Nuys argues, was largely motivated by “fear” that “not to Americanize . . . placed the potential fate of the nation in the hands of radicals or degenerates. . . . She defined citizenship in terms of racial assumptions [then] common” (146–147).

The author is more interested in the Americanizers than in their clients. Immigrants and their organizations have no real voice in this book; they are largely the mute objects of the work to reform them. Nor does he make enough distinctions between the various nativists. James D. Phelan, the millionaire one-term U.S. senator from California who figures prominently in the work, was inexorably opposed to Asian immigrants but supportive of Italian immigrants and their organizations in a way that few Protestants were.

The book is clearly written, well organized, and accurate, with only the odd slip. Israel Zangwill, for example, was not an “English . . . immigrant” (35); he was born and died in Britain. Van Nuys has made a distinct contribution to the literature and points the way toward work that needs to be done.

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The Whiteness of Child Labor Reform in the New South. By Shelley Sallee (Athens, University of Georgia Press, 2004) 207 pp. $49.95 cloth $19.95 paper

This book makes an intriguing and potentially important argument: The efforts of Progressive-era reformers to curtail child labor in the New South resulted in the invention of new forms of white identity, or what Sallee calls “fictions of whiteness,” that disadvantaged African-Americans. In an account that focuses primarily on industrialism and politics in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Alabama, Sallee offers a view of the regional and national forces that channeled reform efforts into support for white supremacist social and economic policies. Throughout the seven short chapters of this well-organized book, Sallee presents her findings and analysis in clear and concise prose, drawing upon a respectable array of primary and secondary sources to make her case that Progressives were driven not simply by racism, but by a series of complicated relationships to, and “political investments in[,] race-based arguments.” (10) Chapters offer accounts of various mill owners and mill towns in Alabama; detailed demographics and family-labor strategies of white mill workers; readings of the political rhetoric of the anti–child-labor campaigns by organized labor and the corresponding responses by mill owners and southern boosters; and fascinating examinations of the debates among Progressives about how properly to characterize the “whiteness” and “racialness” of mill workers.
Many labor historians will find themselves comfortably reassured by this book; yet little of it is interdisciplinary in either method or content. Sallee’s analysis would have been enriched by reference to a broader range of disciplinary perspectives. Readers looking for innovative, or even traditional cross-disciplinary, perspectives will be disappointed.

The book makes a number of vital contributions, but space permits mention of only one: Sallee documents the central role of women and their political networks in the development and emergence of a “transregional white middle class” during the Progressive Era. This concept, which deserves to be widely examined, may prove useful to future historians and sociologists seeking to understand the peculiar dynamics of gender, race, class, and citizenship in the early twentieth-century United States.

A flaw in the book is its lack of a well-defined understanding of how race functions as ideology. The introduction fails to clarify the author’s perspective on this troublesome question and a footnote that details the theoretical antecedents for the work cites several books that directly contradict each other. This lapse is not a major setback, however, given that a significant majority of historical works on race also suffer from the same theoretical incoherence. It remains a significant source of confusion in the field.

The one major weakness is Sallee’s inexplicable choice not to engage the recent vigorous criticisms by historians Arneson and Kolchin regarding the status of “whiteness” as an object of sociohistorical analysis.1 Their critiques and the responses to them—published well in advance of the present work—draw inspiration from other disciplines (most notably sociology and anthropology) to make a strong case that the ideological notion of whiteness as deployed by recent American labor histories is conceptually and methodologically flawed. If Sallee had looked more aggressively to other disciplines (anthropology, sociology, or American studies) or even looked more widely within her own discipline of history, this otherwise fine book would have offered greater analytical and conceptual rigor and moved the scholarly discussion about whiteness forward. This book could have dispensed with its hazy conceptualization of “whiteness” entirely, and it would remain a compelling contribution to southern historiography of race and labor in the Progressive era.

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