Robert Korstad, *Civil Rights Unionism: Tobacco Workers and the Struggle for Democracy in the Mid-Twentieth South* (University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

Robert Korstad's *Civil Rights Unionism* is a gripping and important account of the rise and fall of Local 22 of the Food, Tobacco, Agricultural, and Allied Workers of America-CIO between 1943 and 1950. Local 22 represented over 10 000 tobacco manufacturing workers at R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company and several independently-owned leaf processing plants in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Korstad argues that Local 22's predominately black membership transformed the union into a vehicle for civil rights activism linking the struggle for higher wages with political and social freedom. This labor-based civil rights movement could not withstand the Cold War conservative backlash and lost a decertification election in 1950. The demise of Local 22, according to Korstad, deprived the labor movement of a broad vision of social change and the civil rights movement of a vision of economic as well as racial emancipation.

In the first half of the book, Korstad provides the historical context for the emergence of Local 22's "civil rights" unionism. R.J. Reynolds shaped Winston-Salem's political, economic, and social landscape establishing deep roots in the city. By the 1920s the company paid one-fourth of the city's property taxes and its twenty-two story headquarters towered over 100 acres of tobacco production facilities concentrated downtown. Unlike most southern manufacturers, Reynolds hired black men and women in significant numbers. These hiring policies helped dramatically increase the city's black population from 13 650 to 78 815 between 1890 and 1945. Reynolds, however, embraced a racial capitalism that classified almost all black employees as "unskilled," confined to the lowest paid jobs, while reserving skilled jobs for whites. The race-based dual wage structure reinforced divisions between black and white workers and poverty in the city's black community.

The overthrow of the Reconstruction era experiment in bi-racial democracy strengthened Reynolds' power. In 1898, the merchants, bankers, manufacturers, and larger farmers who controlled the Democratic Party organized a successful campaign to oust a ruling coalition of Populists and Republicans from the state legislature. The new legislature reversed populist reforms that had benefited small farmers, workers, and African Americans. The state's new political rulers disenfranchised poor white and black voters and built a system of white supremacy that required the separation of races in public spaces and the deference of African Americans to whites. But as Korstad points out this system of white supremacy "cloaked elite control of wealth" and "mandated class and gender hierarchies as well." While the state's elite appealed to white workers by emphasizing bonds of racial solidarity, they firmly believed in the

"natural superiority of prosperous white men" and "meant to be the rulers of the ruling race."

Korstad, however, argues that "cracks" existed in the reactionary political order. In the three decades preceding Local 22's founding, Korstad argues the city's black community "forged a basis for resistance" that laid the groundwork for the civil rights unionism of the 1940s. Korstad argues that the basis of resistance lay in a rich "working-class inflected" urban life that emerged in Winston-Salem's black community. The juke joints and numerous social clubs and churches provided a "refuge from a threatening white world" and "provided innumerable avenues for developing organizational and leadership skills." Black and white tobacco workers resisted in the workplace in subtle ways by taking blue Monday holidays and arguing with foremen. They also directly challenged the tobacco giant by joining several failed union drives by the AFL's Tobacco Workers International Union.

In the early 1940s black tobacco workers channelled their tradition of resistance and self-organization into a successful union drive against R.J. Reynolds. In 1942, CIO organizers from the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing, and Affiliated Workers of America (UCAPAWA- later the Food, Tobacco, Agricultural, and Allied Workers FTA) arrived in Winston-Salem and along with a cadre of black union supporters in the plants won the loyalty of a majority of black tobacco workers, churches, a segment of the black middle-class and a small minority of white Reynolds employees. Korstad argues that political transformations during the Depression and World War II bolstered the union drive. The Communist Party, the CIO, and various popular front groups emerged in the 1930s as effective vehicles for militant and inter-racial challenges to the status quo. And New Deal legislation like the Wagner Act and the pro-labor orientation of wartime labor agencies like the National War Labor Board legitimized workers' protests and provided important allies to the city's working class.

