

development of our current understanding of suburban development could also be discussed in more depth. Hopefully Greason will expand his arguments later. *Suburban Erasure* is an excellent start at bringing nonurban African Americans in the north into the wider scholarly discussion.

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Robert P. Wolensky and William A. Hastie Sr. *Anthracite Labor Wars: Tenancy, Italians, and Organized Crime in the Northern Coalfield of Northeastern Pennsylvania, 1897–1959* (Center for Canal History, 2013). Pp. 447. Paperback. \$24.95.

Readers familiar with history of Pennsylvania anthracite coal mining in the twentieth century know of the Knox Mine disaster in 1959, when managers directed workers to illegally mine coal under the Susquehanna River, resulting in the flooding many Wyoming Valley shafts and galleries, and killing twelve people. The Knox Coal Company was the leaseholder of the River Slope mine from the Pennsylvania Coal Company and was but one of many lessees in an evolving corporate reorganization of access to mineral rights in Luzerne and Lackawanna counties. A compelling argument made in Robert Wolensky et al.'s earlier book, *The Knox Mine Disaster, January 22, 1959* (1999) (reviewed in *Pennsylvania History* 69, no. 3 [Summer 2002]: 458–59) was that the leasing system encouraged illegal mining in the quest for profits and in corruption among company officials and union leaders. In many ways, *Anthracite Labor Wars* takes as its start this devastating “end” of mining in the northern field. This book's purpose is to trace the origins of the pernicious system of leasing and subcontracting—when the owners of mineral rights got out of the mining business—and to trace the intricate, if not endemic, “culture of corruption” that these forms of tenancy spawned. In addition, this study reveals mineworkers' active—often violent, though ultimately futile—resistance to tenancy. For scholars of the region the study is a deep dive; and for researchers of other coal regions in the state and elsewhere, it will serve as the definitive source for comparative industrial and labor histories.

Robert P. Wolensky, professor of sociology emeritus at University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point, joins with William A. Hastie Sr., a former mine-worker (he was on-site at Knox in 1959) and local historian of Pittston,

to contribute an extensively researched history of mining and a history of mineworkers in the northern anthracite field as shaped by an evolving system of tenancy. Early chapters define two types of tenancy: the first was subcontracting in which a coal-owning company granted an individual miner a contract to mine coal or do development work in a mine; and the second was leasing, which was the practice of a coal-owning company to let a section of a mine, or an entire colliery, to an independent coal company. Whereas subcontracting dated back to the 1890s and continued in the twentieth century, the system of leasing came to dominate after 1935. These chapters supply a descriptive industrial history of mining around Wilkes-Barre, Pittston, and Scranton, and important business histories—and corporate restructurings—of the Erie Railroad's subsidiaries, the Pennsylvania Coal Company (PaCC) and the Hillside Coal & Iron Company (HC&I). Both companies benefited by demanding of their subcontractors and leaseholders more tonnage for less cost, and thus the contract miners and incorporated leaseholders became the drivers of labor's exploitations.

The four middle chapters of the book describe the thirty-year war (1905–39) workers fought over subcontracting, leasing, and many other grievances at the Erie Coal companies. The labor actions were not just against management but against the United Mine Workers and the union's inability to rid the region of subcontracting. There were wildcat strikes in 1905, a widespread, general shutdown in 1910 involving 12,000 employees (from all ten PaCC collieries and three out of four HC&I collieries), and the 1916 Industrial Workers of the World–led strike that began an alternative understanding of labor protest in the northern field. According to the authors, “The area's militant tradition [comprised] a series of labor movements undertaken against powerful forces by workers who were unwaveringly set on pursuing their own vision of the just workplace and community” (xiv). Further, Wolensky and Hastie cast special light on the Italian immigrants employed by the Erie companies who were receptive to the IWW's syndicalism and its demands and methods to eliminate tenancy.

