Bobbins, Pins, and Runways: The Needle Trades and the Remaking of Working-Class History

Daniel E. Bender

THE ABUSABLE PAST

NEWS FROM RHR

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

The Graduate School and University Center of the City University of New York

The Edward Palmer Thompson Fellowship in United States History

The Doctoral History Program at The Graduate School and University Center of The City University of New York proudly announces that Karen Sotiropoulos has received the E.P. Thompson Dissertation Fellowship in U.S. History. Ms. Sotiropoulos is at work on a dissertation titled: “Staging Race: Black Cultural Production Before the Harlem Renaissance.”

The Fellowship is named for Professor Thompson (1924-93), the distinguished British social historian, in honor of his impact on U.S. historians. It carries a stipend of $10,000, and is awarded annually to the CUNY doctoral student whose work best exemplifies the standards of scholarship exhibited by Professor Thompson in his pioneering works of social, intellectual, and political history.
Figure 1: Displays such as the Philippine Exhibit at the 1904 St. Louis World’s Fair brought together competing cultural and political agendas, which officials in the United States’ colonies were not able to harness as they pleased. Picture source: St. Louis Post Dispatch, 1904.
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Prospectus for Special Issue of
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“Markets, Politics, Identities: What’s Left?”

For a significant number of intellectuals and activists on the left, capitalism and character are incompatible, and corporate bureaucracy is the antithesis of personal and political self-determination.

Starting from this premise, resistance to the commodification of selfhood is expressed through resistance to the division of labor and proletarianization. Abstention from markets is the necessary condition of moral or artistic achievement. Attacks on the bureaucratic procedures and “managerial culture” specific to corporate capitalism are a defense of genuine selfhood and autonomy, and a critique of capitalism as such. Furthermore, they are the only legitimate means of connecting political economy and morality.

In practical terms, then, when it becomes no longer possible to resist or abstain from markets and bureaucratic corporate and governmental structures, resistance itself is no longer viable. The commoditized self becomes a purely passive recipient of political discourse that is itself commoditized and reified.

This issue of the RHR will take the statements above not as premises but as questions, and will interrogate them critically, to ask the question—"What’s Left?"

It will include a forum from the 1998 meeting of the Organization of American Historians with papers by Barry Shank, Mary King, and James Livingston, and commentary by Casey Blake. We seek in addition papers from all parts of the world, and/or transnational perspectives, that will further interrogate the connections between markets, politics and identities.
Topics might include the following:

- the role of markets and the new “entrepreneurial” capitalism in creating new identities (of women, of youth) in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe
- the political effects of economic destabilization of traditional agrarian societies in Africa and Asia
- consumerism as a form of political agency among people of color in developed capitalist countries

Articles should depart from a clear political and historical perspective, invite debate, and be grounded in specific instances of market engagement and identity formation. The issue will be edited by Van Gosse and James Livingston. Abstracts, proposals or completed articles can be sent to the Radical History Review, Tamiment Library/10th Floor, 70 Washington Square South, New York, NY 10012. Email inquiries can be made to Van Gosse at <paorgdev@igc.org>.
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The Radical History Review and the Radical Historians Newsletter have launched a new, joint web site entitled “RADICAL HISTORY AND POLITICS.” This web site:

- is extensive: currently made up of about 200 html files and nearly 1,000 screens of text and images—with much more to come!
- includes basic information on both publications, including subscription information, availability of back issues, and tables of contents for many, many issues;
- also includes (for RHR) calls for papers, guidelines for contributors, a ten-year index, and a gallery of cover art from the last 30 issues.

This web site is more than just a promotional tool for the two publications:

- It houses a growing “archive” of articles, interviews, book reviews, public history commentaries, teaching radical history essays and syllabi, columns, collections of images, and humorous pieces from RHR and the Radical Historians Newsletter.
- Like RHR and the Newsletter, the texts and collections in this “archive” engage a wide variety of historical fields—women and gender, gay and lesbian, race and ethnicity, working-class and labor, international and transnational, culture and politics—in many regions of the world.
- We plan to solicit original essays, debates, reports, and exhibitions for the web site that have not been previously published in RHR, the Newsletter, or anywhere else. Ideas and proposals for such pieces—especially for online art exhibitions—should be sent to skotna@sage.edu.
- NEW! We have just initiated a forum for online discussions of political/historical issues; the first forum topic is the Teaching Radical History section on “Radical Mentoring” in this issue.

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