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Gregg Andrews. *City of Dust: A Cement Company Town in the Land of Tom Sawyer.* Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1996. xii + 360 pp. $42.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8262-1074-6.

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Going back "home" to one's industrial community after a lengthy absence has become a traumatic experience for many American workers in the late twentieth century. In the name of "progress" and the quest for greater profits, combinations of powerful corporations, business interests, and government bodies have too often made conscious decisions that physically destroyed, deindustrialized, or otherwise ravaged once viable working-class communities. Economic costs aside, the sense of "loss," of uprooted identity, that accompanies the destruction of such communities is a price that never appears in corporate accounts, a price paid for by the relatively powerless who had little or no say in the relevant decision-making process. Memory itself is precarious and problematic, and few such communities have sympathetic, knowledgeable historians who soundly document their existence and record the distinctive experiences of their working people.

Ilasco, Missouri, is one of the fortunate exceptions. A native son of an adjacent "suburb" called "Monkey Run," historian Gregg Andrews has produced a well-written, valuable book about the working people who lived, worked, and struggled to make a better life in a cement company town throughout its sixty years of existence. Ilasco, located three miles away from Mark Twain's childhood home in Hannibal, Missouri, was physically destroyed in the late 1960s. When the national cement corporation faced regional and global competition, it sought to capitalize on tourism in Hannibal, and united with the tourist industry to persuade the state to route scenic Highway 79 directly through the town's center. Andrews' account covers the entire history of Ilasco, including its nineteenth- century origins, rise, fall, and the aftermath of its demise.

Andrews' pioneering social history focuses needed attention on a group of workers and an industry that labor historians and others have previously neglected. The author's description of the work process involved in cement manufacture, and the terrible toll on the workers of the industry's accidents and diseases, alone provide little-known, valuable information. At the same time, the setting for this particular industrial experiment in the New South–in agrarian, former slave-holding, Confederate-sympathizing Ralls County–was highly unusual. Defying easy characterization as either a Southern or Northern state, "Mossback," Missouri has never been noted for its development of heavy industry, presence of Yankee capitalists or southern and eastern European immigrants, or for the outbreak of major labor conflicts. Yet Ilasco's history involved all of these aspects. Thus, while *City of Dust* is primarily a social history of cement workers in this non-incorporated town, it also has the merits of a

good community study in that it sheds new light on the larger history of American business, immigration, labor, and working-class culture.

Ilasco came into existence shortly after the eastern capitalists who owned the nation's largest cement corporation, Atlas Portland Cement Company, decided to expand operations beyond their base in Lehigh Valley, Pennsylvania, into new, geologically rich, terrain. In 1901, Atlas thus began construction of the first cement plant built west of the Mississippi, on a site that included Le Baume cave–once considered an alternative entrance to Mark Twain's classic "robbers' " cave. Perhaps because Atlas did not own the plant's surrounding land at this time, the company could accurately advertise that it did not intend to create a company town. On privately owned land adjacent to the plant and rented out to tenants, Ilasco soon emerged as a rough-and-tumble labor camp in which a population of 3,000, primarily "new" immigrants in origin, lived before World War I. The county's heavily populated center was an anomaly whose foreign-speaking people and cultures were considered undesirable by nativist residents in the surrounding region. Ilasco's name itself was a composite of the ingredients–iron, lime, aluminum, silica, calcium, oxygen–that were needed to make portland cement.

Andrews has divided Ilasco's history into three major chronological periods. Part I, "A Foreign Colony in Mossback, Missouri," traces the origins and early development of Ilasco until 1910, when a machinists' strike and Italian radicalism were defeated by state troops. No governor had called out against labor since the railroad strike of 1886. For the author, the state's repression of this 1910 strike, which temporarily united ethnic and American-born workers but which was widely portrayed as a "foreign uprising," was the defining moment in the community's history. The absence of a labor movement for many years afterward (until 1943), along with a lack of radical ideas, largely predetermined Ilasco's future.

