

He has published on Texas Centennial music and celebrations and the National Folk Festival and is cur-

rently documenting the oral history of swing-era vocalist Louise Tobin.



Changing Gears

End of an Era

Directed by Justin Jones

(Muncie, Ind.: Institute for Digital Entertainment & Education, in association with the Center for Middletown Studies, Ball State University, 2010), DVD.

Over the past three decades, the plant closing story has become an American set piece: workers' voices tinged with both regret and pride, images of near-empty interiors of expansive factories and old buildings with broken windows, and somewhere along the line, the scene where an iconic factory tower falls to a dynamite blast. Variations of this narrative have appeared in books (Dale Maharidge and Michael Williamson's *Journey to Nowhere*, 1985), documentaries (*The Last Truck*, 2008), and even in popular songs, such as Bruce Springsteen's "Youngstown."

Changing Gears joins that collection, this time with a focus on Muncie, Indiana. The film tells the story of the rise and fall of the Borg-Warner auto parts company and its union, United Auto Workers Local 287. As with most other documentaries on plant closings, the film focuses on workers. Interviews with the last union president—whose father had been the local's first African American president years earlier—and several other active union members are intercut with historical

background on Muncie, the company, and the union. Over the course of the film, we follow several workers as they get ready, drive to the factory, and enter the plant on its last day.

Just as the classic *Middletown* is both a story of a specific place and a story of a type of place, *Changing Gears* combines the specific history of one industrial city and one of its most significant factories with the broader story of industrialization, globalization, rising health care costs, and the struggles of industrial unions to respond to those challenges while also doing their primary job—protecting workers. In the film, the workers offer powerful testimony first to the significance of the union in shaping not only their jobs but also family and community life, and then to the almost impossible conundrum they faced at the end, as the company demanded concessions in retiree health care. While the film does not make the details of the options union leaders faced entirely clear, it illustrates powerfully that the debate involved a false choice. As several of the workers note, the plant was

doomed to close no matter what they did, not because it was losing money but because it was not making enough profit.

The film provides a concrete, engaging history of Muncie along with the history of this factory. By contextualizing the story of Borg-Warner in the broader history of the community, including the Lynds' famous Middletown study, the filmmakers remind viewers that what happened to these workers in this plant was part of larger local, regional, and global trends.

While *Changing Gears* rehearses themes that will be familiar to any-

one who has studied deindustrialization, it does so with thoughtful attention to local history. It also offers a complex and mostly clear exploration of the difficulties that industrial unions face when companies move overseas, insist on givebacks, and undermine the stability of the American work force.

SHERRY LEE LINKON is co-director of the Center for Working-Class Studies at Youngstown State University and co-author, with John Russo, of *Steeltown USA: Work and Memory in Youngstown* (2002).



Slavery in the Upper Mississippi Valley, 1787-1865 *A History of Human Bondage in Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin*

By Christopher P. Lehman

(Jefferson, N. C.: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2011. Pp. vi, 222. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. Paperbound, \$45.00)

Slavery in the Upper Mississippi Valley offers readers an introduction into the history of slavery in the upper Mississippi River Valley. Arguing that slavery in the region “played a significant role in the development of the United States” (p. 1), Christopher P. Lehman, a professor of Ethnic Studies at St. Cloud University, argues that presidents, through their appointed territorial officials, and myriad other local leaders, developed land, fought wars against American Indians, and waged political battles in local and

national elections to protect slavery in this region. Lehman’s narrative, which proceeds chronologically from the 1780s through 1865, focuses on northern states “bordering the Mississippi River” (p. 3). Indiana goes unmentioned, except for those years when Illinois was part of the Indiana Territory.

In seven chapters Lehman delves into the economies and political institutions that slaveholders forged in the North. The work begins with an overview of slavery in the Northwest