Andreas draws an interesting parallel between America’s industrial espionage and intellectual property theft in its early efforts to industrialize and modern-day concerns about Chinese piracy of ideas. He makes the point that, “Only after it had become a mature industrial power did the country vigorously campaign for intellectual property protection—conveniently overlooking its own illicit path to industrialization” (p. 98).

The United States’ burgeoning strength also led the nation to a volte-face regarding rights of neutrals in the face of a blockade. Smuggling munitions and accoutrements of war helped succor the Continental army in the War of Independence and the Confederate army four score and seven years later. Great Britain and the United States essentially reversed positions on non-belligerents’ rights between the War of 1812 and the American Civil War.

His chapter on smuggling alcoholic beverages to Indian tribes ends rather abruptly before the Civil War. The reader is left to wonder whether the remaining independent tribes received alcohol after the Civil War and what the effects were. Was alcohol a key factor in subduing the Plains tribes?

The book does flag near the end, because the scenarios display recurring characteristics: attempts to suppress smuggling of illicit items resemble a Whack-a-Mole game. Again and again, as authorities crack down on one leak in the blockade or along the border, other leaks develop. Of course, the ingenuity of smugglers often far surpassed the ability of authorities to anticipate and to adjust to changing situations.

Andreas repeatedly argues that suppression leads to higher profits. While this may be true, the argument seems a little simplistic. The costs of evasion surely rose, so, in effect, evading the blockade came to resemble a lottery—a few big winners. The economies of scale in smuggling is an interesting aspect that he alludes to but might have developed in greater detail in a separate chapter on the basic economic principles of smuggling. Bribing officials and procuring boats and contacts for evading border patrols and naval vessels may require large-scale operations.

Andreas ends by arguing that Americans and policymakers need to recognize the history of smuggling in America, “because it corrects for the hubris of the present and the common tendency to view recent developments as entirely new and unprecedented, and because it helps us make sense of why we are where we are and even where we might be headed” (p. 350). This is an apt point, and one that should intrigue nonspecialists.

DAVID G. SURDAM, University of Northern Iowa

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In the late summer of 1909, young immigrant women workers at the Triangle Shirtwaist Company in New York’s garment industry famously went on strike to secure better hours, higher wages, and safer working conditions. Within a few months, over 20,000 in the “needle trades” joined in a pivotal strike—The Uprising of Twenty Thousand — that led to profound gains to the women’s labor movement such as the 52-hour workweek and the right to paid time off. Working women’s other gains in the Progressive Era include the formation of the Women’s Trade Union League to aid in the organization of labor unions as well as the creation of the Women’s Bureau to study and advocate for women in the workplace. These gains were dramatic and
lasting, but they did not affect the majority of working women who did not work in factories, schools, and hospitals prior to 1940 (most working women were employed as domestics). In *Unprotected Labor*, historian Vanessa H. May explores the factors which prevented domestics from achieving the same rights as their counterparts in other employment sectors and asks why labor reformers did not push for better hours, wages and working conditions for these workers in tandem with their efforts to improve conditions for women in other sectors.

May first emphasizes the fundamental difference between domestic work and other jobs: domestics worked in the private arena of middle- and upper-class homes—not more public places such as sweatshops or beauty parlors. Then she questions why middle-class women’s groups, who were amongst the biggest champions of workplace regulation for public jobs, were not advocates for the regulation of domestic work in private homes. May’s main thesis is that middle-class women reformers viewed the home as a private space “dedicated to the nurturance of middle-class families” (p. 12), which should not be subject to government regulation. May argues that these middle-class reformers proved to be exceedingly hypocritical individuals who fought for justice for women workers in their public lives but mistreated their servants in their private lives.