Part II, "Whose Community?," chronicles the period from 1910 to 1930, when Atlas closed saloons and greatly extended its land ownership, political power, and control over workers, into the schools and churches that the cement workers had built. Ilasco was transformed into a non-incorporated company town which continued to lack political representation of its own in larger governmental bodies or institutions. Racism, nativism, the prohibition movement, "Americanization," and company-sponsored patriotism were useful means of dividing workers, who saw little alternative to their acceptance of company paternalism. The resentment that immigrant and American workers possessed often found an unfortunate outlet in drunkenness or domestic abuse, or in a more respectable but more vague form of cultural "trickstersism," in which the worker got the better of his boss through guile of some sort. When Atlas merged with U.S. Steel in 1929 to create a new subsidiary, the Universal Atlas Cement Company, the prospects for Ilasco workers and the fate of the community became even more dependent on the paternalism of big business and decisions made by outside powers.

Part III, "Dust to Dust," spans the period from 1930 until the present and describes the role of big business, Hannibal tourist interests, and the state in the destruction of Ilasco. The successful formation in 1943 of Local 205 of the United Cement, Lime and Gypsum Workers International Union, an industrial union within the American Federation of Labor, grew out of the militancy of the larger labor movement as well as local conditions. Its maturation in the context of the Cold War, Taft-Hartley, and anti- Communist purges, however, insured conservative tendencies, including a focus on "bread and butter" issues instead of workers' control of the corporate decision-making or productive processes. Even though Ilasco workers had rejected company paternalism and become less isolated by 1957, when national-pattern bargaining was established during a national cement workers strike, they could not ultimately salvage Ilasco. By the 1960s, a variety of commercial interests had decided that Ilasco had become expendable. Workers could not forestall Universal Atlas's decision to build a new automated plant which was completed in 1967; nor could they fight against global economic competition, the decline of organized labor in the U.S., or the tourism schemes of Hannibal business people who had always treated Ilasco as a colony.

Andrews has written a highly readable book for the general public as well as academics. One of the greatest strengths of *City of Dust* is that, throughout, the author took Ilasco's working people as he found them, without romanticizing them, without either blaming them or absolving them of all responsibility for their fate, and without imposing on them his own views of what they should have done. As presented, these were very human people, sympathetically brought to life by multiple individual stories based on oral histories, court cases, newspaper accounts, the census, and other records.

Ilasco workers thus had flaws as well as virtues. One particular flaw, endemic racism, was a major obstacle

to unity. Even Ilasco's new immigrants, themselves the object of ridicule and discrimination, seem to have accepted America's Social Darwinist hierarchy, thereby insuring that racism would impede the development of class-consciousness. Unfortunately, Andrews never explored the interesting question of when and how these particular Ilasco immigrants became "white" or racist, or why the Ku Klux Klan avoided Ilasco. If his general analysis of racism is correct, the Ilasco case suggests that perhaps there may be important regional differences in the U.S. in regard to the timing and process through which new immigrant ethnic groups first perceived themselves as being "white."

Fortunately, Andrews has not ignored women in this cement town and has treated gender and cultural issues in sophisticated ways. For example, he argues that, although some workers undoubtedly drank too much–both immigrant and American workers in the early century patronized saloons–in these meeting places of sociability, they developed potential or actual inter-ethnic contacts that the cement company feared might lead to unionization. Atlas thus had an immediate direct interest in promoting prohibition. But working-class women who had suffered from their men's excessive drinking also sometimes became advocates of temperance or prohibition for autonomous reasons of their own, without any intention of supporting the cement company's efforts to have an industrially disciplined, efficient, anti-union labor force at its disposal. The evidence in Ilasco indicates that the intersection of gender and class interests was often complex and sometimes contradictory.

Despite such merits, minor quibbles emerge from Andrews' general presentation of culture. If anything, he may have unwittingly exaggerated the extent of drunkenness and criminality among the foreign-speaking cement workers in Ilasco's early decades because of his reliance on individual court cases and English-language newspapers. Moreover, Andrews' belated discussion of the gender gap would have been more useful if it had been incorporated earlier into the text. It must have had important implications for a predominantly male work force, the existence of a rough-and-tumble labor camp, and the slow process of community building. Slight reorganization would have strengthened his overall case.

