Peter Benson, *Tobacco Capitalism: Growers, Migrant Workers, and the Changing Face of a Global Industry*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012.

Tobacco killed more Americans in the twentieth century than all of the country's military operations combined, and despite public health efforts that have reduced U.S. tobacco use, ten times more people worldwide will die of tobacco-caused illness in this century than in the last. Peter Benson's work in *Tobacco Capitalism* is infused by this public health outrage, by the undiminished profitability of the international tobacco industry, and by the social suffering he witnessed in rural Wilson County, the tobacco heartland of North Carolina. His powerful analysis traces the challenges faced by farm owners, tenants, workers, and former growers and workers, and links them to new meanings, images, and rhetorical strategies used to advocate self-interest. His account moves from farm bill debates and anti-smoking campaigns to the strategies of tobacco agribusiness, portraying a globalizing capitalism, the changing role of the state, and configurations of race, ethnicity, and moral structure that have emerged since the civil rights era.

Benson follows the deep history of tobacco from its colonial-era role in supporting slavery to recent anti-tobacco legislation and the 2004 Tobacco Buy-Out program. He traces how the tobacco corporations have increased their power through grower contracting, the use of temporary Mexican migrant workers, and campaigns to recreate a new cultural legitimacy for tobacco production in the face of health risks. Corporate posturing to defend deserving tobacco farmers actually created conditions for the further deterioration of markets, the loss of more farms, and expanded corporate profits. The book analyzes a language of victimization that portrays state and public health efforts as enemies of deserving farm citizens, while masking the considerable advantages the government provides to farmers, from federal and state supports to lax enforcement of immigration and worker protection laws.

Central to Benson's argument is a financial squeeze placed on tobacco producers that leads them to adopt debt-financed machinery for greater efficiency and higher quality, and to employ illegal immigrants at lower wages than Wilson County citizens would accept. Following a pattern seen with commodities in many regions of the world, contraction in the farmers' share of tobacco income has led to fewer and larger farms, more industrialized work rhythms, and the "headaches" of supervising foreign workers. One of the book's several poignant descriptions is of the loss of the artisanal care of tobacco leaf curing, and Benson compellingly explores the moral politics of poverty, respect, hard work, dignity, and reputation through local usage of the words "sorry" and "sorriness."

The book also contributes a fascinating history of corporate image making intended to counter the massive cost of tobacco mortality and legal evidence of

wrongdoing. Benson traces the rise of Philip Morris to become one of the United States' most admired companies, as committed to reducing toxic pesticide use and developing "less hazardous" cigarettes, supporting FDA supervision of tobacco products, and acceding to the tobacco settlement agreement of 1998 (in return for protection against future liability). The company portrays itself as strengthening the American emphasis on individual choice over public policy, and allowing "informed" adults to decide whether or not to smoke. Benson argues in his conclusion that restrictions on supply would be more effective than present approaches in limiting the spread of tobacco addiction and its massive health costs.

Benson provides harrowing descriptions of Mexican migrants vomiting in the fields from nicotine poisoning from handling wet leaves, tossing restlessly in broiling, unventilated housing lit all night by floodlights, committed by lack of transportation to spend their free hours in filthy quarters, and supervised by nervous operators whose profits depend on the tobacco being clean. The workers are socially excluded from "the community" by language and hostility, and earn low (though unspecified) wages. They are blamed for their living conditions, which are stereotyped as being part of a pathologized Mexican culture. More broadly, the region's social fabric bears scars from the tobacco industry's transformations: "Unusually high unemployment, aversion to work among many residents, and increased dependence on social services in counties like Wilson were brought on by waves of agricultural industrialization and a mix of capital flight and concentration" (p. 212).

Aspects of the book are frustrating, especially its many repetitions of key points. Some readers will be distracted in places by Benson's harsh language, such as his descriptions of senators as "political monsters" and Philip Morris' power as "cutthroat, stomach-churning." The author's desire to engage sophisticated social science theory exists in tension with his goal of inspiring public awareness and stronger anti-smoking policy.

Benson's argument would be strengthened by better, basic descriptions of Wilson County's tobacco growing practices, changes in farm size and types, hired labor patterns, the uses of chemicals, drying processes, and specifics of new, specialized machinery. Scenes presented are sometimes vivid—of the tobacco sale, or worker housing—but it is often unclear how experiences and conditions might vary. For example, although Benson emphasizes the disadvantages of contracting—growers' loss of control, vulnerability, and competition with neighbors—a few farmers assert that contracts have served them well, and we are not told why.

The book's nuanced analysis of the intentions and meanings of growers and farm workers is not extended to tobacco corporations. It supplies no evidence for assertions such as, "this means that Philip Morris is counting on growing its business in spite of (or because of) FDA regulation," and it would have been interesting to explore the possibility that corporate policies

are the outcomes of contested internal processes. That said, the virtues of this study are many, and it makes an important contribution to our understanding of rural life in a world of powerful corporate-controlled markets and globalized economic and political processes.

———Peggy F. Barlett, Emory University

Neil White, *Company Towns: Corporate Order and Community*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012.

Recent labor protests and the implementation of "right to work" legislation across the United States have raised questions about the obligations of corporations to care for their workers. For scholars of labor, this is an apt moment to reflect on the history of the company town. Company towns such as Carnegie Steel's McDonald, Ohio and Hershey's Hershey, Pennsylvania arose in sites of industrial production across the global north. Under an ethic of corporate paternalism, these planned communities offered subsidized housing to laborers in hopes of retaining a settled workforce. Hospitals, shops, and utilities, too, were managed and provided by the company.

In *Company Towns*, Neil White seeks to counter what he identifies as a "structuralist approach" that dominates the study of these places. He argues that this approach, buttressed by popular representations in song, film, and drama, has created a homogenous image of company towns as places where laborers were (often frustratingly) dependent upon corporate largesse for survival. To counter this, White uses archival material from corporate and town records as well as oral history and journalism to engage "with the scores of manufactured time-bound, and historically relevant settlements obscured by the term [company town]" (p. 5).

White compares two such towns and the wider communities that sprang up around them in the early twentieth century. The first is Corner Brook, a paper mill company town in Newfoundland, where the author grew up. The second is Mount Isa, a mining town in Queensland, Australia. Though both were sites of similarly organized extractive industry, White argues that each developed a distinct communal identity. In doing so, he seeks to highlight "the experiences of the residents whose actions filled in the vast gaps between wilderness and industry to create local societies" (7) over the structural forces that appear to make company towns essentially the same. "Community," for White, is the agentive antidote to "corporate order."

The book is structured thematically, with chapters about the developments of industry in Corner Brook and Mount Isa (chs. 1 and 2); "fringe towns" that sprang up on the outskirts of both (ch. 3); labor organization (ch. 4); small businesses and economic development (ch. 5); and domestic life (with a