Layers of grassroots protest and worker militancy become more complex when “insurgents” led strikes in 1920 and 1924–25, and especially during the violent contest in 1928 at PaCC's no. 6 colliery—involving the company's use of subcontractors as a cost-cutting measure, insurgent mineworkers, the UMWA's neglect of the subcontracting issue, and the manipulations of both workers and union locals by organized crime. The “Feud at No. 6” began with a company lockout and a shaft's reopening with six subcontractors and mining

machines. The 400-member workforce walked out and soon were joined by 1,300 men from the colliery's three other pits (one-third were Italians). Local 1703's officers refused to support the "mutineers," and why should they have? "[V]irtually all were subcontractors and other 'company men' who had gained office by controlling jobs and receiving favors from the bosses," claimed the insurgents, who then held an unofficial election of new representatives (95). District 1 president Rinaldo Cappellini refused to recognize the election, as did UMWA president John L. Lewis, and PaCC's management "applauded" the union presidents' decisions. During these first contentious weeks of what became a nearly year-long, district-wide revolt in 1928, the murders of six former and current Local 1703 officers, members, and subcontractors occurred, and Pittston "struggled to make sense of the mayhem. Why was it happening? Who was behind it?" Wolensky and Hastie supply two answers: "In the simplest terms, the aggressions pitted the subcontracting systems supporters against its opponents" and "organized crime remained an unspoken element in the bedlam." Connecting these answers more explicitly is coauthor Hastie (in an interview conducted in 1989) who spoke about the murdered Alex Campbell (elected check-weighman of No. 6): "he could not be intimidated or bribed by the organized crime boss Santo Volpe. . . . Volpe had Campbell and (the newly elected secretary of the local) Peter Reilly killed because they were also standing by the men" (104-5).

The authors meticulously document the contributive Mafia-element to the subcontracting rebellion in 1928, to leaseholding companies of PaCC collieries, and to the Italian workforce. Throughout the book readers are reminded that a third of the workers were Italian immigrants, mainly from Sicily, who "were particularly opposed to subcontracting because they had seen its adverse consequences in the old country's sulfur pits, including the involvement of organized crime" (97). The authors admit "it was not clear why so many Sicilians gained employment at the Erie coal companies," but the immigrants were hired as both workers and as subcontractors. The authors speculate that "it may be no coincidence that the [Erie] companies were the premiere architects of the subcontracting system, for Sicily's mining industry had long been structured around petty subcontractors who hired relatively large work crews, often with the assistance of *Padrone* labor contractors" (57). When PaCC and HC&I hired Sicilians as subcontractors "they, in turn, took on fellow countrymen as laborers and drove them with 'pushers,' 'hustlers,' and 'enforcers' in a manner similar to the old-world pattern." Sicilian mineworkers "knew of the systems harmful consequence in the

mines around their former homes . . . in south-central Sicily. They knew that organized-crime-affiliated miners were prominent among the subcontractors and they were determined to keep the system, as well as its criminal foundations, out of their American workplaces" (58–59). Some questions remain for future study about formal and informal labor recruitment systems, who was hired by subcontractors and leaseholding companies and stayed on the job, and about intra-ethnic and cross-ethnic alliances in the five alternative union movements *Anthracite Labor Wars* chronicles.

By the 1930s two dual union movements, the National Miners Union, led by the Communists, and the United Anthracite Workers of Pennsylvania, failed to dislodge the expanding leasing system. The book's final chapters track the proliferation of leases by each company, how several leaseholders grew into large operations, the continued connections to organized crime, and how tenancy shaped the final decline of the northern field. The authors claim that production in the northern field was sustained in the 1940s and 1950s, as "former subcontractors . . . investors, speculators, public officials, and persons with no mining background all scrambled to garner the [leases]" (194), yet if this was a benefit the costs to the region were incredibly high:

Tenancy spawned a regime of subsidence and other environmental hazards, as well as injuries, bribes, kickbacks, bogus inspections, short-weighting, illegal mining, shorted wages, broken union agreements, even murder. . . . They were predictable outcomes of systematic degradations initiated by the major anthracite corporations, their tenants (including alleged organized criminals), the mineworkers' union and its leaders, state regulatory agencies and inspectors, and, in certain cases, "coal hungry" mineworkers. (189)

