



2013

Review of *Free Time: The Forgotten American Dream*. Benjamin Kline Hunnicutt. Reviewed by Anders Hayden.

Anders Hayden
Dalhousie University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw>



Part of the Social Work Commons

Recommended Citation

Hayden, Anders (2013) "Review of *Free Time: The Forgotten American Dream*. Benjamin Kline Hunnicutt. Reviewed by Anders Hayden." *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 40 : Iss. 3 , Article 11. Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol40/iss3/11>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Social Work at ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.



Returning to an examination of domestic policy in the post-War period, Katznelson details the Congressional attack on organized labor that was fashioned to, among other things, deter labor organizing by African Americans as industry moved South. Ultimately, the Democratic Party's uneasy North-South marriage ended with the Civil Rights movement and the realignment of the political parties.

Concluding with a discussion of the nature of contemporary American democracy, a democracy that was born in the ND and the post-War period that gave rise to an expansionist foreign policy that has too often supported harsh dictatorial governments, Katznelson employs the image of Janus to describe a two-faced arrangement whereby a procedural democracy exists in the domestic sphere while a covert undemocratic foreign policy goes unchallenged. This two-sided state, a state characterized by democratic advantages yet marked by antidemocratic pathologies, continues to constitute the world Americans inhabit. This, ultimately, is the legacy of the New Deal's southern cage (p. 485).

Fear Itself examines an enormity of important topics that have only been suggested in this review. It uncovers important cultural and historical bases of the American polity that deserve the attention of any academic who is interested in understanding aspects of recent U.S. history that have previously remained unexplored.

*Marguerite Rosenthal, Prof. Emerita,
School of Social Work, Salem State University*

Benjamin Kline Hunnicutt, *Free Time: The Forgotten American Dream*. Temple University Press (2013). \$34.95 (paperback).

The intense stresses on Americans as a result of long hours of labor have been a prominent theme in recent sociological work, such as Juliet Schor's *Overworked American*, Arlie Hochschild's *The Time Bind*, and *The Time Divide* by Jerry Jacobs and Kathleen Gerson. Rather than a future of leisure and widespread prosperity, "time famine" exists amid inequitably distributed material excess. Long hours of work in the pursuit of endless GDP growth are widely seen to be the only realistic economic option. Benjamin Kline Hunnicutt's *Free Time: The*

Forgotten American Dream puts the current situation in a broad historical context, drawing attention to the centrality of the progressive reduction of the hours of work in earlier formulations of the American Dream.

Hunnicutt aims to “re-present that traditional American Dream” and to challenge the idea that it has become unrealistic. He documents the wide range of American advocates of Higher Progress, from Walt Whitman to labor radicals, who pointed to a realm of freedom beyond the marketplace and its focus on getting and spending. Others, including many educators and architect Frank Lloyd Wright, prepared their fields for the coming age of leisure-based freedom. The goal of freeing up time from “wage slavery” so that workers could cultivate their minds, participate in democratic life and convivial communities, and regain control over their lives was widely shared. Indeed, these dreams made major inroads in the 19th and early 20th centuries with the introduction of the ten-hour day, and later the eight-hour day and 40-hour week. Hunnicutt pinpoints the shorter-hours movement’s high point as 1933, when a 30-hour workweek bill, approved by the Senate, was on the verge of becoming law.

An additional aim of *Free Time*, building on Hunnicutt’s earlier *Work Without End* and Kellogg’s *Six-Hour Day*, is to explain why the work-time reduction movement faltered. He documents the pushback from many in business, who saw a threat to a growth-based capitalism in which they occupied a central position and, by the 1930s, stepped up promotion of a “new economic gospel of consumption.” Hunnicutt calls into question the progressive legacy of FDR, who played a key role in stopping the shorter-hours momentum, offering the alternative of perpetual economic growth and full-time (i.e., 40 hours), full employment. The perceived imperative of winning the Cold War arms race later became an additional argument to favor expanded production over shorter hours. Hunnicutt also emphasizes the post-war labor leadership’s loss of commitment to shorter hours and conversion to the “need-to-consume-to-create-jobs logic.” While work was increasingly glorified, leisure was trivialized and feminized, as male employees came to see a less-than-40-hour schedule as something for women. In the face of these trends, Hunnicutt also points to contemporary holdouts who continue to push for shorter hours.

Free Time is an impressive account of evolving thought about work, leisure, and progress in American history. It succeeds admirably in showing how prominent the shorter-hours vision was and provides many of the answers as to why that vision faded. Hunnicutt is thorough in documenting the various voices calling for Higher Progress through expanded leisure (perhaps too thorough in places, where there is repetition of a broadly similar vision by many individuals). One limitation is that the book sidesteps the additional obstacles to a shorter-hours vision created by growing inequality and the shift in relative power from labor to business since the 1970s. Many workers have been getting neither increased material consumption nor shorter hours, and face a greater struggle to keep up with the ever-upscaling consumption standards of the rich.

In his conclusion, Hunnicutt makes clear that he is not only an academic observer, but an advocate of shorter hours and a vision of Higher Progress as an alternative to the “current dream of eternal consumption, wealth, and work that now threatens human communities and the natural world.” While the forces opposing this vision are powerful, in light of growing climate instability and other signs of the environmental limits to consumption growth, Hunnicutt’s plea to revive the forgotten American Dream deserves a wide hearing.

*Anders Hayden, Department of Political Science,
Dalhousie University*

Sharlene B. C. L. Furuto (Ed). *Social Welfare in East Asia and the Pacific*. Columbia University Press (2013). \$90 (hardcover); \$30 (paperback).

Research into social work and social policy in different countries around the world has expanded exponentially over the last 20 years. Many more publications on international social welfare are now available, and they provide important insights into the way societies around the world seek to promote social well-being. Initially, international scholarship focused narrowly on government welfare, but its scope has now been expanded to include nonprofit organizations, community development programs, “nonformal” social welfare