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A SOCIAL HISTORY OF THE LABORING CLASSES FROM COLONIAL TIMES TO THE PRESENT BY JACQUELINE JONES. Blackwell Publishers, 1999. 224 pp. ISBN 0-631-20770-8 pb. $ 22.95

Students of American Civilization, including historians and literary scholars, are likely to receive with interest and gratitude the newest study by Jacqueline Jones, an outstanding American historian of race, class, and gender. *A Social History of the Laboring Classes* is the fourth book by Jones, following the Bancroft Prize winner *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow* (1986), *The Dispossessed* (1993), and *American Work* (1998). It is also, on another level of continuity, part of a series edited by Jack P. Greene and entitled *Problems in American History*. The book offers a synthesis of the social history of work – which is a crucial component of American civic identity – from the colonial period through the late twentieth century. Jones defines work in the broadest sense as "any activity that leads to the production of goods and services" (1999:1). Employing a definition that accommodates not only wage-earning, but also domestic and communal labor, Jones focuses on interconnectedness of various groups of American workers: "waged and unwaged, men and women, black and white, native-born and immigrant, agricultural and industrial" (2). She uses the plural form "working classes" in the title and throughout the study to account for the American workers' tendency to shift their individual and collective self-identification.

In Chapter 1, devoted to the seventeenth-century colonies, Jones juxtaposes the social and economic development of New England and that of the Chesapeake. Whereas New England replicated the English division of society into small villages, the Southern colonies, which consisted of isolated households, were a new world of work to English-born men and women. New England families, which were much less dependent on the fluctuations of international market than Southern households, perceived work as part of routine family activities, and not a degrading exploitation of servants. The status

of various kinds of workers in that period could be located along a continuum of dependence, rather than described in terms of strict opposition. Far from having a "class" consciousness, the indentured servants understood their status to be temporary, and felt free to resist "hard usage", although their defiance of authority tended to be spontaneous and unorganized. In the mid-seventeenth century, it was difficult to disentangle household and community relationships from work relationships in New England and elsewhere in the colonies. It was during the latter part of the seventeenth century that the Southern colonies moved toward slavery. In 1700 the line that divided colonists was between the free and the unfree, in both Northern and Southern colonies. Age was a determining factor and African heritage was increasingly a disadvantage in the South.

The runaway apprentice Benjamin Franklin epitomizes the eighteenth-century spirit of enterprise in Chapter 2. However, as one of the Founding Fathers, he also represents exclusiveness of the American project. One of the ironies of the American Revolution was that the rhetoric of freedom was appropriated by white men, such as Franklin and Jefferson, to reinforce their own superiority and exclude some groups from their vision of "good life". Jones opposes the simplistic notion of the contrast between "free labor" in the North and exploitation in the South, and discusses the oppression of large numbers of black workers, slave and free, in the North and South. While Southern slaveholders gradually developed a theory of "paternalism" to rationalize and perpetuate the existing labor pattern, slavery in the North was far from benign. Since housing was a premium in the North, enslaved workers were discouraged from having families, and often felt isolated from their compatriots. In the South, however, by 1750 the black family had emerged as a viable institution.

The third chapter, on the antebellum South, employs the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* as a point of reference, and describes the hierarchy of working people from the slaveholding elite (husbands and wives) down to the modest slaveowners who labored in the fields with their bondsmen and women, and further down to the landless whites, squatters, at the very bottom of the Southern white social structure. Jones distinguishes and discusses three kinds of work performed by enslaved Southerners: the tasks imposed by a white person, domestic labors on behalf of their own family members, and lastly, condoned or illicit "overwork". By the late antebellum period, the latter came to be increasingly identified with political subversion. Jones describes slavery as "an inherently aggressive system in both political and economic terms" (76), and subverts some of the myths created by slaveholders: the myth of a pampered house-servant, the myth of organic society (belied by the labor patterns in Southern cities which witnessed rivalries between free and enslaved, white and black workers), and the notion that all free men were white and all blacks were slaves (in fact, it was not unusual for blacks and whites to

work together at the same tasks in the rural South). Jones makes an interesting point about the inner conflict in the stance of slaveholders: as political officials, they understood the necessity of barring black workers from certain kinds of work; as profit-seekers, however, they were more tolerant of their hired slaves' autonomy.

