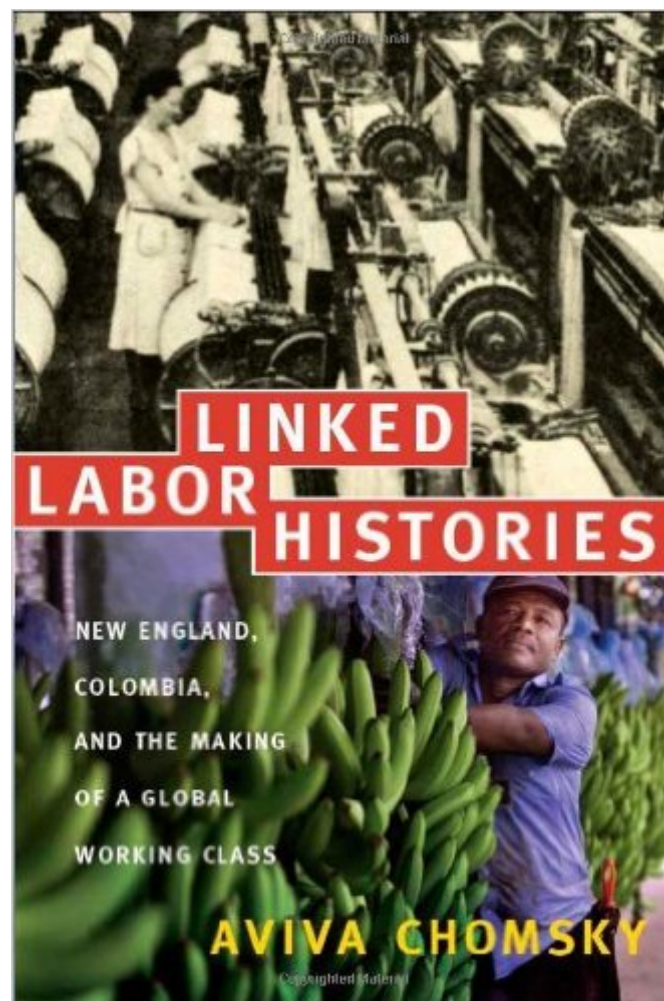


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# Linked Labor Histories: New England, Colombia, And The Making Of A Global Working Class (American Encounters/Global Interactions)



## Synopsis

Exploring globalization from a labor history perspective, Aviva Chomsky provides historically grounded analyses of migration, labor-management collaboration, and the mobility of capital. She illuminates the dynamics of these movements through case studies set mostly in New England and Colombia. Taken together, the case studies offer an intricate portrait of two regions, their industries and workers, and the myriad links between them over the long twentieth century, as well as a new way to conceptualize globalization as a long-term process. Chomsky examines labor and management at two early-twentieth-century Massachusetts factories: one that transformed the global textile industry by exporting looms around the world, and another that was the site of a model program of labor-management collaboration in the 1920s. She follows the path of the textile industry from New England, first to the U.S. South, and then to Puerto Rico, Japan, Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean, and Colombia. She considers how towns in Rhode Island and Massachusetts began to import Colombian workers as they struggled to keep their remaining textile factories going. Most of the workers eventually landed in service jobs: cleaning houses, caring for elders, washing dishes. Focusing on Colombia between the 1960s and the present, Chomsky looks at the Urabá banana export region, where violence against organized labor has been particularly acute, and, through a discussion of the AFL-CIO's activities in Colombia, she explores the thorny question of U.S. union involvement in foreign policy. In the 1980s, two U.S. coal mining companies began to shift their operations to Colombia, where they opened two of the largest open-pit coal mines in the world. Chomsky assesses how different groups, especially labor unions in both countries, were affected. *Linked Labor Histories* suggests that economic integration among regions often exacerbates regional inequalities rather than ameliorating them.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

NECLAS 2009 Annual Meeting, Union College, Schenectady, NY, October 3. Best Book Prize 2009, awarded to Aviva Chomsky, *Linked Labor Histories: New England, Colombia, and the Making of a Global Working Class*. Durham and London: Duke University Press (2008). That labor is typically devalued and that workers tend to not organize, when their choices are low-wages or no job, are not revelations. Why these continue to be persistent features in Latin America, the United States, and the rest of world do demand our scholarly and critical attention, especially in these times of out-of-control CEO salaries and bonuses and diminishing wages and benefits for workers. This year's NECLAS 2009 Best Book Prize winning entry, *Linked Labor Histories: New England, Colombia, and the Making of a Global Working Class* by Aviva Chomsky is an historical study that eloquently and forcefully explains why, as she puts it, "a race to the bottom" (12, 294) for workers' wages and rights is taking place. This book--about globalization's impact on labor and a critique of globalization from perspective of labor history--is unreservedly deserving of the NECLAS Best Book prize. The volume is clearly written and very well narrated--Chomsky knows how to tell a story. Besides being fully researched, Chomsky's interdisciplinary approach brings into its purview an analysis of Colombian and U.S. histories that helps us learn, "What are the circumstances that have allowed workers to improve their conditions, and how can we as a society work to increase those spaces, and the chances, for workers to have a meaningful voice in their workplaces and communities" (301). This humanistic and social justice perspective only makes the book more urgent and compelling.

*Linked Labor Histories: New England, Colombia, and the Making of a Global Working Class* by Historian Avi Chomsky provides a thorough and detailed look at the interconnectedness of labor and globalization. Maintaining that labor and capital should be at the forefront of any study of globalization, Chomsky examines the long twentieth century history of the "race to the bottom" in which corporations continuously searched for ways to speed up production, decrease wages, and operate with little to no regulation to the detriment of workers. Chomsky works hard to enlighten readers to the paradoxes inherent in globalization and industrialization by examining case studies of

New England corporations, Colombian mills and mines, and products such as textiles, looms, bananas and coal. Chomsky offers solutions to the problems that result from globalization and maintains a hope that through education and awareness a new system can result which offers a better life for all of those exploited by this current economic structure. The importance of *Linked Labor Histories: New England, Colombia, and the Making of a Global Working Class* cannot be overstated. Chomsky's focus on the violence, poverty, inequality, and prejudice that is innate in the system of global capitalism should serve to outrage and engage readers. The examples of "linked labor histories" that Chomsky provides between New England, the South, and Colombia illustrate the long global phenomenon of neo-liberalism and the "race to the bottom" in a local, national, and international context. By maintaining a focus on the human side of capital and labor, Chomsky rightly recognizes that people are more than consumers, producers, and cogs in a machine.

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