Another great strength of *City of Dust* is that the author has successfully placed Ilasco's working people within the context of the broader society and the powerful business and governmental forces that shaped so much of their lives. In so doing, he has further humanized his subjects. After 1910, their options for collective action and reform were much more limited than they had been before. The demise of radical alternatives in 1910, and the nonexistence of a viable local labor movement afterward, meant that they lived, worked, and tried to build a community of their own within the very narrow limits industrial capitalism then imposed on them. Andrews justifiably emphasizes the importance of a militant national labor movement, the Wagner Act, and an actively supportive federal government for the successful unionization of Ilasco workers during World War II. At the same time, he devotes considerable worthy attention to the lucrative contracts that came to the cement company from the New Deal state and to the subsequent anti-union conservative political environment that greatly benefited Universal Atlas and its successors.

Andrews has drawn upon a wide variety of sources, painted a big picture, and generally succeeded in supporting his arguments with evidence. His analysis of Atlas leases and legal maneuverings to acquire property is especially impressive. Still, one sometimes wishes for other information. If possible to ascertain, it would have been desirable for the author to have shed additional light on the following: the national cement company's specific policies and experiences in other places with new immigrants; the extent of inter-ethnic antagonisms and cooperation within the diverse new immigrant and American-born working class of Ilasco itself; outmigration and the exposure of Ilasco's migratory immigrant and American workers to the labor movement in other places and industries. Upon occasion, Ilasco's workers seem a bit too geographically removed, or otherwise isolated from their larger environments. It would also have been helpful to readers unfamiliar with the area to have included a regional map showing the location of Ilasco, along with its adjacent "suburbs," as well as the towns, cities, and Mark Twain sites mentioned in the text.

While Andrews has explored English-language sources thoroughly, one wishes he had also delved into some foreign-language ones, especially fraternal society records and ethnic newspapers, for other perspectives on immigrant culture, the labor movement, and perhaps Ilasco itself. The daily life, holidays, and customs of the new immigrants, as described, could have occurred in any ethnic working-class community. But most Slovaks, Hungarians, Italians, and Rumanians read foreign-language newspapers and had extensive kinship and ethnic contacts elsewhere. The occupation of Ilasco by Missouri troops during the strike of 1910 was precisely the type of spectacular event that ethnic newspa-

pers were likely to cover. Some papers also regularly featured the letters of ethnic workers, who described and compared local communities. There is no guarantee, however, that research would lead to letters or articles on Ilasco in particular.

The strengths of *City of Dust* are considerable and far outweigh any minor weaknesses. Readers will find that one of the most delightful, original, and striking features of *City of Dust* is the author's skillful interweaving of references to Mark Twain and his legacy into the cement company's history. Andrews introduces each chapter with quotations from Twain's writings and, throughout the text, carries the theme of what this social critic might have thought of the changes that the cement company had brought to his childhood environment. More importantly, he discusses the appropriation and distortion of Mark Twain's legacy by Atlas Portland Cement Company, its successors, and allied business groups in the Hannibal region. He argues that Atlas officials and others, influenced by the challenge of the strike of 1910 which occurred during the same year Twain died, began to develop a selective, self-interested, entrepreneurial distortion of Twain's legacy which continues today. The glorification of capitalism and elevation of Tom Sawyer–not the rebel Huck Finn–as entrepreneurial hero and national symbol thus preceded the contemporary tourist industry. Presumably, the history of Ilasco workers would have been quite different if *City of Dust* had been subtitled "A Cement Company Town in the Land of Huck Finn."

It would be hard to argue with the author's general conclusion, that Ilasco is a town that is "a symbol of the broader political defeat of the American working class in the twentieth century" (p. 322). Andrews has brilliantly shown that, in its various forms, industrial capitalism had exacted an extremely heavy price on the lives–and quality of life–of ordinary working people throughout the town's history. Despite their cultures and struggles, cement workers could not even avoid outright destruction of their community. His eloquent, personalized epilogue conveys a vivid sense of what Ilasco–and its destruction–has ultimately meant to the author and former residents. Ilasco's tragedy may be an extreme example of more general problems associated with industrial capitalism. *City of Dust*, a well-researched account and powerful testimonial, will strike a particularly strong chord with working people who have suffered the trauma of the devastation of their communities and ways of life. Scholars and the general public who have values beyond those of the marketplace will find it particularly rewarding–and disturbing–reading.

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