

Similarly, the New Western History would be enriched by a more in-depth analysis of gender. Limerick touches on the importance of the West as a “mythic region where men are men, and women recognize and celebrate the maleness of men” in her essay exploring why the interior West became enormously popular in the late twentieth century (280-1). There is much scope for a more sustained treatment of gender throughout her work that would enrich our understanding of both the West and the larger American culture. The absence of such analysis in these essays, given the extensive literature on gender history in the West, makes this omission seem glaring.

Despite these limitations, *Something in the Soil* further demonstrates the analytic power of the New Western History and provides many fascinating glimpses of the American West – past and present. Limerick’s latest offering is also valuable in that it highlights the popular appeal of the New Western History. Finally, Limerick’s focus on useful tools of the trade and provocative ideas offers fresh inspiration to all historians.

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Mary H. Blewett, *Constant Turmoil: The Politics of Industrial Life in Nineteenth-Century New England* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000).

Mary H. Blewett has written a comprehensive work about the coming of and the growth of the industrial order in southeastern New England in the nineteenth century. Much attention is given to the textile world there epitomized by the sister cities of Fall River and New Bedford. While the author discusses the early role of the Borden family in Fall River’s industrialization first, she also covers the role of other families, including the Chaces, Durfees, and Stickneys in Fall River’s rise as a textile center after 1865.

The manufacturers concentrated on increasing production at the expense of their workers’ lives. Overproduction led to wage cuts based on the “laws” of supply and demand. When the workers countered with calls for a ten-hour day, the manufacturers’ thrust for cheap production came to the fore. Eventually the workers’ fight for the ten-hour movement and against wage cuts led them to engage in strikes in Fall River in 1848 and 1850. As Blewett states “British immigrants and New England workers joined together to oppose unjust treatment in 1848 and in 1850 they did it again” (84). While conceding that “The defeat of the strikes in 1848 and 1850 meant that the textile workers in the Fall

River mills remained formally unorganized” she also argues that “they continued to support labor protest and ten-hour reform” (97).

The author finds that the call for the ten-hour movement was revived after the Civil War. As New Bedford developed as a textile community, it joined with Fall River as key strike sites in the struggle. Eventually labour reformers were able to push a flawed ten-hour act through the Massachusetts legislature in 1874. This act was strengthened in 1879. While the ten-hour act applied to women and children, nearly half of the rapidly growing Fall River workers were men. While the city’s industrial elite was weakened by depression and scandal, the English immigrant workers, led by women weavers, struck twice in 1875 over wage cuts. They were successful in their fight. Another move in 1875 was a vacation strike to prevent wage cuts but this led to reprisals against the strikers and a split in labour’s ranks between the mule spinners and the weavers. Blewett finds that other strikes in the 1870’s (Lonsdale, R.I. 1876 and New Bedford 1877) were not successful, although she points out that “the decisions to strike in both Lonsdale and New Bedford reflected the defiant code of the English weavers to resist wage cuts” (245). The 1879 strike in Fall River over wage cuts was not followed by electoral success for the Democrats. Although attempts to establish an amalgamated textile union by weaver George Gunton were not successful, political gains were made by a fellow Lancashire immigrant, Robert Howard in 1880. As Blewett argues, “New England labor politics also involved crucial ideological, strategic, and deeply personal political struggles over the alternatives of amalgamation or trade unions” (291). In contrast to Gunton’s focus on amalgamation, the author shows that mule spinner Robert Howard was a leader dedicated to trade unionism and labour politics. Howard was more politically successful, and he organized the mule spinners at the expense of the weavers.

By 1884 two distinct strikes revealed not only splits between weavers and mule spinners, but also the hardening of the Fall River system of “protecting market dominance with a retaliatory wage cut and massive production” (299). The failure of the strikes contributed to the mule spinners joining the AFL in 1889 at the expense of the other workers. The weavers struck again in 1889 but were defeated as were the New Bedford weavers in 1894 when they struck against a paycut. The weavers’ “vacation” walk out in 1894 after a wage cut caused divisions within the Fall River textile elite. According to Blewett “[Matt] Borden was trying to fix regional wages and the cloth prices ... fulfilling Fall River’s market dominance” (384)

While the industrialists continue to follow the Fall River model, there would be a dramatic strike in New Bedford in 1898 over a region-wide wage cut for weavers. After the state legislature called a hearing on the regional wage cut and the fining system, New Bedford became the site for a tussle over labour

politics as well according to Blewett. Although other textile centers varied in their response to the wage cut, Fall River strikers split over staying out (mule spinners v. ring spinners) and in New Bedford the weavers stayed out while the mule spinners went back.

According to the author, not only did the strike of 1898 bring changes in union developments but it also led to the manufacturers being elevated to a trade association. In addition women's status continued to decline in the textile industry; skilled weavers often left and were replaced by immigrants from Quebec and southeastern Europe. A battle among manufacturers over wage cuts pushed the Fall River operatives close to a strike in 1902, but splits among the workforce prevented a walk out. Certainly the trade unionism of Robert Howard and the consolidations of Matt Borden were creating a fin-de-siècle legacy.

Blewett concludes that trade unionism and (industrial) combinations had become the dominant expression of industrial politics" (386). However she points out that by the 1920's over production was no longer an important factor in New England as textile production continued to decline and shift southward. In addition English immigrants and women weavers were no longer key players in the region's textile industry.

In evaluating *Constant Turmoil* this reviewer has stuck close to Blewett's story of the shaping of an industrial order in southeastern New England in the nineteenth century. While the author smoothly intertwines her social analysis of this order in the body of the text, one wonders whether she is attempting to cover too much: 1) social, political, labour, and business history, 2) gender analysis, manhood, and masculinity 3) ethnic and immigration history, labour politics, and corporate political culture. She defends her approach in the book's prologue: "The structure of my book offers the reader a mix of narrative and analysis based on empirical evidence and discourse analysis" (15). To this reader the strength of *Constant Turmoil* is its fascinating narrative of an emerging industrial order. This narrative is helped by the judicious use of photographs and primary sources as well as extensive use of appendices, which include such topics as comparing nativity, employment and population patterns in the cotton cities of Fall River, Lowell, and Lawrence. Mary Blewett has written the definitive book on the emergence, development, and finalization of the industrial order in southeastern New England in the nineteenth century.

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