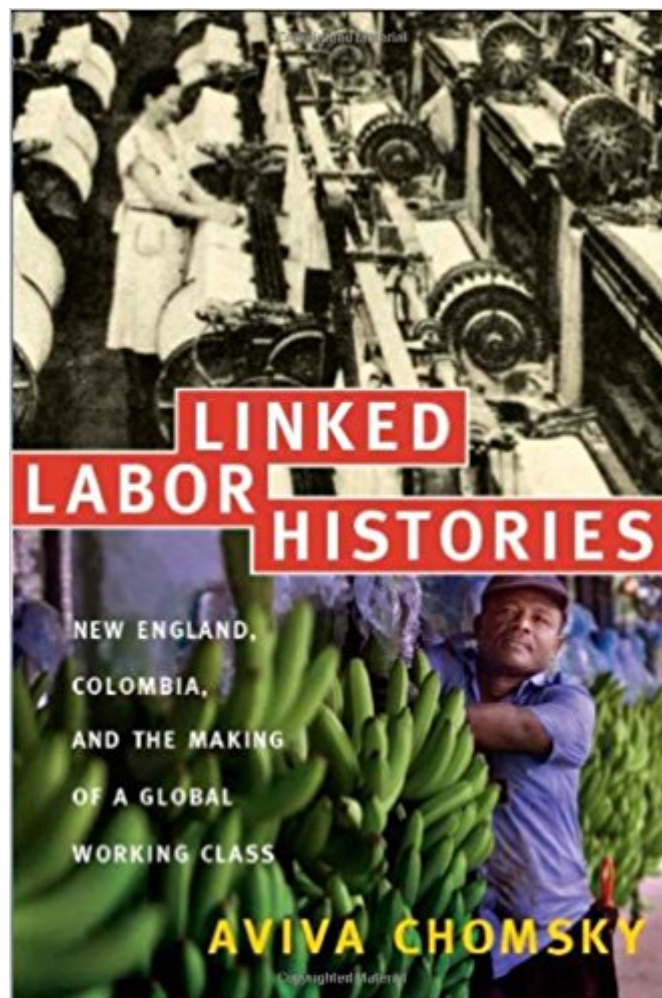




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Linked Labor Histories: New England, Colombia, And The Making Of A Global Working Class (American Encounters/Global Interactions)



Synopsis

Exploring globalization from a labor history perspective, Aviva Chomsky provides historically grounded analyses of migration, labor-management collaboration, and the mobility of capital. She illuminates the dynamics of these movements through case studies set mostly in New England and Colombia. Taken together, the case studies offer an intricate portrait of two regions, their industries and workers, and the myriad links between them over the long twentieth century, as well as a new way to conceptualize globalization as a long-term process. Chomsky examines labor and management at two early-twentieth-century Massachusetts factories: one that transformed the global textile industry by exporting looms around the world, and another that was the site of a model program of labor-management collaboration in the 1920s. She follows the path of the textile industry from New England, first to the U.S. South, and then to Puerto Rico, Japan, Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean, and Colombia. She considers how towns in Rhode Island and Massachusetts began to import Colombian workers as they struggled to keep their remaining textile factories going. Most of the workers eventually landed in service jobs: cleaning houses, caring for elders, washing dishes. Focusing on Colombia between the 1960s and the present, Chomsky looks at the Urabá banana export region, where violence against organized labor has been particularly acute, and, through a discussion of the AFL-CIO's activities in Colombia, she explores the thorny question of U.S. union involvement in foreign policy. In the 1980s, two U.S. coal mining companies began to shift their operations to Colombia, where they opened two of the largest open-pit coal mines in the world. Chomsky assesses how different groups, especially labor unions in both countries, were affected. *Linked Labor Histories* suggests that economic integration among regions often exacerbates regional inequalities rather than ameliorating them.

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Customer Reviews

“Linked Labor Histories clearly establishes Chomsky as one of the foremost innovative labour historians of America – North and South.” – David C. Carlson, Canadian Journal of History

“Linked Labor Histories is a book with a story that scholars can certainly learn from, but it has an even more important message to concerned citizens and labour activists about the necessity of building a movement that confronts globalisation with global strategies.” – James P. Brennan, Journal of Latin American Studies

“[A] valuable contribution in the movement to revive (and revise) analytical tools that shed light on the past in order to illuminate the paths we walk today.” – Louis Segal, A Contracorriente

“What in many text books easily turns into a dry account becomes in Chomsky’s skilful narrative a fascinating and lively story, where the personal is never far from the general. In particular, I like the way in which each of the seven chapters ends with snippets of life histories from workers and unionists, whose personal experiences reflect the more abstract development of global capitalism. It is this putting flesh on social history that makes Linked Labor Histories such a captivating read. . . . Linked Labor Histories is a tremendous achievement and a fascinating read.” – Ulrich Oslender, Bulletin of Latin American Research

“Linked Labor Histories is an informative, thought-provoking explanation of how workers’ struggles within the imperialist centers are linked to those in countries dominated by imperialism.” – Ted Zuur, Socialism and Democracy

“Chomsky challenges readers to rethink their assumptions about regional and global power relations, as well as the parts played by governments, workers, and their unions in capital’s continual search for cheap, controllable labor. . . . Aviva Chomsky has written an exciting book about globalization and how the creation and maintenance of global inequalities over time have empowered capital over labor. . . . Chomsky’s work explores new avenues of inquiry. She pushes readers to engage with the long history of the global South, and consider the strategies workers, unions, corporations, consumers, and governments have used to shape its development in the past, and the ways they could do so in the future.” – Beth English, Labor

“By looking at globalization from the perspective of labor history, and labor history through the lens of globalization, Aviva Chomsky transforms our understanding of both. In

Chomsky's hands, global labor history becomes a compelling tool for understanding and challenging the social inequalities that capitalism creates and depends on. The result is not only a wonderfully rich and detailed look at particular places and times, but a pathbreaking study that forces us to rethink how we understand the Americas as a whole. Students, scholars, labor leaders, and activists should all read this magnificent book.

