

and inequality that shaped the lives of impoverished workers and their families. With these social and material realities in mind we have a fuller understanding of the working poor before moving into subsequent discussions of their contact with institutional sites of power such as state welfare, courts, and penitentiaries. Finally, Rockman concludes with a discussion of the extent to which the advent of the free market system and attendant commodification of labour coincided with a reassertion of a commitment to slave labour. The strategic placement of early chapters on material hardship and subjugation ahead of later chapters on state welfare and punishment seems to chart the inevitable path toward which this new political economy propelled those caught in its web. This organisational structure forces the reader to grapple with Rockman's larger contention that capitalism is an essentially oppressive system.

Scraping By is a provocative yet convincing work that outlines disturbing parallels between slavery and wage work in the antebellum period. Rockman shows how the commodification of labour in the modern capitalist system entailed the purchase and control of human labour, accruing profit and advantage to a concentrated few with financial means. By focusing on the plight of subaltern workers in the early American republic, Rockman successfully demonstrates how early capitalists controlled access to and movement within the market system and in so doing, constricted opportunities to ameliorate extreme disparities in wealth. Probably Rockman's most important contribution is to reaffirm that the best indication of whether or not a given society is just is to consider the condition of those at its foundation, which is to say, the material condition of working people. The poverty, toil, and anguish of early Baltimore's working poor as sketched out by Rockman reveal a great deal about the nature of American capitalism in the early nineteenth century.

Dustin Galer
University of Toronto

Daniel Burton-Rose, *Guerrilla USA: The George Jackson Brigade and the Anticapitalist Underground of the 1970s* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 2010).

Between 1975 and 1977, the George Jackson Brigade took part in more than two dozen bank robberies and bombings. Daniel Burton-Rose's *Guerrilla USA* gives a critical, but largely sympathetic account of this seven-member armed struggle group based out of Washington State as they bombed targets ranging from the prison industrial complex to strike-bound workplaces in an attempt to stir the masses into action.

Laying the background for the introduction of the brigade, the book's

earliest chapters lend a whiff of inevitability to the brigade's call to arms, spinning the story of a largely pacifist left that is unable to step up to combat the violence of the state. Burton-Rose uses the good sixties/bad sixties dichotomy, but turns the valuation around, lauding the violence-coded action of the late 1960s. During the next decade, we are told that anti-capitalist activists faced another narrow choice: "joining a party-building organization or one that concentrated on armed attacks against the government and corporations" (152)

Of course, this tome is dedicated to the latter. The largest portion of the book is devoted to detailed portraits of two brigade members, Ed Mead and Rita Brown, whose lives before the armed struggle are no less stirring. Both grew up in rural environments, with single parents struggling to make ends meet, and eventually wound up in prison (Ed for burglary and Rita for stealing money from the envelopes she processed at the post office). There, they read books, debated new ideas, witnessed injustice and even played the part of jailhouse lawyer, a turn of events not unusual for left-wing prison narratives. But their involvement with prisoner organizing, which included strikes and links with prisoner solidarity groups on the outside, became a catalyst for their left-wing militancy.

These biographies lend support to Burton-Rose's thesis that the brigade represented a departure from the composition, if not the practise, of its well-known counterpart, the Weather Underground, which has been highlighted in a movie and a half dozen books in recent years. While members of this group are associated with a WASP elite, the brigade - named after George Jackson, a member of the Black Panther Party and one of the Soledad Brothers - had a more diverse membership. Yet the practical and theoretical implications of this different composition remained unclear in the absence of a formal concluding chapter.

Burton-Rose's extensive oral interviews with former brigade members lend the book an immersive atmosphere. From the excitement of a successful bombing, to the airs of apprehension surrounding successive bank robberies, the book retells exceptional events on a very human scale. This method of collective biography suits the small, intimate world that the brigade members forced themselves to inhabit. That their personal and political relationships are more typical of a small commune than a guerrilla army become especially apparent when arrests reduce the active brigade to three people - two of them a couple. The romanticism of taking on the corporations and the state cannot hold against the endless days between bank robberies and bombings. Isolated from their left community and confined to a safe house, board games, television and bickering became their daily routine until they too are captured.

Consistent with the views of other North American guerrillas, the brigade and its supporters expressed a strong disdain for the 'do nothing left,' decrying the inconsistency of only supporting armed struggle in the global south

and affirming that Black and Native Americans surely support their armed struggle. Mead, who opined that the brigade would “totally bypass the left,” summed up the feeling of resentment: “There’s two kinds of people—there’s those doing armed work, and they can take all the risks and make the sacrifices and we can sit back and criticize them... [W]e can just go about our work and revolution is some nebulous hope or passing fad” (200)

Burton-Rose’s lack of criticism of this armed work limited the book’s appeal for me. Although the author disapproves of some of the brigade’s more boneheaded moves, he appears to only sympathize with left-wing critics who supported domestic armed struggle, like the Left Bank Collective or the Coven. The book reaches its nadir on this score in a chapter centred on an underground press article critical of the brigade. There, Burton-Rose records the criticisms of members and supporters of the brigade, bookended with his own critique of the article, which includes language and political arguments reminiscent of the circa-1970s urban guerrillas he portrays.

I have to disagree with Burton-Rose. I do believe that it is easier to rob banks and bomb buildings than to change people’s minds about capitalism and organize workers. And despite claims for the brigade’s anti-vanguardism, I am convinced that this is endemic to urban guerrilla struggle, whether Leninist or not, as glimpsed at in the brigade’s dismissal of much of the left and in statements like: “[N]o more mass meetings stalemating action” (179). But for all this criticism, the book is a must read for anyone with a critical eye who wants to change the world and avoid the dead ends of the past. As a communiqué by the brigade put it: “There are two things to remember about revolution: we are going to get our asses kicked, and we are going to win” (237)

Peter Graham
Queen’s University

Barbara Foley, *Wrestling with the Left: The Making of Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

In August 1968, I took part in a bus drivers’ strike at the Chicago Transit Authority, where I had a summer driving job. Picketing and rallies provided the chance to speak with drivers I had known only casually. One was a Black man, about fifty, who turned out to have been active in the great 1937 Flint sit-down that unionised General Motors. “I worked with the Socialists”, he recalled. “Communists, too. I was pretty much in with them, until I realised they cared more about themselves than us”.

My friend’s comment reflects a collective intellectual shift by thousands of young Black workers and activists attracted to the Communist Party (CP) in the