



Divided We Stand

Bruce Nelson

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Divided We Stand is a study of how class and race have intersected in American society--above all, in the "making" and remaking of the American working class in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Focusing mainly on longshoremen in the ports of New York, New Orleans, and Los Angeles, and on steelworkers in many of the nation's steel towns, it examines how European immigrants became American and "white" in the crucible of the industrial workplace and the ethnic and working-class neighborhood.

As workers organized on the job, especially during the overlapping CIO and civil rights eras in the middle third of the twentieth century, trade unions became a vital arena in which "old" and "new" immigrants and black migrants forged new alliances and identities and tested the limits not only of class solidarity but of American democracy. The most volatile force in this regard was the civil rights movement. As it crested in the 1950s and '60s, "the Movement" confronted unions anew with the question, "Which side are you on?" This book demonstrates the complex ways in which labor organizations answered that question and the complex relationships between union leaders and diverse rank-and-file constituencies in addressing it.

Divided We Stand includes vivid examples of white working-class "agency" in the construction of racially discriminatory employment structures. But Nelson is less concerned with racism as such than with the concrete historical circumstances in which racialized class identities emerged and developed. This leads him to a detailed and often fascinating consideration of white, working-class ethnicity but also to a careful analysis of black workers--their conditions of work, their aspirations and identities, their struggles for equality. Making its case with passion and clarity, *Divided We Stand* will be a compelling and controversial book.

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