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Sherry Lee Linkon, *The Half-Life of Deindustrialization: Working Class Writing about Economic Restructuring*

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surprisingly, that “by examining the actions of individuals ... we can better understand how different approaches to international communism led to variants in party approaches to similar issues.” (156) I say surprisingly because my major critique of this innovative and useful work is that it is too distant from the men and women who composed the CPA, CPC, and CPSA. We hear much of the CI and of Party leaders but almost nothing of Party members and activists. Perhaps in further work the author will explore the relationship of base and leadership in a fashion similar to his dissection of national parties and the CI.

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Sherry Lee Linkon, *The Half-Life of Deindustrialization: Working Class Writing about Economic Restructuring* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 2018)

LIKE MANY SCHOLARS of deindustrialization and the working class in contemporary Europe and North America, Sherry Lee Linkon finds the recent upsurge of public interest in her work “at once affirming and frustrating.” (xv–xvi) Brexit, European populism, and the election of Donald Trump may have generated thousands of “what’s wrong with the working class” newspaper articles, but there is still a fundamental lack of understanding of how deindustrialization has reshaped and compounded the injuries of class. Her latest monograph, *The Half-Life of Deindustrialization*, is a powerful report to those who argue that working class people in deindustrialized communities should “just get over it” (3) and move on with their lives, and it is exactly the book we need right now to help understand the cultural and political fractures of this new gilded age.

Linkon does a wonderful job of weaving together what are basically short literary analyses of dozens of poems, essays, novels, blogs, memoirs, films, which she argues constitute a distinct genre she entitles “deindustrialization literature.” (15) Her concept of a “half-life” of deindustrialization is a powerful and evocative one that captures the extended, persistent effects of industrial decline on culture and community. E.P. Thompson famously demonstrated how pre-industrial modes of organization and structures of feeling lived on well into the industrial age; likewise the cultural products of the industrial age and the trauma wrought by its rapid decline will continue to shape Western societies for decades to come. Much of the literature studied by Linkon was actually written by the children and grandchildren of industrial workers and focuses on how they navigate a landscape of ruin, casualized service labour, and the legacies of class solidarity that provide hope for change but seem inapplicable to present circumstances.

In her first chapter, Linkon focuses on work, the memory of work, and the sets of conflicting emotions that work often generates in the context of industrial decline and capital flight. The accusation that deindustrialized communities are trapped by a “simple nostalgia” (27) for the past is robustly refuted. She instead identifies a “reflective nostalgia” (35) that combines feelings of longing and attachment with critical thinking and a nuanced understanding of one’s own exploitation. However, turning this ‘reflective nostalgia’ into active resistance can prove challenging. For dock workers in Baltimore in the hit HBO series *The Wire* or low-paid service workers in suburban Detroit in Dean Bakopoulos’ *Please Don’t Come Back from the Moon* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2005), the class struggles and “good work” of the past provides an inspiration for the next generation, but not

a practical model for resistance in the present context. Much has been written on how casualization and precarity inhibits worker solidarity and organizing, but Linkon's literary analyses bring out the emotional and cultural impact of this sense of powerlessness in the face of neoliberal capitalism.

The second chapter explores the impact of deindustrialization on identity. Contemporary working-class identity takes many forms and often intersects with race and gender, a reality which is obscured by the cultural stereotype of the "white man wearing a hard hat," (55) but it nevertheless remains the glue that holds communities together. Linkon addresses the scholarly debate over whether working-class youths embrace individualism in response to economic insecurity and finds that the individual journey for redemption and meaning often involves a return to the communal. For example, in Christie Hodgen's novel *Elegies for the Brokenhearted* (2010), the main character Mary grapples with the trauma of unemployment and a broken family through a personal journey of escape and homecoming, finding "redemption by accepting that her life is embedded in working-class families and relationships." (93) This chapter also explores highly contested nature of Black working-class masculinity, and the ways in which deindustrialization can expose and activate racial and gender divisions in communities and thus make class solidarity even harder to maintain.

In the third chapter, Linkon explores how deindustrialization literature deals with landscape, and uses deindustrialization literature to put the human back into apparently empty "ruins" of industrial decay. In much of the literature she studies, the central narrative is told through characters' relationships with the changing landscape. In Derrick D.