Chapter 4, which focuses on the conflicts among Northern laboring classes before and during the Civil War, begins with vignettes of two displaced types of worker: the colonial craftsman working in a household-shop, who had become reduced to the status of employee in a factory, and the young woman of middling landowning classes who lost her function as a household producer. Jones is wary, however, of taking an elegiac view of antebellum Northern workers, and emphasizes, instead, the emergence of new job categories as a result of revolutions in technology and transportation. She points out that despite the rise of craft-based labor unions, working classes in the North remained fragmented. Conflicts among different groups of workers in urban areas were often far more bitter than conflicts between workers and their employers. Jones explains further the politics of Northern migrants to the Midwest, who became the standard-bearers of a "free labor, free soil" ideology. Their objective was to counteract the competition of slaveholding neighbors. Hence, while calling for abolition of slavery, they also demanded restrictions on black migration and job opportunities. Exposing the hypocrisy of some Northern proponents of abolition, Jones argues that "the plight of black workers throughout the antebellum North foreshadowed the legal and institutional barriers that southern blacks would face after the Civil War" (98). From the point of view of black soldiers in the Union Army, who remained under the command of white officers and were denied equal pay, the work of war did not differ from the patterns of civilian labor. The war opened, however, the door to white women professionals.

Discussing ideologies of race in modernizing economies, Jones compares in Chapter 5 the cases of African-American and Chinese workers. The outcome of the Civil War did not change the pattern of dependence of the black family on their landlord in the rural South, which persisted well into the twentieth century. Jones analyzes various systems of labor in the rural South and focuses on the system of sharecropping as a way of combining the planters' desire to grow more cotton, and the black people's desire to work as families. Although sharecroppers tended to move from one place to another, upward social mobility was rare among them. At the turn of the century black family members were desperate to enter modern industrial labor force. Their efforts had parallels on the West Coast, where Chinese immigrants suffered from similar exclusionary policies adopted by white men who thus sought to protect their own superiority. The absence of family units among Chinese workers, due to restrictive laws that barred Chinese women from entering the United States, led the Chinese to form labor organizations and struggle aggressively for higher wages and better

working conditions. Although most Chinese took the jobs that white workers did not want, by the mid-1870s anti-Chinese sentiment had become a major political movement in California. In spite of discrimination, some African Americans and Chinese emerged as leaders and challenged political mechanisms that sustained racial ideologies.

Chapter 6, "The Laboring Classes in Turn-of-the-Century America", discusses the role of immigrants, who between the Civil War and World War I dominated working classes and fueled an economic revolution. To achieve economic security, immigrants sought to locate entrepreneurial niches for themselves. Although those ethnic niches offered internal ladders of social mobility, they also inhibited working-class consciousness and led to inter-group rivalry. Around the turn of the century, American intellectuals, policy makers, as well as "Progressive" reformers (who tried to mediate between the restless and potentially dangerous workers on the one hand and arrogant labor barons on the other) engaged in a heated debate over the definition of the good society. Workers not only talked but also began to organize themselves.

Tracing the history of national labor organizations from the foundation of the National Labor Union in 1866, Jones emphasizes the disruptive force of racial prejudice among whites. She argues, however, that despite traditional hostilities based on religion, ethnicity and gender, this period in American history is notable for cross-class labor alliances. The desperate efforts of workers to claim a measure of dignity met with a tremendous amount of state power and led to labor violence in the late nineteenth century. Although the state was ready to suppress strikes, it also employed researchers to investigate working conditions. Some of those studies found their way into popular magazines, and influenced attitudes of numerous readers. Within state and local governments, the condition of labor inspired not only research but also legislative action (e.g. laws limiting child labor).

