

Capitalism and the work ethic

INDUSTRIALIZATION AND THE AMERICAN LABOR MOVEMENT, 1850-1900

By Irwin Yellowitz
Kennikat Press, Port Washington, N.Y.,
1976, \$12.50

THE WORK ETHIC IN INDUSTRIAL AMERICA, 1850-1920

By Daniel T. Rodgers
University of Chicago Press, Chicago,
1978, \$15.00

By James B. Gilbert

The social and political impact of modern industrial work was a great question mark that hung over American society at the turn of the 19th century. In this period of reflection and reformation, work was a disruptive factor for two reasons: The transformation of human labor lay behind many of the swift economic changes of the era, yet pre-industrial myths about work were woven into the texture of practically every contemporary social theory of note.

While this situation has changed somewhat, our distance from the thoughts and decisions of that generation of reformers and activists is not as great as we might imagine. The public rediscovery that work is unfulfilling and demeaning has seemed to move in tandem with most important reform ideas since World War II. That work is alienating seems to be part of almost any modern economic and social critique of American society.

The changing conditions of work have an importance we should not underestimate. To puzzle out its intricacies is to explore the very nature of the relations inherent in industrial capitalism. To examine its effects upon workers, even to look at the work ethic through the historian's eye, is to touch some of the deepest sources of class feeling in America. But one complication should be noticed: work as a human experience may have little to do with what we call the "work ethic." In fact, the degrading reality of the one and the ethical and social promises of the other have clashed since the beginning of industrialization. In his early writing on the subject, Marx defined this clash as a form of alienation, a physical and psychological appropriation of goods and status from workers. While Marx was working out his radical vision of industrial labor and its consequences, American observers, nursed on Calvinism and weaned on a craft and agrarian society, had developed a version of the work ethic that played a crucial ideological role in the period of capitalist take-off. It provided, first of all, an ethical justification for the immiseration of work by defining all labor, even the most menial, as God's work.

This ascetic notion corresponded well with the poverty of social reality and turned exploitation into a positive and soul-felt virtue. The work ethic also explained social hierarchy by promising success as a reward for hard work. Those who rose in society, so this argument went, were both virtuous and clever. A more abstract version of this definition of work was imbedded in theories of middle class individualism that defined the personality as self-made.

Workplace reality.

The problem with such a comprehensive theory was that it did not fit the reality of the late 19th century, neither for worker, nor for middle class people caught increasingly in white collar versions of proletarian life.

Laborers worked as hard as ever, yet success, defined as getting out of the factory, eluded them. Middle class intellectuals at the same time bitterly attacked the disappearance of individualism and worried about social hierarchy and widening class distinctions. Too important a theory to relinquish, the work ethic was closely examined in this period as a kind

of ideal with which to criticize the reality of the factory system.

Although, in public at least, this was largely a middle class affair, the discussion of work prior to 1900 was also joined by unions and laborers. Irwin Yellowitz's interesting book documents one portion of this discussion. His major point is indisputable: the conditions of employment changed rapidly after 1860. Workers reacted in a variety of ways to the intensification of exploitation, but the author is interested in one primary impulse which he finds voiced in labor union efforts to assert control over the workplace.

With the increased division of labor stimulated by mechanization, unions such as the stonecutters, tobacco workers, and carpenters tried to resist the effects of technological innovations. Half-heartedly, they sometimes even opposed the introduction of new machinery into factories, or other management reorganizations that changed skills and introduced uncertainty or part-time employment. The futility of holding out against modernization, however, was almost always obvious, and unions usually turned to more peripheral issues as a means of retaining skill levels and favorable work environments.

As Yellowitz notes, this meant that unions supported the eight-hour day (to spread work around) and tried to assert control over apprenticeship to limit entry in selected trades. They also opposed immigration, arguing that foreign workers always undercut American wage earners and tempted owners to introduce economies of skill and scale. Finally, unions opposed child labor and woman's labor on the grounds that both undercut the wages of skilled males.

Industrial crack-up.

While there are additional reasons for such union positions on child labor and immigration, for example, Yellowitz's reading of the dilemma of workers is a persuasive one. Unable to control the workplace, they could either try to prevent the application of new machinery (which was a fruitless task) or they could try to eliminate competitive labor sources. Although only hinted at, this suggests that many of the social reforms of the late 19th century concerning working conditions and supported by unions were issues of class.

