ways of looking at the world" (p. 99). Lane takes readers through a meeting of one group, TechNet, including the participants' "delivery of well-rehearsed commercials" and their "positive for the week" (p. 98). TechNet's leader, like the leaders of many such groups, is overtly religious, and Lane notes the common involvement of religious institutions and individuals in the career management culture.

The final chapter contains the book's the most trenchant findings. Here Lane considers her subjects' narratives about marriage and family life and analyzes the ways in which the career management ideology and the spread of dual-earner families combine to reshape traditional notions of marriage and masculinity, as well as the experience of unemployment. Her central finding is the "hidden extent to which self-proclaimed flexible, entrepreneurial [male] free agents depend on the steady income of an employed spouse" (p. 13). Unlike twentieth-century men, who "consistently equated job loss and unemployment with a crisis of masculinity" (p. 119), male job seekers now have "alternative models of professional success, toward which they can turn" (p. 120). They advocate for a partnership in which neither spouse's job is seen as primary and feel comfortable filling domestic roles while unemployed. These new attitudes, Lane discovers, enable the men to "reconceptualize relying on a partner's income . . . as evidence of their masculinity rather than a challenge to it" (p. 121).

At the same time, Lane finds that these shifting narratives around gender and work have very different implications for the female job seekers. "[A]lthough the stigma and stress faced by unemployed middle-class men seem to be lessening, the opposite seems true for middle-class women" (p. 122). While relying more on a partner was, for some male job seekers, "a badge of their forward-thinking attitudes to marriage and gender roles," relying more on their male partners when they were unemployed made some women feel a sense of failure.

"Whereas the grounding of masculinity in secure employment has weakened for middle-class men in recent decades," Lane concludes that "for women . . . professional identity and self-worth appear to have become more closely intertwined" (p. 126). The female job-seekers, because they have "recently adopted a model of professional identity built around steady employment . . . are unable to share in career management's emotionally buoying effects" (p. 127).

In the book's epilogue Lane explores why, despite the ongoing insecurity and hardship of many who espouse it, career management continues to have appeal in U.S. popular culture. Seeking to understand her informants' political inaction and "why they have trouble envisioning any solution other than individual responses" (p. 155), the author asks them why the unemployed are not "taking to the streets." Her own answer is that it's "because they adhere to a cultural logic that renders such alternatives invisible" (p. 155)—that is, they frame as natural and inevitable social conditions that are actually the result of specific corporate and government policies. Ultimately, Lane suggests, "social change occurs only through a change in values, in ways of looking at the world" (p. 155). Despite her frequent references to other ways of seeing the world and possible alternatives to career management ideology, however, she does not identify these or open them for discussion with her informants. In Lane's defense, such intervention lies beyond the normal scope of ethnography. *Company of One* is a fine study that fulfills an important research need, but one wonders: What if the project was extended to offer its subjects some alternative ways of viewing their situation? Could it help move some of the unemployed to action?

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