Jones describes the period from 1916 to 1945 as the time of unprecedented industrial growth, and pinpoints three key themes in the history of labor in the twentieth century: technological innovations at worksites, large-scale population movements caused by displacement of workers, and intervention of the federal government into the economy and the workplace. Despite skyrocketing profits during the war, hostility between employers and organized labor continued. Jones undermines popular myths when she argues that, first, for ordinary working people, the decade of the twenties bore little resemblance to popularized images of the Jazz Age (179), and, second, the Great Depression that began in 1929 came less as a shock than as a confirmation of numerous Americans' precarious status in the workplace. The financial disaster, which affected different groups of workers in different ways, fueled subeconomies: filmmaking and organized crime employed people in a wide range of jobs.

Jones reevaluates the New Deal as a watershed of major propositions in the history of American labor, but also as "a limited highly politicized and ultimately contradictory hodgepodge of federal legislation" (189). Emphasizing Roosevelt's pro-union stance, which hastened the organization of all sorts of workers, Jones discusses the significance of the Congress of Industrial Organizations. She recognizes it as a breakthrough in the history of American labor movement (especially in terms of the collective-action strategies it employed), but she also points out the limits of CIO's success. By the 1940s and 1950s it had become clear that only a favored few could benefit from the gains achieved for workers as a group during the Great Depression. The fact that the Great Depression came to an end only when the country began to mobilize for war revealed the limits of the New Deal. The racist employment policies in the Armed Services as well as the promise of good jobs and good wages for many white women during World War II resemble the social patterns during the Civil War.

In Chapter 8 Jones explains the changing situation of American labor in the second half of the twentieth century in the context of international politics. The onset of the Cold War influenced the attitudes of labor union leaders, who concentrated on insuring job security for their members while demonstrating their loyalty to America and distancing themselves from all kinds of radicalism. Jones examines further the political reasons and social implications of white Americans' exodus out of the cities into the suburbs. Drained of their multi-class vitality, American cities came to be populated by the poorest people of color and the wealthiest whites. Jones analyzes the role of women in suburban areas, and the expansion of the "pink collar ghetto" in the 1950s and 1960s. She juxtaposes the middle-class women's movement, which originated in suburbia, and the National Welfare Rights Organization shaped by poor, mostly African-American urban women. She also describes the situation of those who faced hard times during the "affluent decade" of the 1950s: migrant workers and rural Southerners. Although in 1964 the legal basis of all-white and all-male workforces collapsed, many unions found ways of circumventing the law's intent. The Reagan Revolution of the 1980s consisted in delegating social welfare responsibilities to individual states, and contributed to the widening of the gap between rich and poor, which paralleled the decline in union strength. As a result, the mid-twentieth-century broad middle class was replaced by the late twentieth-century bifurcated workforce. In the context of economic and political transformation after the collapse of communism, the issues of welfare, affirmative action, and foreign immigration provoked passionate debate. Within four decades after World War II the locus of union militancy in the United States shifted from factories to the worksites of service workers. In the 1980s and 1990s "Fourth Wave" immigrants, who

along with African Americans formed an army of service workers, helped change the face of American labor.

With the clear outlines of general tendencies and a multitude of examples to prove the validity of statements, the book is an invaluable source of information for students of American history and general readers alike. Literary scholars can benefit greatly by coming in touch with Jones's brilliant, inspiring scholarship. First of all, especially in the early chapters Jones frequently refers to texts which form part of curriculum in American literary history: journals of the Pilgrim Fathers, Thomas Jefferson's writings, Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography*, Frederick Douglass's *Narrative*, as well as Louisa May Alcott's novel *Work*. All these examples show how strongly politicized American literature is. Second, methods and implications of Jones's study may have a direct bearing on analyses of authorship as labor, as well as valorization of various forms of work in literary texts. Finally, Jones's book is a paragon of stylistic elegance; among its many uses, it may serve as a model to anyone who aspires to write sophisticated and yet lucid and highly readable texts. Suggestions for further reading (divided into primary and secondary sources) at the end of each chapter, as well as index of names and issues at the end of the book are very helpful to those who seek specialized knowledge to which this successful synthesis holds the key.