Her study of domestic service focuses on servants in New York City, which she argues was at the forefront of the labor movement during the early twentieth century (p. 5). Thus, May posits that an investigation of the failures of domestic service regulation in New York is an instructive case study that has applications for the rest of the nation. May does not provide quantitative evidence on domestic service but instead brings forth an impressive compilation of qualitative evidence from contemporaneous newspapers articles, domestic servants’ interviews, women’s group meeting minutes, and union records. While the bulk of the primary source evidence originates from employers, activists, and government bodies, May provides enough accounts from servants themselves to show the severity of the injustices they faced and how employer complaints vastly contradicted those of domestics. May explains that middle-class women routinely complained that domestics had a “proclivity for sexual vice” (p. 30) and that employment agencies should vet them on a set of moral standards while domestics described incidents of sexual assault by the men of the house (p. 49). In another example of contradiction, employers expressed fears that servants brought diseases into their homes and pressed for the introduction of bills in the state legislature requiring domestics to undergo medical testing (p. 129), while domestics complained that they caught illnesses from their employers’ homes (p. 165). While domestics fought their employers by attempting to unionize and filing complaints with the Legal Aid Society (p. 65), it was not until the end of the 1930s that they began to win some workplace protections. They successfully campaigned against legislation requiring medical testing by arguing that if employers truly cared for the physical wellbeing of domestics, they would enact policies to enforce the eight-hour workday, thus allowing workers to rest and stay healthy (p. 168). But it was not until 2010 that domestic workers earned basic rights such as overtime pay for live-out workers in New York State.

The strength of May’s book lies in her use of narrative evidence to unpack the incentives, motivations, and hypocritical nature of middle-class women reformers. A limitation, however, is that she does not adequately address the shifting racial demographics in the domestic sphere that resulted from the Great Migration of African Americans to the northern cities starting in the 1910s, as well as the
passage of the anti-immigration acts in the 1920s—events that resulted in domestic service becoming a predominantly African American profession. The public/private dichotomy that May sets up as the foundation for her argument necessitates that these two spheres possess racial homogeneity. The percentage of blacks in domestic service in New York City rose from 14.32 percent in 1910 to 34.9 percent in 1930 (IPUMS census samples). May argues that middle-class women reformers crusaded for women’s rights in the public sphere, while denying basic rights for their domestic employees; however, she does not address the fact that these women did not extend their campaigning efforts to black women in the public sphere. For example, these middle-class women reformers were amongst the biggest proponents of the passage of Mothers’ Pensions, which were state-level programs that provided aid to impoverished women with children in the 1910s and 1920s, and which became the blueprints for the creation of federal welfare legislation in the 1930s. Yet, few of these middle-class women supported the provision of mothers’ pensions for African American women, which led to the widespread denial of aid for black mothers and children.

Overall, May successfully exposes the hypocrisy of many middle-class women in regards to white immigrants. Anyone with an interest in early twentieth-century politics, reforms, and poor relief will find May’s work intriguing as she sheds new light on a profession that is so frequently in the shadows both in the literature and our everyday lives.

SHARI J. ELI, University of Toronto

The Thousand-Year Flood: The Ohio-Mississippi Disaster of 1937. By David Welky.
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Crises are institutional stress tests. From revolutions to depressions, system-wide shocks can change incentives drastically, tip equilibria, and reveal which political and economic commitments are truly renegotiation-proof. Natural disasters are no exception, and have proven to be a rich source of variation for recent papers in economic history. David Welky, in his book, The Thousand-Year Flood, documents the human and government responses to the massive 1937 Ohio-Mississippi flood. In doing so, he reminds us of this often-forgotten natural disaster, and illuminates the interaction of the New Deal administration with both environmental and disaster relief policies. In particular, the technocratic policies of the Roosevelt administration, especially the WPA mobilization of labor, made the flood less damaging even as it made flood control less provincial and more coordinated.

Welky’s book argues that in terms of devastation, the 1937 flood was larger than the 1927 flood, and his mission is to bring this event to life. This is not as clear as the author suggests. The 1927 flood damages were estimated at between $250,000,000 and $350,000,000, while Welky notes on page 22 that the 1937 flood damages were close in nominal terms, estimated at roughly $300,000,000. However, his narrative reveals why the 1937 flood was not the memorable event of 1927; New Deal policies, particularly the army of relief workers sent in by the WPA, managed to effectively mitigate much of the flood’s human costs, and the subsequent flood control policy ensured that the losses of the 1927 flood were not likely to be repeated again soon. In short, the national political response to the flood was effective enough to blunt the flood’s historical impact, even if local responses of municipal government and charity (the Red Cross) were underwhelming, if adequate.