Seth Rockman. *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009. Pp. 368. Paper $27.00.

For wage laborers in post-Revolutionary Baltimore, just scraping by was hardly the American dream. Seth Rockman, Associate Professor of History at Brown University, examines the unskilled laborers of Baltimore from 1790 to 1840 to reveal the interchangeability of workers, gendered and racial experiences, class struggle, survival strategies. He exposes "capitalism's systematic dependence on these multiple, simultaneous, and overlapping forms of inequality" that were instrumental to "relations of ruling" (10) that relied on the exploitation of those living hand-to-mouth. Engaging multiple and interconnected historiographies of labor, economics, gender, politics, and slavery, Rockman's well-researched monograph relies on payroll records, job advertisements, directories, tax lists, and census rolls. Together these sources immerse the reader into the lives of street scrapers, seamstresses, mariners, ditch diggers, domestic servants, rag pickers, and mud machinists.

The book's focus on Baltimore is calculated, as the port city was a boomtown in the 1790s, the third largest city in the nation, and was attracting a vast population ranging from whites, immigrants, manumitted and runaway slaves. It claims that the vast array of Baltimore's quickly expanding numbers, allowed the differences in this diverse group to dissolve, especially in the labor market.

Rockman explores the experiences of the working men in nineteenth-century Baltimore. These wage laborers both were exploitable and interchangeable. White men, manumitted slaves, and rented slaves worked side by side with one another performing the same treacherous labor. "White men could expect no hand up from the city's employers, who relished the city's well-stocked labor pool and saw no advantage in segmenting the market for manual labor" (47). Rockman wonderfully describes what was possibly the most difficult of all the jobs in Baltimore, drudging the Baltimore Harbor running the mud machine. Based on remarkably well-kept municipal records, one of the book's best chapters is dedicated to the mud machine and its workers.

Rockman posits that working women were just as exploitable and interchangeable as men were, with an added gendered dimension. Women found it incredibly hard to find paid work, especially outside of domestic servant or seamstress, and thus turned to prostitution at times. Women were also paid much less, as it was assumed that they should be dependent on a male breadwinner. Women, especially black women, were vulnerable to sexual coercion, violence, and rape by the head of the household to which they served. As a result, some fought for economic justice, while others turned to laundry service in the comfort and safety of their own homes.

Household units that were scraping by turned to "scavenging, bartering, and a host of informal exchanges" (185). One of the most common strategies was short-term credit and pawning. Rockman also explores the racial dimensions to "scraping by" and credit, including the added burden of trying to purchase the freedom of a family members, and racial ideologies surrounding trustworthiness with credit, and experiences at the almshouse. The racial and slave experience in Baltimore was a peculiar one. Term slavery, coexistence of white wage workers and life-long slaves on the same job, and "enslaved workers who managed their own time, arranged their own hire, and lived outside the direct supervision of their legal owners" all contributed to Baltimore's perplexing status as "the northernmost city in the South and the southernmost city in the North" (233).

This book is well organized and a pleasure to read. However, while Rockman speaks to each demographic of the working class, he does not put them in conversation with each other, and unfortunately finds no evidence of class consciousness. Ultimately, *Scraping By* provides both Early American and Labor Histories with an expansive and valuable contribution. Scholars and students will find themselves immersed in Rockman's exquisitely detailed chapters.

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