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Stephen P. Rice. *Minding the Machine: Languages of Class in Early America*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 2004. Pp. xiii, 230. \$49.95

Stephen P. Rice's *Minding the Machine: Languages of Class in Early America*, as demonstrated in the title, takes theoretical inspiration from other recent scholarship, most noticeably Stedman Jones' *Languages of Class*, which seeks to shift our understanding of the origins of "class society" from one based on the "materiality of experience" to the "linguistic ordering of experience" (p. 9). By this logic, class itself becomes a concept that is up for grabs on the field of cultural conflict in the context of industrializing society, rather than being understood as a socio-economic category that is for the most part fixed. This reordering of our understanding of class provides the framework within which Rice treats what he calls the "popular discourse on mechanization" in Northern antebellum America. In this network of popular discourse, Rice finds journalists, entrepreneurs, public intellectuals, scientists, engineers, and other middle class participants in public discourse confronting the social consequences of mechanization: the increasingly noticeable separation between the supervisors of production and the laboring classes who toiled in the new mechanized workplace. Social stratification challenged the republican ethos of equalitarian citizenship, and Rice impressively takes apart the writings and speeches of social commentators to reveal the operation of linguistic constructions that served to solidify the social authority of the emerging middle class while negating the possibility of substantive working class opposition.

Accordingly, Rice makes two major historiographical interventions. First, he observes that when historians have talked about class-consciousness, they have focused exclusively on the working class and its perception of itself, taking as gospel E.P Thompson's dictum that the working class "was present at its own making." In this traditional understanding, the working class has a kind of gradual epiphany about its own state in industrial society, and thereby begins to see itself for the first time as a class, as a social group with common socio-economic status and interests. Rather than focusing on the working class, Rice turns his attention instead to the middle class, reformulating the study of social authority, in his words, "in terms of how power is wielded," as opposed to "how power is resisted" (p. 8). The absence in America of the equivalent of a Chartist movement or any widespread, radical, class-based political opposition to industrialization is a historical problem over which much ink has been spilled, but Rice is convincing in his implicit claim that the exclusive focus on the working class that has dominated thinking on this subject justifies

the spilling of more ink. This leads to his second major historiographical intervention, which is to find in the creation by the middle class of a popular discourse on mechanization the means by which language was used to co-opt working class rhetoric into a shared class consciousness that depicted the respective roles of the working and middle class as cooperative rather than oppositional. The principal argument put forth in the book, that it was middle class consciousness of itself and the creation of an organic discourse on mechanization that constructed the peculiarly American experience of industrialization, is by no means a slight one. A relatively short book at 155 pages of text (without the endnotes), the implications of its orientation and argument are widely significant for how historians think about the origins of class in American life and thought.

The focal points, or keywords, in this discourse on mechanization were a series of dichotomies that served as metaphors to the emerging social dichotomy between the middle and laboring classes. These dichotomies were relations between head and hand, mind and body, and human and machine. A progression exists here that is not necessarily explicit: as middle class commentators used a physiological language as a justifying metaphor for their higher place in the reality of social stratification, it became easier to think of the middle class as the brains behind the operation of mechanization itself, and the laboring class as not just the hands attached to the head of the middle class, not just the body that needed the mind to function properly, but, working within the metaphor, as not actually human. Considering the ideological power of a language that could effectively dehumanize an entire class of people, it is an open question whether the "languages of class" model will or can replace what in another day would have been called by another name: alienation. That being said, Rice provides powerful evidence testifying to the widespread and weighty presence of the physiological metaphor in the discourse on mechanization.

