**History from the Bottom Up & the Inside Out**, by James R. Barrett, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2017, ????+283pp., £????(paperback), ISBN 978-0-8223-6979-0

James R. Barrett’s work sits in a long succession of research focussing on the primacy of workers agency in the context of the US in the nineteenth and twentieth century’s. With the gaze clearly focussed on history from the ‘bottom up’, this collection of essays offers an additional dimension in the form of a detailed analysis of the subjective experiences of those individuals who formed part of a combined movement. This might initially appear antithetical to a history about the collective. However, through rich empirical narratives documenting detailed individual accounts, a convincing and powerful case is made of the importance of these individual stories and personal experiences of struggle and conflict that shaped and attracted them to activism (including Barrett himself). A major strength is the utilization of a history of workers from the ‘inside out’. This ‘inner history’ is inclusive of personal relationships, emotions and identities. Such an approach to history from ‘below’ is all the better since it offers a more rounded and richer perspective of everyday class and culture. At the same time, this attention to detail does not detract from the central tenant of Barrett’s analysis of a materialist approach to history since these are positioned within the wider context of capitalist structures, the role of the powerful and the seismic changes of late nineteenth and twentieth-century American society. Barrett admirably captures the intersections between the ‘on the ground’ micro relationships and their relations with macro structural forces above. Moreover, the multitudes of shade found in everyday life can often be lost in narratives that offer understanding that is more black and white. Capturing the subtleties and complexities of everyday class, race and gender and their historical contingency are what this work does well.

The perspectives that inform the collection are influenced by a combination of critical and exemplary academics (Edward Thompson, David Montgomery, and others ) as well as the personal experiences and political convictions of the author (trade union activism; left-politics and religious and family influences). The result is a grounded and politically informed scholarly piece of work that seeks to humanize and understand what can be at times, difficult social relationships. Indeed, the rootedness of the author (with his feet in different camps sometimes simultaneously) and his position as a witness, actor, and scholar during a period of unprecedented changes, offers many advantages. For example, such a vantage point will influence what sorts of questions to ask; which empirical material to look for and where, and will inform the theoretical position upon which this will hang and make sense. Sounds straightforward but how do you account and theorize for the socialistic solidarity of workers movements like trade unions and communist organizations whilst at the same time dealing with the rabid racism, inherent sexism and homophobia that was widespread in some of these organizations?

In this, the work displays honesty in terms of acknowledging and documenting not only progressive individual and collective acts of solidarity but also significantly, the less palatable episodes of *intra-class* struggles and conflict. The book captures well the complexities and nuances informing racism throughout this period, situating this in historically and politically specific conditions and within the backdrop of legal and social processes and broader social and political changes. The empirical detail of individual events serves to enrich and broaden our understanding of complex social relationships. So whilst it is clear that at particular historical junctures, racism appears to be informed by economic insecurities with trade union leaders operating exclusionary and discriminatory policies, at other times intra-class racial conflict arises from the ambiguous and insecure social positions of those immigrant workers classed as ‘inbetweeners’ (that is, not yet accepted or constructed as ‘white’). There is a whole chapter on how migrant Irish and European workers ‘become white’ and how a process of ‘Americanization’ often viewed as a conservative construction process was contested and appropriated by organized labour through acts of interethnic cooperation.

Barrett is clear in contextualizing what happens on the ‘ground' within the broader framework of hegemonic ideas around ‘race' at the level of the state, employers, popular culture and the press that ensure such ideas are supported, reflected and reinforced. Barrett demonstrates a high degree of sensitivity and empathy in dealing with those subjects tasked with resisting reactionary forces within the workers' movement. This is one of the many strengths of the book.

Collectively, its main contribution is the inclusion of fascinating and important details of individual narratives of subjective experiences and their inter-linking to the multiple identities of those who formed part of a wider collective of workers. It details well how workers (including the various waves of newly arrived immigrants) survive and adapt during periods of rapid change, poverty, and injustice. Here we are exposed to narratives around how individual personal and subjective experiences – emotions, relationships, health, culture, children, open marriage, abortion, sexuality, and others impact identities and experiences around class, religion, race and ethnicity, trade unionism and political activism. It is difficult to do justice here to the fascinating detail and myriad of experiences that go to make up this important study of race, ethnicity and class identity in the US.

This book makes an important and significant contribution to our understanding and knowledge of workers’ history per se. It will strengthen and add a new paradigmatic dimension to the proud list of left and seminal academic and activist historians, sociologist, political scientists and others that have developed history from ‘the bottom up’ perspectives. This is a necessary read for all scholars and activists interested in race, ethnicity, gender, class, identity and US history.

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