From the middle class viewpoint, the expectations of work encoded in the work ethic seemed just as seriously compromised by industrialism. Dan Rodgers' account of the work ethic in industrial America provides a good description of an important turn taken in the discussion of work after the Civil War. He finds two ideals held in tension in the 19th century: one, that work must be creative and was a kind of moral duty; the other that work was productive and founded on delayed gratification and asceticism.

When plunged into the open hearth of the industrial revolution these associated ideas cracked apart. The moral and creative side of the work ethic became increasingly abstract, he argues, and attached itself vainly to political and social disputes where it caused more confusion than enlightenment. The other side of the work ethic was denatured, even reversed, when asceticism gave way to the increasing popularity of leisure and self-indulgence, setting the stage for a consumer society.

Beyond these two fascinating discussions of work and the work ethic at the turn of the century, there were at least two other key reactions to changes in the work ethic. The first, which fed into management reorganization and revitalization, declared that even though industrial work might be alienating, workers could be compensated for the loss by a variety of schemes, in education, planned leisure, sports, or through one of a thousand plans to make work appear to be more pleasing. The other approach was muted and still

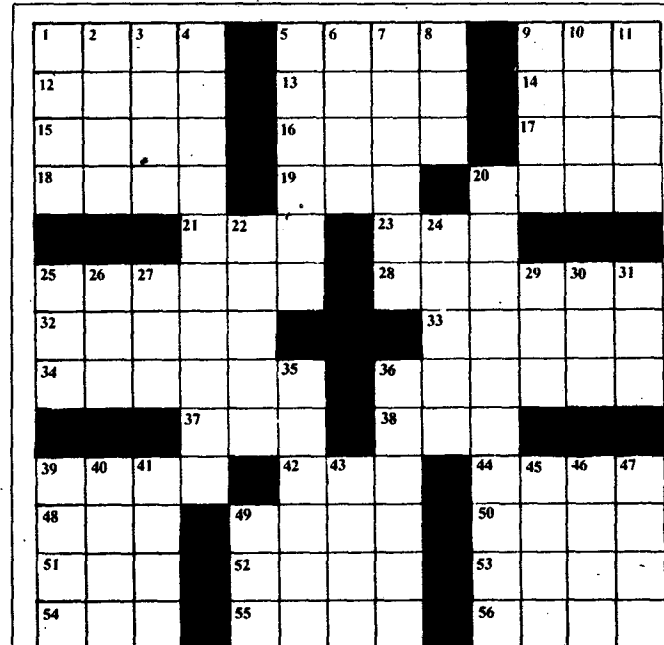


Wives of striking Ohio coal miners, in late 19th century, thumping pans at a "black-leg" (scab) trying to take strikers' jobs.

remains to be explored by American society. This was the radical, class conscious attitude that the only logical response to alienated work was for laborers to capture complete control over the workshop. While this solution suggested itself to socialists and a few middle class intellectuals, by the end of the first World War, it was

largely a response left out in the cold. ■

James B. Gilbert is professor of American history at the University of Maryland. He is the author of *Designing the Industrial State* and, most recently, *Work Without Salvation*, a study in changing concepts of the work ethic in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.



San Juan & San Jose

By Jay Shepherd

ACROSS

- 1 Roman general: _____ Antony
- 5 Thick soft mass
- 9 Loiter
- 12 Medley
- 13 Former philanthropist: _____ Kahn
- 14 Actress _____ Rehan
- 15 Large wading bird
- 16 Uncommon
- 17 Hit (slang)
- 18 Endure
- 19 Article
- 20 Funeral _____
- 21 Biblical name
- 23 Flightless bird
- 25 Portuguese navigator
- 28 Bound
- 32 "_____ in Paris"
- 33 Buzz
- 34 Acts in opposition
- 36 Heavy political backer
- 37 Request
- 38 Recreation org. (Mil.)
- 39 Baseball's Musial
- 42 Incumbents

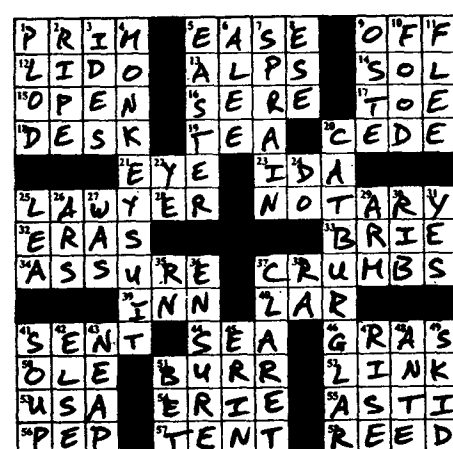
- 44 Gown
- 48 Sing with closed lips
- 49 Health resorts
- 50 "The Terrible"
- 51 Single unit
- 52 Church part
- 53 Program of events
- 54 Cooking utensil

