Clifford Farrington. *Biracial Unions on Galveston's Waterfront, 1865-1925*. Austin, TX: Texas State Historical Association, 2007. vi + 253 pp. ISBN 978-0-87611-217-5, $29.95 (cloth).

After emancipation, white and black workers had to renegotiate the terms of the workplace. These negotiations were not simple nor were the terms inevitable, and it is the resulting compromises and conflicts

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that Clifford Farrington explores in this book. The story he tells is one of great importance. As he rightly points out, labor historians have often focused on national organizations or individual strikes. The evolution and development of local labor consciousness and even the workers themselves are often lost in these histories. Farrington looks at one area in depth in order to explore how racial and class tensions were negotiated in the workplace between 1865 and 1925. He uses Galveston as a point of comparison to broader biracial unionism along the Gulf, most notably that of New Orleans. Galveston, he maintains, provides a case study of how "a particular laboring community organized to deal with issues such as class, race, changing technology, and employer hostility" (16).

Farrington begins with a concise account of the 1866 formation of Galveston's first waterfront union, the Screwmen's Benevolent Association (SBA), as it evolved from a mutual-aid society to a labor union. Throughout the upheavals of the next 50 years, the SBA remained an important presence on Galveston's docks. Although the SBA barred black workers from joining the union, its existence nonetheless served the interests of Galveston's black workforce; its restrictive practices forced employers to turn to black labor even in an atmosphere of growing exclusion.

Initially nonunionized, black waterfront workers quickly acted to take advantage of employer dissatisfaction with the SBA. Norris Wright Cuney, a local black elite, organized three hundred workers. Without having to abide by the restrictive regulations governing SBA stevedores, Cuney underbid white competition and secured a contract for his men. These men went on to organize themselves into the Cotton Jammers and Longshoremen's Association. Although small and powerless compared to the SBA, this organization's presence established an alternative source of labor for employers being squeezed by white unions. An important aspect of this organizational history is Farrington's in-depth exploration of the black union's split into two rival groups (the Cotton Jammers and the Lone Star Cotton Jammers). He shows that differing ideas on cooperation with the white union were at the root of this division. He therefore avoids representing black labor as a monolithic group.

At the crux of Farrington's work is the series of union attempts at "amalgamation," which called for black and white workers to work "side by side, or 'abreast' one another, in gangs headed by either a white or black foreman" (144). Farrington argues that white labor leaders were faced with two options: recognize their need to recruit black workers in their struggle for better working conditions and higher wages or continue to exclude African Americans and allow employers to play one race against the other. He maintains that in the

Jim Crow South, faced with the racism of their "rank-and-file members," labor leaders did not have the option of recognizing the inherent merits of black efforts or uniting with black unions based on an ideology of racial equality. Southern efforts of biracial cooperation were therefore driven by self interest which had to reach a "critical level" in order to overcome the racial divide. This is an astute observation and rightfully deromanticizes biracial cooperation. Strikes in the first decade of the twentieth century and the failure to cooperate despite attempts by the Cotton Jammers highlighted the advantage employers gained in exploiting racial divisions and thus pushed the SBA towards a policy of amalgamation. After years of debate, the SBA and the Cotton Jammers reached an agreement in 1912. Unlike in New Orleans, where biracial unionism thrived, Galveston's biracial efforts peaked in 1912 and 1913 and were short lived. Amalgamation was replaced by a work-sharing agreement that did not involve integration of Galveston's workforce.

Farrington owes a large debt to Eric Arnesen's *Waterfront Workers of New Orleans* (1991). Farrington's study applies Arnesen's framework to Galveston and examines how local circumstances affected the success of biracial unionism. Given that New Orleans was a major port in the Gulf and that circumstances in New Orleans often directly influenced employers' and labor leaders' decisions, it is appropriate that Farrington offers the context of union activity in New Orleans. However, he relies too heavily on Arnesen's account, and the salient points of comparison sometimes become confused in this synthesis.

This book has shortcomings. Most fundamentally, Farrington's argument is limited by his focus on the workplace. Although unions were workplace organizations, the larger community and workers' personal lives influenced union membership and activities. Although he sets out to write workers back into labor history, workers' voices outside of committee reports are notably absent in Farrington's account of the rise and fall of biracial unionism. While the union spokespeople's voices in SBA and the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) minutes are important and he utilizes these sources extensively, one wonders about the uncensored voices that are not necessarily represented in official reports. Additionally, in a study of black unions, the lack of attention given to race relations and black conditions in an era of calcifying segregation and discrimination is significant. Examining the everyday life of black workers would have allowed Farrington to explore in a more meaningful way what was at stake for black union members as they agreed to act as a scab union. It would also have given Farrington a more nuanced understanding of why biracial unionism floundered in Galveston.

Farrington raises important questions about the development of local labor movements. The presence of biracial cooperation in the Jim Crow era, no matter how short lived, is striking and deserves study. Readers interested in local Galveston history or of Galveston's unions will find this book valuable. Ultimately, this book fails to answer many of the important issues it raises, but it will undoubtedly open the door for further study on post-Emancipation biracial labor history.

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