The final chapter is curiously titled as postscript, but raises an important question: Why have Italians been neglected in the story of anthracite labor? This is the best chapter in the book in terms of engaging the broader historiographical and interpretive debates on immigrant (and ethnic) workers beyond the anthracite region and outside of Pennsylvania. However, it ultimately seeks an equal prominence for Italians *in the anthracite region* that Victor Greene saw in *The Slavic Community on Strike* among East European immigrants. The chapter argues that three narratives have "clouded" a contemporary, social memory of (and scholarly inquiry about) Italians as committed activists for workers' rights and economic justice. Italians' roles in the

anthracite region are instead shaped by past and present “stories” of them as “unfit” immigrants, or a hard-working people, overcoming many obstacles, and assimilating, or as gangsters as popular culture informs. To challenge and problematize these stories the authors recall the collection of “Italians” chronicled in the seven previous chapters—as interviewees, as labor leaders, insurgents, and strikers, as subcontractors and as leaseholders, as crime bosses, murder victims, and arrestees. As such a listing of multiple and oppositional roles suggests, it is not clear if national/ethnic/regional group-based identities are even useful constructs in understanding individual or collective action. This final chapter signals that there is more research to be done on “activist Italians and their multi-ethnic comrades,” and certainly if an “Italian Community on Strike” is to be written for the region, women and the family will need be included, as well as other working-class forms of mutual support and action, political alignments, and transnational connections.

That this volume would be foundation to researching such topics is unequivocal: the quantity of published and archival sources from which the authors draw is massive, including oral history collections held at Wilkes-Barre’s King’s College and over sixty more interviews conducted by Wolensky and contributing to the Northeastern Pennsylvania Oral and Life History Project, as well as union and court proceedings, government surveys, reports of special commissions, trade journals, coal company archival collections, and dozens of newspapers (and the endnotes to each chapter often quote at length from these sources). Collected and displayed on nearly every page of the study are over 250 reproductions of telegrams, newspaper headlines, advertisements, and proclamations, along with photographs of people, breakers, shafts, (and as frontispiece to each chapter a different miner memorial from the northern field). Two thorough appendices (75+ pages) supply definitions for anthracite mining terms, and helpful descriptions of laws and organizations, and the second appendix comprises nearly 500 biographies of major and minor figures in the study.

*Anthracite Labor Wars* effectively connects industrial, technological, and corporate histories of northern-field anthracite with mineworkers’ labor, livelihoods, and safety. “Coal pillaging and unsafe mining, along with wage, weight, and car cheating were hallmarks of the tenancy systems at PaCC, HC&I, . . . , Knox, and other companies. . . . The industry became engulfed in a culture of corruption where normal business dealings involved unethical and/or illegal actions” (184). This volume explains exceedingly well how tenancy systems inured the conditions under which workers mined

anthracite, and, indeed, their dignity at work, and we come to empathize with mineworkers' sustained militancy shaped by local concerns, their wild-cat strikes, dissatisfactions with the United Mine Workers, and creations of alternative union movements, in their attempts to resolve their grievances. Yet, as the authors conclude, those systems of tenancy became so pervasive, so entrenched, "it can be argued that subcontracting and leasing themselves constituted a type of *organized* criminal activity. Legal (and ethical) principles were systematically violated by companies, tenants, union leaders, and, in some cases, workers" (189).

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Cheryl Janifer LaRoche. *Free Black Communities and the Underground Railroad: The Geography of Resistance* (University of Illinois Press, 2014). Pp. 232. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. Cloth \$85.00.

A number of studies have appeared over the last few years that have expanded our appreciation of the range and complexity of the Underground Railroad (UGRR). LaRoche adds her voice to those who insist that more attention has to be placed on the pivotal role played by northern free black communities in the movement to undermine slavery. Hers is mainly a study of three black rural settlements, Rocky Fork and Miller Grove in Illinois, Lick Creek in Indiana, and Poke Patch in Ohio. It also has a wider frame of reference, taking in some of the many other black rural settlements (as well as a few of the urban communities) that were pivotal to what she inventively calls the "geography of resistance." Rocky Fork stood on 300 acres three miles west of Alton and was the first port of call for those fleeing slavery along the Missouri River and from southwest Missouri. Established in 1844, Miller Grove, which was settled by freed families from Tennessee, was a beacon for slaves escaping from Kentucky, Tennessee, and Missouri. Lick Creek, located in a remote area southeast of Paoli, Orange County, seventeen miles from the Ohio River, was settled in 1817 by freeborn African Americans. By 1855 the settlement occupied 1,500 acres. Poke Patch in western Gallia County was settled in an area whose economy relied heavily on iron-ore furnaces. Situated where they were, these settlements were usually the first stop on the line to freedom.