

ers who dared to stand up for their rights and reminded the world that decolonization is an ongoing process of struggle against oppressive forces.

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Matthew L. Basso. *Meet Joe Copper: Masculinity and Race on Montana's World War II Home Front*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013; 372 pp., 29 b&w photos, 1 b&w illus., notes, ind., paper, \$30. ISBN: 9780226044194

Matthew Basso's *Meet Joe Copper: Masculinity and Race on Montana's World War II Home Front* is an impressively detailed labor history that engages with recent theory about whiteness and masculinity. Its importance to American mining history is clear; although women on the home front have gained much attention in popular narratives about WWII, seldom has anyone analyzed male production workers like Montana's "copper commandos." The federal government granted deferments for copper workers who produced this vital war material; indeed, only the Manhattan Project had a higher urgency rating than the region's copper facilities (130). By looking closely at federal and local materials, as well as oral histories, Basso is able to make surprising claims about home front workers in Montana's copper communities.

Basso begins by looking at the formation of local beliefs about race and gender in both Anaconda and Black Eagle, home to the Anaconda Copper Mining Company's ore-processing facilities, as well as Butte, home to the state's major copper mines. Black Eagle has seen little scholarly attention, so details about its early history, including Croatian and Italian workers' ouster of Indians from its smelter, were new to this reviewer.

The book's major contributions, however, come during its later two sections, which cover World War II. The war set forth a series of challenges to copper workers, who had long seen their

physically demanding labor and independent behavior as the pinnacle of working-class masculinity. Instead of promoting this form of masculinity, the federal government and Hollywood demanded that men make sacrifices, either by producing war materials without striking against employers, or by fighting overseas. The real challenge to Montana's men, however, came as the war dragged on and the state's copper communities experienced labor shortages. The government first proposed the use of disabled and older men in copper facilities, which workers begrudgingly accepted. Then the government argued for including women and workers of color, both ideas triggering intense debates and outrage.

Despite the International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers' reputation as radical in its interracialism, Butte's eight thousand miners bucked their union's leadership by walking off of the job in 1942 in what Basso terms a "hate strike." They deemed unacceptable a federal government proposal to send thirty furloughed black soldiers to mines in Butte. Government officials, operating under FDR's Executive Order 8802 which prohibited discrimination in industries with federal contracts, still acceded to these local demands.

In contrast, Black Eagle's smeltermen were more welcoming to the women who joined their workforce in 1943, but only after they developed ways to segregate the women and to make them seem temporary. In the city of Anaconda, the Anaconda company threatened to let the government send Mexican or black workers to the smelter, a stance that it took to convince white smeltermen to instead admit white women into the workforce as an alternative. White workers eventually accepted a very small number of women into that smelter, but they spent a lot of time trying to make sure that their union privileges remained intact and that the boys overseas could regain their smelter jobs upon return.

None of the parties in these situations come out looking particularly good, whether they are

the acquiescent government officials, the racially discriminatory company managers, or the working members of the “Greatest Generation,” whose fight to protect whiteness and masculinity continued into the socially conservative post-war era.

Meet Joe Copper is a complex academic book, demanding a reader’s full attention. In dealing with these intertwined community stories, the author sometimes hurts the narrative flow by doing too much foreshadowing. Yet Basso manages to craft a story that is both careful in its attention to detail and sweeping in its implications. Attesting to its importance as a social history, the book recently won the Philip Taft Labor History Award, the first time since 1988 that a book about the mining industry has done so. Hopefully, it will inspire additional research connecting mining labor and war.

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Gwyn A. Williams. *The Merthyr Rising*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2014 (reprint, 1978) [dist. by University of Chicago Press]; 237 pp., 1 b&w illus., 3 maps, tabs., notes, ind., paper, \$30. ISBN: 9781783160051.

The University of Wales Press has reissued Gwyn Williams’ *The Merthyr Rising*, first published in 1978 and reprinted in 1988 and again in 2003. The book concerns a riot or insurrection—Williams prefers the term “rising”—at the iron-making town of Merthyr Tydfil, Wales, twenty miles north-northwest of Cardiff, on 2 June 1831. The Merthyr region, rich in iron ore, coal, and limestone, became an early center of iron manufacturing. By the time of the rising, forty thousand inhabitants served forty-four iron furnaces in the Merthyr region. The work paid well—at least compared to the agricultural labor which these iron miners and mongers had fled—but employment was unstable. By 1831 Merthyr, with its economic instability, transience, working

conditions, and its class, religious, language, and political frictions, was a cauldron of discontents—Williams goes so far as to declare Merthyr Tydfil “a frontier town.”

What ignited the crisis was a combination of a sharp economic recession that began in 1829. This, combined with rising prices, had pushed the poor to desperation by the beginning of 1831. Working-class anger especially focused on the bailiffs of the local Court of Requests, who enforced the court-ordered repossession of workers’ property for debt in answer to local merchants’ petitions. Protest meetings and marches had already occurred in the spring of 1831, but when, after the announcement of another wage cut, bailiffs descended on the house of one of the leading protest speakers, violence erupted on 2 June 1831 and lasted for five days.

Williams sees a working class forming in the crucible of Merthyr Tydfil by the 1820s, but not yet a working-class movement; the rising, he believes, was the beginning of that. He sees the Merthyr action of June 1831 as a distinct expression of working-class grievances and ambitions, separate from the middle-class Reform Bill agitation and other protest movements of that tumultuous period. “That [British] national crisis assumed divergent forms in localities of differing historical experience,” Williams writes. “In Merthyr Tydfil, the impact of a complex national crisis on local tensions produced a revolutionary insurrection of the working class and brought a pre-history [that of the working class] to an end.”

That proto-working-class movement suffered from an absence of prominent leaders, however—“it was precisely the absence of personalized ‘leadership’ which gave it [the rising] its character”—and thus had no means to articulate its demands. Williams believes the movement was a premeditated revolt but uncoordinated. Once anger had been vented at the obvious targets, the protesters were unable to produce a coherent set of objectives beyond such obvious steps as demanding abolishment the Court of Requests and debt im-