The establishment of Local 22 in December 1943 led to the emergence of a vibrant labor-based civil rights movement that challenged the gender- and class-based system of white supremacy that coalesced at the turn of the century. In 1944, the union negotiated a historic contract that empowered black tobacco workers in the workplace and undermined whites' expectation of black subservience. The contract provided for higher wages, replaced arbitrary hiring with seniority and established a grievance procedure that allowed black union stewards to democratically resolve grievances with foremen and supervisors. The union, as Korstad states, also sought to empower "unionists in the political and social life of the community." Local 22's left-wing leadership cultivated a union culture that fostered loyalty and connected the workplace and community. Union sponsored recreation activities, including athletics and choral groups, became popular among members helping "sustain the workers'

movement." Local 22 translated union solidarity into political action. The Local led voter registration drives and membership campaigns for the NAACP and helped elect the city's first black aldermen since the turn of the century.

In the late 1940s, Local 22's "civic unionism" faced serious challenges. Automation, rising unemployment, and an unsuccessful campaign to increase Local 22's white membership weakened the union. A Republican take-over of Congress and the subsequent passage of the anti-labor Taft-Hartley Act deprived the union of an important ally in the government. The Red Scare also undermined support for the Local. A sizable cadre of Communists in the union made the Local especially susceptible to red-baiting. A HUAC investigation of Local 22 helped firmly link the union with Communist subversion and alienated many of the Local's liberal and community allies. The CIO also turned against the Local. As part of the CIO's post-war drive against its left-wing, the CIO led a campaign to replace Local 22 with the anti-Communist United Transport Service Employees. In 1950, Local 22 did not win enough votes to remain the legal bargaining agent for Reynolds' employees.

Korstad has made a significant contribution to our understanding of the mid-twentieth century United States. He adds to a growing body of scholarship that examines the impact of the Cold War on the black freedom struggle. Some scholars like Mary Dudziak and Tim Tyson have shown how the Cold War created a window of opportunity for civil rights. They argue that politicians became more willing to make racial reforms to improve the country's image around the world. But Korstad reminds us that the Cold War shaped and narrowed the vision and possibilities of the civil rights movement. Understanding the demise of Local 22 and emergence of a civil rights movement less attuned to economic inequality partly explains the contradiction between the end of Jim Crow and the persistence of poverty in black urban communities today. Korstad also provides important insights into the fate of the labor movement. Korstad rejects the argument that the emergence of "industrial jurisprudence" became a "legalistic barrier to militancy" and helped bureaucratize the labor movement. For black workers in the violence-prone Jim Crow South, Korstad argues, "industrial jurisprudence was quite simply indispensable." Instead, the post-war red scare and anti-labor climate along with the CIO's acquiescence to the Cold War, and their decision to appeal to their white base, undermined the broad social vision embodied in Local 22.

Korstad's work also intervenes in current debates on the Left over identity politics. Korstad challenges left-wing and liberal scholars and activists who privilege class politics as real and primary while dismissing concerns about racial and gender equality as identity politics. The history of Local 22 shows that gender and racial oppression are not simply social constructs that women and people of color need to shed in order to join the 'universal' struggle for working-class emancipation. By placing black men and women workers at the

center of his story, Korstad shows how systems of gender, race, and class hierarchies emerged simultaneously and in reinforcing ways. The triumph of Local 22 is that its members sought to dismantle an entire interrelated system of oppression. The tragedy is that many white workers and labor leaders rejected and narrowed this vision.

The breadth of Korstad's work is impressive and so is his ability to incorporate the broader historical context into the narrative of the Local. But there are questions the book raises yet leaves unanswered, as all good books should. One of the many significant aspects of Korstad's book is that he gives voice to the neglected history of African American women in the trade union movement. He reveals the centrality of women to the leadership and organizational successes of Winston-Salem's labor movement and the relative gender parity that defined Local 22. But I found myself wanting to hear more about the tension, debates, and disagreements between men and women and among men and women as the Local sought to address gender-based inequality. Korstad also rightly suggests that labor-based civil rights persisted in subtle ways after the devastating blow of the Cold War. But I would like to suggest that it persisted even more vigorously, at least in other parts of the country like Detroit in unions like UAW Local 600, which as Korstad points out supported Local 22 during its 1947 strike. In the 1950s and 1960s black unionists around the country organized a black caucus movement that shared the vision of the workers Korstad so wonderfully brings to life in Winston-Salem in the 1940s.

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