



Smokestacks in the Hills: Rural-Industrial Workers in West Virginia (The Working Class in American History)

Lou Martin

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Long considered an urban phenomenon, industrialization also transformed the American countryside. Lou Martin weaves the narrative of how the relocation of steel and pottery factories to Hancock County, West Virginia, created a rural and small-town working class--and what that meant for communities and for labor.

As Martin shows, access to land in and around steel and pottery towns allowed residents to preserve rural habits and culture. Workers in these places valued place and local community. Because of their belief in localism, an individualistic ethic of 'making do,' and company loyalty, they often worked to place limits on union influence. At the same time, this localism allowed workers to adapt to the dictates of industrial capitalism and a continually changing world on their own terms--and retain rural ways to a degree unknown among their urbanized peers. Throughout, Martin ties these themes to illuminating discussions of capital mobility, the ways in which changing work experiences defined gender roles, and the persistent myth that modernizing forces bulldozed docile local cultures.

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