- 55 Pair
- 56 Auto creator

DOWN

- 1 Drudge
- 2 Troubadour song
- 3 Social reformer: Jacob _____
- 4 Certain Central American
- 5 Subject to death
- 6 Where Provo is
- 7 "Sesame _____"
- 8 Garden tool
- 10 Indolent
- 11 Stare open-mouthed
- 20 Where Ponce is
- 22 Epsom _____
- 24 Early-warning satellite
- 24 Auto
- 26 Chimpanzee, for one
- 27 Woman's undergarment
- 29 Disney dwarf
- 30 Spenserian heroine
- 31 Fondle
- 35 Boy's given name
- 36 Bothered -
- 39 Do marketing
- 40 Popular fish
- 41 Biblical word
- 43 Space agcy.
- 45 Egg-shaped
- 46 Poet
- 47 Concludes
- 49 Mournful

Answer to last week's puzzle



LIFE IN THE U.S.

SPORTS

Duke basketball: the men prosper, the women suffer

By Barry Jacobs

DURHAM, N.C.

A HANDMADE SIGN ON THE wall in Debbie Leonard's cramped office in Duke's Cameron Indoor Stadium explains the smile on her face. "Nothing great," it says, "is ever achieved without enthusiasm."

Leonard, in her second year as head coach of Duke's women's basketball team, is nothing if not enthusiastic. Yet, as she readily points out, all the spirit in the world won't help you in big-time college athletics unless it's backed up with money.

Title IX of the federal Educational Amendments Act of 1972 mandated that schools receiving federal funds provide equal opportunity in athletics for both men and women. But the deadline for full compliance—July 21, 1978—came and went without much notice. In the absence of definitive guidelines or direction by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, the agency charged with enforcing Title IX, the nation's colleges and universities set their own pace toward equality, and were free to define "equality" itself.

As a result, all-too-familiar men's standards were applied to upgrading women's programs. Basketball, one women's sport with the potential to produce revenue, received the most attention.

Some schools began pouring funds into their women's basketball programs as soon as the impact of Title IX became clear, to get the jump on other schools in exploiting the market. Many of the small colleges that ruled the women's basketball roost were shouldered aside by free-spending major colleges like North Carolina, UCLA, and Maryland.

At North Carolina State, an early financial commitment to women's basketball brought impressive results. Boasting 12 scholarship players (the maximum allowed under women's rules), a full-time coaching staff and a large budget for recruiting and travel, State was ranked in the Top Ten the past two years and is right up there again this season. It is not uncommon for the Lady Wolfpack to draw 4,000 fans to home games. They have their own pep band and cheerleaders and their own fundraising wing of the school's alumni booster organization.

So when State travels the 25 miles to Duke, a longtime rival on the men's level in the Atlantic Coast Conference, it's like stepping back in time.

The Duke women have no cheerleaders, no pep band. They're lucky to draw 100 fans to their 8,564-capacity home arena, in part because Durham's major newspaper doesn't cover their games.

Men with money.

According to coach Debbie Leonard, the Duke women make do on under \$20,000, "enough to just get by." The basketball team travels to away games in vans with U-Haul trailers attached. With enough money last year for four partial scholarships, three went to players Leonard conceded "couldn't have played on many high school teams." No wonder Duke posted a 1-19 record last season in its first stab at Division I women's basketball, losing to Maryland 103-39 and to North Carolina State 125-43.

Women's coach Debby Leonard gets by with \$20,000, while Bill Foster has \$500,000 to play with.

Meanwhile Duke's men's squad, with a budget of approximately \$500,000, was the toast of college basketball last year, rising from four consecutive last-place finishes in the Atlantic Coast Conference to a 27-7 record and a shot at the NCAA championship against Kentucky. While Leonard was getting an ulcer, her male counterpart, Bill Foster, was being acclaimed coach of the year.

Foster, a perceptive man whose interests extend far beyond the basketball court, is well aware of the gap between men's and women's basketball at Duke. He has tried to help Leonard, providing advice, equipment, and joint scheduling opportunities that enable the women to share the larger crowds and jet travel.