Jones short film *631*, the house of the African-American Joyce family becomes a symbol of the broken promise of post-war industrial prosperity, as the family's pride and joy decays and is eventually abandoned. Linkon reminds the reader that most people experience deindustrialization through its impact on the local, and often do not connect the ruined landscape of their town to neoliberal policies or deregulated capitalism, making broad-based political mobilization more difficult as a result.

Linkon's final chapter deals with the growing sub-genre of "rust belt chic": poems, memoirs, blogs, and essays by cultural commentators that attempt to explore and celebrate the "essence" of their home communities and their working-class upbringings. Linkon's views on "rush belt chic" seem highly ambivalent: she argues that these writings can help deindustrialized communities like Youngstown have "a critical conversation about its own history," (158) but recognizes that the line between authenticity and appropriation is highly contested. She is rightly critical of the way "rust belt chic" ignores class in its rush to celebrate the culture of particular places. For example, resilience, grit, and loyalty are associated with Cleveland or Detroit as cities, rather than specifically with the working class of those cities. Also, with the partial exception of writing on Detroit, "rust belt chic" is insensitive to race and privileges a youthful white male interpretation of post-industrial urbanity. These writers often also fail to recognize their own role in driving gentrification, which causes the displacement of the working class and especially the Black working class from their own communities.

Obviously it is Linkon's goal to demonstrate the value of deindustrialization literature, particularly that which emphasizes the persistence of working-class

culture and strength of working-class communities in the face of economic dislocation. However, the somewhat arbitrary boundaries around what she includes in the genre become increasingly frustrating and are never fully justified. Regardless of what one thinks of the many writings that do lay blame for poverty and social dislocation on working class culture, such as J.D. Vance's best-seller *Hillbilly Elegy* (New York: Harper, 2016), or the "rust belt chic" that openly appropriates working-class culture, Linkon's failure to engage with it weakens the force and wider applicability of her argument. There are also missed opportunities to explore how deindustrialization and the memories of industrial work have differently impacted those for whom the industrial era never actually brought job security or prosperity – particularly many African-Americans and racialized immigrants. She alludes to their distinct experiences on several occasions but it seems absent from her broader arguments about "reflective nostalgia" and the cultural legacies of the industrial era.

Those minor flaws aside, this is an innovative study that introduces the reader to an incredibly diverse body of literature and art and analyzes it in a nuanced and meaningful way. It does valuable work in bringing together the study of industrial labour and deindustrialization with that of contemporary service work and neoliberalism, and will help us all to navigate through the "half-life of deindustrialization" in the years to come.

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Kristen R. Ghodsee, *Why Women Have Better Sex Under Socialism: And Other Arguments for Economic Independence* (New York: Nation Books 2018)

WHY WOMEN HAVE Better Sex Under Socialism: And Other Arguments for Economic Independence is an extension of Kristen R. Ghodsee's popular 2017 *New York Times* article of the same name. Ghodsee claims that the main argument of *Why Women Have Better Sex Under Socialism* can be simply stated as "unregulated capitalism is bad for women, and if we adopt some ideas from socialism, women will have better lives." (1) Ghodsee supports this argument through a succession of chapters that explore separate topics, including motherhood, leadership, citizenship, work, and, of course, sex.

Writing for a primarily American (and Canadian) audience, one of the most effective outcomes of Ghodsee's prose is to challenge ingrained, often negative, assumptions that Westerners have about Eastern Europe and socialism more generally. As a scholar of Russian and East European studies, Ghodsee's examples come primarily from this region's history. Ghodsee argues that before the transition from state socialism to capitalism in Eastern Europe, women enjoyed a level of social and economic freedom and equality that Western women have yet to experience. Ghodsee's goal is not to present the history of state socialism in East Europe as utopic, but rather to point out that there were some aspects that were positive and could serve as inspiration for building a better, more equitable society. Although the most cynical writer may point to Ghodsee's rose-tinted glasses, for the most part she is clear about and successful at this goal.

The base on which gender equality – at the political, economic, and social