Rice sees the head and hand phase of this metaphor at work in the establishment and protocols of the mechanics' institutes that flourished in the early Republic. Despite their ideological origins in the ethos of universal education and their celebration as a place where even laboring people put their heads and not just their hands to work, the institutes served as places where the heads could be separated from the hands, that is, they served more as microcosms of social stratification rather than as successful efforts to counteract the same phenomenon. As Rice points out, "the rhetoric of the mechanics' institute was more one of self-improvement than mutual assistance" (p.44). The organic metaphor, according to Rice, found its strongest expression in the founding and operation of the manual labor schools, which served as a strange inverse of the mechanics' institutes. In a

manual labor school, the logic of equalitarianism was taken to new extremes by requiring of its young mostly middle class students manual labor to help pay for their education, thereby training their bodies as well as their minds. The assumption behind this movement, as the language of the leaders of such institutes revealed, was that the development of young people exclusively along one path or another would produce subjects of one half of their natural talent, not the fully formed citizen necessary for republican government. Paradoxically, however, this rhetoric of the organic body politic put forth by Theodore Weld, Jeremiah Day, and other leaders behind the manual labor school movement served to ground middle class cultural authority in an understanding of class relationships that was just as cooperative as the cooperation of head and hand in the human body itself. By creating a language in which roles in the process of mechanization (management and labor) were expressed as external organs of the same body, as necessarily connected and ultimately sharing the same basic interests, middle class writers and orators effectively negated the means by which an oppositional understanding of class relations could be introduced into the popular discourse on mechanization. By doing so, they created class itself, at least in so far as it was understood by the wider populace in antebellum industrializing America.

Inevitably, of course, the social realities of industrialization became unavoidable for writers, and it is here that Rice finds a wider popular discourse of physiology and national health continuing the metaphor of the body by carrying it to new levels of the linguistic ordering of social experience. Commentators as widely read as Harriet Beecher, Sylvester Graham, and Oliver Wendell Holmes, among others, took notice of the growing social stratification and advocated a national reform movement aimed at encouraging people to exercise better control of their instincts, appetites, and bodily health. Reacting in general to the urbanization and atomization of society, social reformers advocated greater individual control over behavior, and this effort directed itself through the language of the popular discourse on mechanization, transforming the structure of the head and hand metaphor into a starker dichotomy between mind and body. By advocating greater mental control over physical health in an effort to reform behavior, these writers asserted the importance of the mind controlling the physical, the mind controlling the body, and thus the laborers of the mind controlling the laborers of the body. Managers and workers were no longer simply different organs of the same body; they were different substances, one subject to the council of the other.

This general shape of Rice's argument comes to an end in his final chapter on how engineers confronted the problem of steam boiler explosions, an inevitable bump in the road on the way to high industrial capitalism. As an important part of the popular discourse on mechanization, argues Rice, steam

boiler explosions provided another opportunity for middle class language to employ the physiological metaphor in the interests of their own authority in society. Such explosions were physical problems that had violent physical consequences, and only the mental labor of the engineer could save the helpless laboring victims of mechanical failure. It is in this example of steam boiler explosions, however, that the insufficiency of the “languages of class” model appears almost in spite of itself. If the job of the historian is to reconstruct the past accurately, would it not be more accurate to understand the occurrence of a steam boiler explosion not merely as an opportunity for middle class discursive activity, but instead as a horrible resurgence in the social world of the raw reality of class difference? Despite Rice’s stated desire to understand class not as material experience but as linguistically constructed prior to experience, the steam boiler serves as the perfect counter-example; that is, if we consider that laborers were totally subject to the contingency of mechanical malfunction, then our perspective should be one of the irreducible, perhaps not totally expressible, material experience of alienation as an unavoidable part of the true story of industrial society.

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William Pencak. *Jews and Gentiles in Early America, 1654-1800*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. 2005. Pp. xiv, 321. \$29.95

In his preface, William Pencak notes that his study of early American Jewry began in response to a conversation with Penn State historian A. Gregg Roeber in the winter of 1998-99. Roeber asked Pencak if he knew anything about colonial Pennsylvania’s Jews to which Pencak replied, “No. Does anybody?” Naturally those familiar with the historic literature on American Jewry would have directed Pencak to the work of Jacob Rader Marcus. For over three decades, Marcus was not only the Dean of American Jewish History, he was also the prime archivist in the field, creating the American Jewish Archives at the flagship campus of the Reform movement’s Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati. Marcus’ works and his archives continue to exert a great deal of influence over the historiography of American Jews. Clearly Pencak discovered Marcus and the archives because his book frequently cites both and rarely deviates from the narrative of Rabbi Marcus’ initial studies. To be sure, *Jews and Gentiles in Early America* does offer some unique insights into the history of early American Jewry, particularly in those