"She [Leonard] just has to hang in there," he said, "keep working. That's how she can improve her program—not getting impatient, and building. It's like building a house. You don't do it all at once; you do it room by room."

Foster, a past president of the National Association of Basketball Coaches (men's), questions whether women are wise to pursue big-time athletic programs. "Unfortunately, they're taking the thing and heading it in our direction," he said. Critics contend Foster worries about competition with the women for Duke's athletic dollars somewhere down the road. But the concern in his voice was genuine when he said of women's basketball, "Before, it was fun to play. Now it's fun to win. I'm not sure that's the best idea."

HEW's Califano calls for equality with exceptions

Until HEW Secretary Joseph Califano recently announced proposals for equalizing financial support for male and female athletes, the American collegiate sports establishment wondered whether the government would mandate equal expenditures according to the number of men and women engaged in athletics, as most women hoped, or would recognize the status quo and be "sensible" in applying Title IX.

The men need not have worried. Califano said that intercollegiate football probably merited an exception. So, too, apparently, will intercollegiate basketball. The exceptions, Califano explained, were based on "sex-neutral" factors such as the level of competition in a sport and costs peculiar to that sport. Thus football earned an exemption because, with 90 players to equip and care for, and a pack of coaches to train them, it obviously entails exceptional expense. And basketball probably merited a dispensation because most major college teams play national schedules.

Califano accomplished, then, just what the men's National Collegiate Ath-

letic Association (NCAA) has been lobbying for ever since Title IX was enacted in 1972—that major "revenue-producing" sports be measured by one standard while other sports stand up to an entirely different one. At schools where sports other than football and basketball are considered major sports and are played on a national level, the new guidelines merely muddy the issue.

At universities like Duke, where the athletic department already provides equal funding proportional to the number of men and women in nonrevenue sports, no changes are required. But what of programs like women's basketball that have the potential for growth? If a team schedules national opponents, does it move up to the same category as men's football and basketball? Will that then require equal funding for the women, or will it earn them another amorphous "exemption"? And if nationally-oriented women's teams must be given equal funding, will that encourage some schools purposely to stifle the development of some women's sports?

The confusion is far from over. —B.J.



Duke coach Debbie Leonard recruits without money; player Tara McCarthy (insert) practices late at night, after the men are gone.

Neither is 26-year-old Debbie Leonard, who knows all about playing sports for the sheer enjoyment of it, having lettered in field hockey, basketball, and softball at High Point College. But she is determined to join the party. "Women's basketball is here," she insisted. "You either take advantage of the situation or not. Grant scholarships and take a stand, or play just to have fun."

Most of the emerging women's basketball powers are state institutions. Private universities like Duke are hard-pressed to come up with comparable funding even when they try, a fact Leonard reluctant-

ly accepts. "I don't think it would do me much good to file a Title IX suit," she admitted. Not that she's willing to meekly swallow poverty and defeat. "I think the athletic department has to take a stand and say, 'This is what we want for women athletes at Duke University.'"

Idle talk.

Duke athletic director Tom Butters explains that the needs of the school's traditional prestige sports—men's basketball and especially football—take precedence over funding women's basketball or anything else. Still, he declared, "I believe in quality programs, both men's and women's." He said Duke is implementing a five-year plan to bring its women's program up to par with those at other schools.

If so, it's taking its time about it. Leonard's budget isn't appreciably different this year from last. "I have to pat myself on the back," smiled Leonard. "I did a pretty good job of recruiting without money." Better than pretty good when Duke's prohibitive \$6,000 annual cost and tough academics are taken into account.

But getting quality players to come to Duke is only part of the battle. They still have to practice, to work at becoming a team, a task made more difficult because Duke's athletic facilities are so limited. Until the women's volleyball season ended in mid-November, Leonard's squad started practice at 8:15 each night after first Foster's team, and then the other women, were through. Her players didn't get out of the locker room until 10:30; Leonard was at work past 11 p.m. "I've got a bunch of zombies walking around here as basketball players," she observed, adding, "but that's just the way it's going to have to be."

Debbie Leonard is confident that with enough money, promotion, and press coverage, she can make women's basketball work at Duke. "I'm going to try to build a program here if they'll support me," she pledged. "Give me the kids and I can build a winning team. If I can't produce, I'll leave."