

*Culturas de classe: Identidade e diversidade na formação do operariado.*

Edited by CLAUDIO H. M. BATALHA, FERNANDO TEXEIRA DA SILVA, and ALEXANDRE FORTES.

Coleção Várias Histórias, vol. 18. Campinas, Brazil:

UNICAMP, 2004. Notes. 435 pp. Paper.

Do workers have their own culture? Is there a distinct working-class culture (or cultures)? If so, what does it consist of, how was it created, and what role does it play in creating a class identity? Drawing inspiration from the debates between Eric Hobsbawm and E. P. Thompson regarding working-class culture in Britain, the editors of *Culturas de classe* gather a wide range of historical studies to explore these questions. Critica 1 of a Brazilian labor historiography that portrays workers as “relatively undifferentiated and homogeneous” because of its traditional emphasis on working conditions and organizational issues, the editors intend to reveal the effects of culture, in all its varieties, on workers’ identities, forms of organization, and political projects (p. 13). Divided into five thematic sections, the book’s 12 contributions focus primarily on Brazil in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but studies on England, Argentina, and Spain are also included. Like most edited collections, the essays vary in quality, but there are some real gems in *Culturas de classe*, and the best essays expose readers to a new generation of Brazilian labor historians that deserve a broader audience.

Drawing evidence almost exclusively from the British experience, the first section outlines the historiographical debates surrounding the relationship between class and culture. Leisure, broadly defined, is the theme of the second section, which includes essays on workers’ festivals in Spain between 1850 and 1920, May Day celebrations in Rio de Janeiro during the First Republic (1889-1930), as well as a thoughtful essay on soccer by José Sérgio Leite Lopes that analyzes the dynamics of class, ethnicity, and race as the game became both more popular and professional in Brazil during the first half of the twentieth century.

The section entitled “Workplace Culture” examines how a shared work environment created a group identity based on common experiences. While Artur José Renda Vitorino analyzes newspapers and other writings to explore the self-image of Rio de Janeiro’s printers and typesetters during the Empire, Fernando Teixeira da Silva, in an essay on stevedores in Santos, pays close attention to issues of gender and argues that a valiant and

occasionally aggressive masculinity were key components of the workers' culture and class identity between 1920 and 1950.

Mirta Lobato's essay on communist activities in the meatpacking industry of Berisso, Argentina, opens the section entitled "Gender, Factory, and Politics." The 1930s were a period of shifting work and hiring practices, and she traces the strategies employed by communist labor leaders to organize Berisso's increasingly native-born workforce in the face of the government's strong anticommunist campaign. Also included is an essay by Daniel James that is essentially a composite of several arguments from his important oral-history study *Dona María's Story* (Duke Univ. Press, 2000).

"Migrations, Ethnicity, and Factory Culture," the final and strongest section in the volume, considers how mobile populations, whether immigrants or migrants, construct a sense of class identity. Alexandre Fortes, writing about eastern European immigrants in Porto Alegre during the 1930s and 1940s, reveals the multiple (and often contradictory) ways that ethnicity and sense of place came together to explain workers' actions. He is particularly adept at showing how the political orientations of Porto Alegre immigrant workers reflected the rapidly changing political climate in Europe in this period.

Paulo Fontes's essay challenges many stereotypes associated with Northeastern migrants to São Paulo. Far from rootless wanderers, the migrants used networks of family and friends to ease their transition to the city and find employment. At Nitro Química, they developed a special work culture based on their Northeastern roots, one that emphasized informality (name-calling and joking around) as well as a pride in the practical knowledge accumulated by largely uneducated workers. As new waves of migrants arrived, the Northeastern cultural identity of both the neighborhood and the factory reinforced one another and deepened.

During the 1950s, there was a sense that deepening industrialization was moving Brazil rapidly toward a bright future. Inherent in this developmentalist discourse was the belief that factory workers from the Northeast were "good workers": apolitical, deferential, and grateful. Antonio Luigi Negro debunks this myth in his study of automobile workers in Greater São Paulo. While industrialists may have expected workers to be grateful for the relatively high wages and benefits, workers viewed these not as gifts from benevolent bosses but as earned compensation for hard work. In Negro's research, the automobile

workers of the 1950S appear to have more in common with the attitudes and militancy associated with the “*novo sindicalismo*” of the late 1970S.

Individually, there are many fine essays in this collection, but the parts fail to add up to a satisfying whole. The editors failure to craft a final essay to draw broader condusions from these diverse essays is the volume’s main weakness. Nevertheless, there are some important essays here, and historians of Brazil interested in issues of labor, gender, ethnicity, and popular culture would be wise to consult it.

THOMAS M. JORDAN, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville

Published in *The Hispanic American Historical Rewiew* - HAHR  
August 2006 – pp. 611-613