

chical relationships, undercut the grand experiment.

In fact, this basic shortcoming was built in from the beginning. The buyout was not negotiated but instead was forced on the employees. National Steel decided to stop investing in the plant. To avoid a range of shutdown liabilities (e.g., severance pay, unemployment benefits, and many others) the company basically decided to sell the firm to its workers. Fearing a closing of the mill, the workers and the community were confronted with a forced choice that they opted to exercise.

With the purchase, blue collar employees were often told that they were "Workers by day, owners by night." But this quickly was viewed as a charade by many of the new owners. No attempt was made to engage the workers in the financial operations, capital spending, or any of the management or operation of the firm. Conflicts flared up when management provided itself substantial pay raises but called for additional austerity measures on the part of the steelworkers. Suspicions arose and suits were filed as each side charged the other with violating the terms of the ESOP. Workers came to realize they were basically "workers at night" as well.

Conflicts at work carried over to home life and the community generally. And in both venues, structural and cultural dimensions of social life framed emerging controversies. Varano describes what he labels a "moral economy" that embodied informal benefits and responsibilities on the part of various actors historically in Weirton. For decades the company treated its workers relatively well (helping to defeat union organizing drives) and contributed to many community causes. In turn, it had the loyalty of, and enjoyed the profits provided by, local workers. Among the privileges workers often assumed were the right to sleep occasionally at work (overtime pay did not mean overwork, Varano points out), the right even to steal from the company (if the contraband went back into the community), and a nepotistic hiring system favoring local family members and friends. Clearly, these values contradicted demands for efficiency and productivity in the market-centered, profit-driven company the plant became under the ESOP. All of this played out in the structural context of deindustrialization and globalization that has characterized the

U.S. economy in the last quarter of the twentieth century.

The strength of Varano's book—the effort to link work life and home life, class and community, as well as the structural and cultural dimensions of work, home, and community—also leads to its primary weakness. It is unclear, from this analysis, if Weirton Steel could have fared better in a different cultural milieu and with more effective worker control, given the broader structural constraints of deindustrialization and globalization. And it is unclear if the terms of the local moral economy doomed the experiment from the start regardless of the structural and contextual realities. Do sleeping on the job and even trivial forms of stealing (from a company that workers own) constitute prohibitive barriers to saving an economically troubled enterprise?

If Varano leaves some questions unanswered, he offers some valuable insights for students of work, community, and class. *Forced Choices* is an intriguing ethnography that informs our understandings of industrial relations and community development, of culture and structure, and most important, the intersections of life at work and life at home in the United States today.

Helping Out: Children's Labor in Ethnic Businesses, by **Miri Song**. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1999. 247 pp. \$59.50 cloth. ISBN: 1-5663-9708-1. \$19.95 paper. ISBN: 1-5663-9709-X.

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The economies of large cities increasingly resemble mosaics, with immigrants from common origins sorted into various economic niches. One does not need to search far to find Cambodian American doughnut shop owners and Korean American market owners in Los Angeles, Vietnamese American nail salon owners in San Francisco, Arab American gas station owners in Detroit, Pakistani American owners of Indian restaurants in New York, and Indian American motel proprietors in Anywheresville, USA. Similar patterns are evident in other cities around the globe.

The occupants of these niches are often celebrated for their work ethic and acumen as

they marshal familial resources to achieve economic security through family-run businesses, especially when economic opportunities are otherwise limited. Less understood is the critical role that children play. In *Helping Out*, Miri Song demonstrates the extent to which some children's lives march to the rhythm of the family business. Indeed, her interviews with 42 ethnic Chinese "children" who worked in family-owned "take-aways" (i.e., meal take-outs in the United States) in Southeast England indicate that children may work long hours and have long workweeks. This heavy involvement is structured by both gender and age, but the involvement of children is generally linked to their mastery of English. English proficiency is necessary to deal with customers and help parents negotiate their way through English society.

One of the strengths of Song's study is her effort to peek beneath the surface of explanations of child labor that focus exclusively on economic circumstances or patriarchal authority structures within the family. Involvement is based on trust and shared responsibility, as well as the desire of parents to keep a watchful eye on their children in a safe environment. Continued involvement is reinforced by normative beliefs about what is right and proper behavior for Chinese children.

A pivotal expository device that Song invokes in this discussion is the "family work contract" (FWC). The FWC describes the "diffuse understandings and expectations" that bind children to their work. Because the FWC does not satisfy the conditions for a formal or informal contract, some readers might be distracted by discordant images of "contracts" and "diffuse understandings." However, this terminological difficulty does not detract from Song's description of the problematic nature of children's involvement in family enterprises. Monitoring and considerable gamesmanship are required to deal with strains that develop among children who bear a disproportionate share of the responsibility for work and yearn for a normal social life beyond the claustrophobic confines of the family business. These strains are reflected in the tactics used by children to engender guilt among parents (e.g., by refusing payment, waiting to be asked to help) and the tactics used by parents to foster guilt among their children for wanting to reduce their involvement (e.g., invidious comparisons with "good" Chinese

children). Such issues are particularly salient for second-generation children who are also trying to negotiate simultaneously their Chinese and British cultural identities.

Helping Out is a well-written qualitative study that should be of interest to scholars who are interested in the intersections between migration, ethnicity, the family, and economic activity. At the same time, the scope of this study is narrow. In focusing on Chinese in the take-away business, Song describes a small piece of the mosaic rather than the larger mosaic formed by a multitude of ethnic groups, economic niches, and practices regarding child labor. Moreover, those who are interested in the interpretations offered by young children and adolescents will be disappointed. The voices in *Helping Out* are primarily those of adult children who were out of school and 17–33 years old (the majority were age 21 plus). It should be noted that five mothers were also interviewed, leaving fathers conspicuous for their absence.

Although *Helping Out* focuses more on the interpretations and recollections of adult children than some readers might prefer, it serves as a timely reminder that child labor is not just an issue of exploited children making soccer balls in developing countries. Child labor affects some children's lives in developed countries as well. It also reminds us of the moral ambiguity involved in child labor that is based on familial ties and is crucial for family survival. Child labor is not always a matter of crass exploitation. In short, Song gives us a little more to think about the next time we look into the eyes of the young person behind the register and place an order "to go."

Construction Workers, U.S.A., by **Herbert A. Applebaum**. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1999. 248 pp. \$59.95 cloth. ISBN: 0-313-30937-X.

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Consider the following brief scenario: A long-term corporate executive and managerial consultant is struck that in response to his questioning, workers consistently state that they like what they do, feel relatively comfortable with the style of supervision they