Out of the Mainstream: Books and Films You May Have Missed

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BOOKS

Between Barack and a Hard Place
By Tim Wise
CITY LIGHTS, 2009
In 150 pages, one of the best white voices talking to other whites about racism comments on what Obama’s election does and does not mean.

Bricks Without Straw
By Albion W. Tourgée
DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2009
This reprint of a novel published in 1880 is accompanied by a useful historical essay about the author and the Reconstruction period the book depicts. The book shows the human impact of the often violent campaign by the white power structure in the South to undo emancipation.

Breakthrough Communities
Edited by M. Paloma Pavel
MIT PRESS, 2009
Activists from around the U.S. have been working on the interconnected issues of the economy, the environment, and equity on a metropolitan basis, seeking new solutions for urban, suburban, and exurban communities on such subjects as housing, transportation, land use, and employment. Thirty-three chapters share experiences from various metro areas.

Gold Dust on His Shirt
By Irene Howard
BETWEEN THE LINES, 2009
This warm account of Scandinavian immigrant mining families in Western Canada in the first half of the twentieth century draws on the author’s own family memories, as well as archives and interviews in North America, Norway, and Sweden.

*This column is adapted from World Wide Work, written by Matt Witt, and published eight times a year by the American Labor Education Center, an independent nonprofit that operates www.TheWorkSite.org, a free website that provides downloadable tools and tips for educators and activists.
Healing Together
By Thomas A. Kochan, Adrienne E. Eaton, Robert B. McKersie, and Paul S. Adler
CORNELL UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2009
Intense labor-management conflict at Kaiser Permanente, the nation’s largest Health Maintenance Organization, led to a partnership agreement covering more than ninety thousand employees that has lasted more than a decade. Four academics were given access to document and analyze the experience. Both those who support and those who oppose such partnerships on ideological grounds will find fodder for their views in this detailed account.

Invisible Hands
By Kim Phillips-Fein
W.W. NORTON, 2009
After President Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal made historic changes in the American economic and political system, the DuPont family and other businessmen began a counterattack that culminated decades later in the presidency of Ronald Reagan. Such businessmen have been the invisible hands behind what is called the conservative movement.

Organizing the Curriculum
Edited by Rob Linné, Leigh Benin, and Adrienne Sosin
SENSE PUBLISHERS, 2009
These eighteen essays include some innovative, practical ideas and perspectives about teaching the U.S. labor movement in public schools.

Remembering Scottsboro
By James A. Miller
PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2009
Death sentences given to eight young black men in 1931 became a major historical event that impacted American arts and culture, as well as politics, and helped set the stage for the civil rights movement.

The Looting of America
By Les Leopold
CHELSEA GREEN, 2009
For those who want more than a vague sense that we are in an economic crisis because of manipulation by Wall Street, Leopold goes into the details about the financial industry’s complex schemes that came crashing down on the rest of us.

The Quality of Home Runs
By Thomas P. Carter
DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2009
Politics, culture, and history are mixed in this study of baseball in Cuba.

Tours of Vietnam
By Scott Laderman
DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2009
What first appears to be a narrow academic study—how U.S. guide books and other tourist materials over the past half-century have described Vietnam—becomes an interesting window into Americans’ often inaccurate perceptions about our own country and the rest of the world.
FILMS

Ask Not
WWW.ASKNOTFILM.COM, 2008
More than twelve thousand men and women have lost their jobs in the military under the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy, including many who speak Arabic or have other vital skills that are in short supply. This seventy-three-minute film tells some of their stories. It also recounts how President Clinton considered segregating gay soldiers in separate units, similar to the blacks-only units that existed until President Truman issued an executive order ending the practice.

Everlasting Moments
WWW.IFCFILMS.COM, 2008
This beautifully made Swedish film, set in a working-class community in the early 1900s, focuses on the wife of a longshoreman who finds her own identity with the help of an old camera and a photography store owner.

Inventing L.A.
WWW.PETERJONESPRODUCTIONS.COM, 2009
By tracing the history of the Chandler family that founded the Los Angeles Times, this 116-minute PBS documentary also tells important parts of the history of Southern California, including decades of fierce anti-union campaigns and manipulation of politicians and public resources for personal gain. The film also describes the internal battles between ultraconservative and relatively liberal family members that led to the paper’s rapid decline.

Journey of a Red Fridge
WWW.LUNAMDOCS.COM, 2007
More than sixty thousand children in Nepal make their living as porters, carrying backpacks and supplies for tourists or transporting goods in a region in which there are few good roads or vehicles. This fifty-four-minute documentary focuses on one of them.

Kick Like a Girl
WWW.KICKLIKEAGIRLMOVIE.COM, 2008
A soccer team of third-grade girls in Utah can’t find adequate competition against other girls’ teams and decides to enter the boys’ league instead. The twenty-four-minute film follows their season and the reactions of girls, boys, and parents.

On Paper Wings
WWW.ONPAPERWINGSTHEMOVIE.COM, 2008
During World War II, Japanese girls were assigned to fold paper for huge balloon bombs that were floated to America. One of the bombs killed a young woman and four children near the rural town of Bly, Oregon. A half-century later, some of the now-grown Japanese women traveled to Bly to meet relatives and friends of those who were killed. Some of the hosts talk about the concentration camp for Americans of Japanese descent that was operated during the war, a short distance from Bly. The film also includes file footage of the massive destruction caused by U.S. firebombing and the dropping of atomic bombs on Japan, although it doesn’t show Americans traveling to Hiroshima or Nagasaki to express their sorrow.
Prom Night in Mississippi
WWW.PROMNIGHTINMISSISSIPPI.COM, 2008

Even after a high school in Charleston, Mississippi was integrated, white families continued to hold a separate senior prom. Actor Morgan Freeman, who comes from Charleston, offered to pay for a prom in 2008—if it was integrated. The school accepted, but problems remained. The story provides an opportunity to explore racial attitudes today.

Short Term 12

This dramatic, powerfully acted short takes viewers inside a residential facility for abused children, and brings both staff and residents to life.

Sweethearts of the Prison Rodeo
WWW.SWEETHEARTSOFTHEPRISONROdeo.COM, 2009

Since 1940, the Oklahoma State Penitentiary has held an annual rodeo in which inmates compete, to the delight of thousands of spectators. Since 2006, female inmates have been allowed to take part. Many of them are young mothers, separated from their families because of drug-related crimes. The rodeo poses the real possibility of lifelong injury, especially for these amateurs with only minimal training, but both women and men participate to relieve the intense boredom of prison life. This two-hour, heartbreaking documentary introduces some of them, and in the process provides a poignant portrait of the inhumanity of the U.S. prison system.

The Philosopher Kings
WWW.PHILOSOPHERKINGSMOVIE.COM, 2009

This seventy-minute film profiles eight janitors at various U.S. colleges who have persevered despite serious obstacles in their lives. Service workers like these are often invisible to those they serve. The film shows that they are people with pride in their work, wisdom learned from hard experience, and determination to get the most out of life. It leaves to other films questions about why they receive only poverty wages and how people like them have joined together to improve their situation.

Upstream Battle
WWW.UPSTREAMBATTLE.COM, 2008

The death of nearly seventy thousand adult salmon in the Klamath River in 2002 focused attention on a conflict over water rights involving Native Americans, Warren Buffett’s PacifiCorp, ranchers, farmers, and commercial fishermen. While this ninety-seven-minute film tells the story from the tribes’ point of view, other participants have their say in candid interviews as well.