•Steve Striffler, author of *In the Shadows of State and Capital: The United Fruit Company, Popular Struggle, and Agrarian Restructuring in Ecuador, 1900–1995*

“The early-twentieth-century export of Draper looms from Hopedale, Massachusetts, to Medellín's domestic textile industry sets the stage for a remarkably creative transnational study, documenting the eerie connection between the fates of both American and Colombian working people. Aviva Chomsky jumps skillfully across time and space to link capital flight and the early globalization of the New England textile industry to patterns of low-wage international immigration, even as she dissects the role of the United States (at times aided by American trade unions) in the suppression of Colombian labor radicalism.

•Leon Fink, author of *The Maya of Morganton: Work and Community in the Nuevo New South*

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Avi is the best author ever! You can never go wrong reading one of her books.

NECLAS 2009 Annual Meeting, Union College, Schenectady, NY, October 3. Best Book Prize 2009, awarded to Aviva Chomsky, *Linked Labor Histories: New England, Colombia, and the Making of a Global Working Class*. Durham and London: Duke University Press (2008). That labor is typically devalued and that workers tend to not organize, when their choices are low-wages or no job, are not revelations. Why these continue to be persistent features in Latin America, the United States, and the rest of world do demand our scholarly and critical attention, especially in these times of

out-of-control CEO salaries and bonuses and diminishing wages and benefits for workers. This year's NECLAS 2009 Best Book Prize winning entry, *Linked Labor Histories: New England, Colombia, and the Making of a Global Working Class* by Aviva Chomsky is an historical study that eloquently and forcefully explains why, as she puts it, "a race to the bottom" (12, 294) for workers' wages and rights is taking place. This book--about globalization's impact on labor and a critique of globalization from perspective of labor history--is unreservedly deserving of the NECLAS Best Book prize. The volume is clearly written and very well narrated--Chomsky knows how to tell a story. Besides being fully researched, Chomsky's interdisciplinary approach brings into its purview an analysis of Colombian and U.S. histories that helps us learn, "What are the circumstances that have allowed workers to improve their conditions, and how can we as a society work to increase those spaces, and the chances, for workers to have a meaningful voice in their workplaces and communities" (301). This humanistic and social justice perspective only makes the book more urgent and compelling. *Linked Labor Histories* is an impressive, path-breaking study of labor history that demonstrates how globalization has been a long-standing process throughout the 20th century and inextricably linked to the beginnings of industrialization. She interweaves history with parallel contemporary cases while retaining a wonderfully comparative outlook replete with incisive analysis. By focusing on the New England textile industry, immigrant labor, and the role of multinational corporations in Colombia such as UFCO (bananas), Drummond and Exxon (coal), the AFL-CIO, and the IMF, Chomsky meticulously shows how labor costs are kept low and workers' efforts to successfully organize are often thwarted. But even such failures, she argues, are the very seeds of success and improvements to workers' lives. The individual testimonies that she places at the end of each chapter add a beautifully humane touch to the march of impersonal historical forces. Moreover, the book has urgency; its issues are very much with us today. And it is the farthest thing possible from a purely academic or scholastic piece of work. This is truly excellent, historiography at its best, and in the venerable traditions of general-interest history writing.

Walter E. Little
Associate Professor
Department of Anthropology
University at Albany, SUNY

Linked Labor Histories: New England, Colombia, and the Making of a Global Working Class by Historian Avi Chomsky provides a thorough and detailed look at the interconnectedness of labor and globalization. Maintaining that labor and capital should be at the forefront of any study of globalization, Chomsky examines the long twentieth century history of the "race to the bottom" in which corporations continuously searched for ways to speed up production, decrease wages, and operate with little to no regulation to the detriment of workers. Chomsky works hard to enlighten

readers to the paradoxes inherent in globalization and industrialization by examining case studies of New England corporations, Colombian mills and mines, and products such as textiles, looms, bananas and coal. Chomsky offers solutions to the problems that result from globalization and maintains a hope that through education and awareness a new system can result which offers a better life for all of those exploited by this current economic structure. The importance of *Linked Labor Histories: New England, Colombia, and the Making of a Global Working Class* cannot be overstated. Chomsky's focus on the violence, poverty, inequality, and prejudice that is innate in the system of global capitalism should serve to outrage and engage readers. The examples of "linked labor histories" that Chomsky provides between New England, the South, and Colombia illustrate the long global phenomenon of neo-liberalism and the "race to the bottom" in a local, national, and international context. By maintaining a focus on the human side of capital and labor, Chomsky rightly recognizes that people are more than consumers, producers, and cogs in a machine. *Linked Labor Histories* uncovers the paradoxes of globalization and works to educate readers to the problems of this system. Highlighting education and knowledge as a solution to the problems of globalization, Chomsky's work provides a much needed, thoughtful and deliberate explanation for students, scholars, workers, unions, consumers, and anyone concerned with human rights.

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