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Review of *Men of the Steel Rails: Workers on the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad, 1869- 1900* By James H. Ducker

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Men of the Steel Rails: Workers on the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad, 1869-1900. By James H. Ducker. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983. Photographs, maps, tables, notes, bibliography, index. xii + 220 pp. \$17.95.

Using an impressive array of company and union publications, newspapers, directories, and archival materials, James H. Ducker delineates the lives and experiences of the Santa Fe Railroad's labor force. Although he includes three chapters relating to unionism, strike action, and working-class politics, his main focus is on the more private side of his subjects' stories. Even in his chapter on the railroad unions, the author is as interested in the fraternal and social functions they served as in their collective bargaining character.

Ducker carefully places each of his topics in an appropriate historiographical context. When dealing with the strikes of the late nineteenth century, for example, he juxtaposes patterns of community response along the Santa Fe with those that Herbert Gutman depicted in his pioneering articles on coal-mining communities. In examining the working lives of the railroaders, Ducker considers attitudes toward managerial initiatives in light of David Montgomery's work on the nineteenth-century struggles over control of the workplace.

In both cases, *Men of the Steel Rails* validates and modifies these important interpretations. Yes, the railroaders often found community support for their strikes, but it depended a great deal on the size of the town and on the proportion of the population that railroaders comprised. Yes, there was resistance to the Santa Fe's efforts to rationalize work in the maintenance shops, but the hostility toward

piece rates was usually voiced by national union spokesmen while local workers often cheerfully accepted managerial initiatives.

Ducker's study is most valuable in offering an extended look into the private lives of railroaders and their families. This material is difficult to summarize, as Ducker presses no sustained thesis, nor does he employ anthropological or sociological formulations. He does use quantitative techniques to analyze demographic data, thus establishing the increasingly segmented class and geographic patterns of one railroad center. More fruitful, however, is Ducker's focus on the details of workers' lives. He quotes extensively from railroad workers' publications and brings his readers into the homes, workplaces, union halls, reading rooms, and saloons where they lived out their lives. *Men of the Steel Rails* is an intelligent, modest, and disciplined study, a worthy addition to labor history and to the history of the late nineteenth-century American West.

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