

New employment game

New Game, New Rules: Jobs, Corporate America, and the Information Age.
By Adele Gray and Gina Alphonso.
New York, Garland Publishing, Inc.,
1996, 226 pp. \$51.

In the current employment environment, the impact of change can be numbing: new roles in the information age, international competition, downsizing, continuing discrimination and “the glass ceiling,” and many others. In such an environment, guidance on how to survive at one’s job is eagerly sought by a wide range of people. Based on the title, then, *New Game, New Rules: Jobs, Corporate America, and the Information Age* is a book one hopes is good—who does not want a better understanding of how to flourish in this fluid environment? It works to live up to the promise of its title, with some success. While not a source for rigorous consideration of the topic, the breadth of thought reflected in the book provides value and insight into the current state of employment.

Co-authors Adele Gray and Gina Alphonso wanted to generate a dialogue about dealing with changes in the workplace, contribute to the understanding of the need for change, and point to actions which will lead to success. Major themes in the discussion include communications and collaboration, training and skill building, and career planning. The authors gathered information on these themes through interviews with human resource executives of “companies with good reputations for work environment and business success.”

The authors examined a number of major issues affecting the work environment, including economic globalization, the renewal of the culture of competition, and the need for continuous skill enhancement. As background, the authors investigated the impact of computers and

the new roles in the information age, the impact of higher competition on job security, the effects of downsizing on morale and career planning, and how employment bias limits company access to markets.

In order to gain perspective on these issues as they affect employment security, the authors reviewed the history of corporate employment. While previously job security was based on the job itself or on company loyalty, security is now based on the skills a worker brings to the job. An entire class of workers, the “contingent work force” of temporary and contract workers, have little job security. Collective bargaining as a device to enhance job security has declined. At the same time, personal factors such as health care coverage, child care needs, and retirement fund mobility limit the flexibility of many workers.

Conversely, the authors suggest that opportunities for self-employment are increasing along with factors which favor smaller organizations. Information systems give small organizations greater capability to provide specialized services in a competitive environment. In larger organizations, teams provide employees greater ability to participate in corporate rule-making. New values are emerging from all levels: training is more essential; turnover is more likely; and security is controlled less by the company and more by one’s skills.

Diversity in employment is also increasingly important to success in new markets, Gray and Alphonso assert. With financing becoming more available, minority- and women-run companies are having greater impact throughout the economy. Many of these companies use collaboration rather than competition to succeed in their market niches.

Among new rules the authors cite to succeed in this new environment are: for companies, increase communications, create realistic development plans for all

staff, accept turnover, and look to the long game rather than to short-run benefits; and for individuals, know your value, acknowledge and progress from failures, learn to embrace change, set and pursue goals, and keep a good hand on your finances.

Gray and Alphonso do a good job of examining the issues with impact on employment security and the work environment, and of suggesting rules which have value to both individuals and companies. Though specific issues may be covered better elsewhere, the value of this book is that they are assembled and examined together as elements of a single issue—employment. Unfortunately, the authors are occasionally given to platitudes rather than to vigorous discussion. While not a rigorous examination, the book takes a broad look at the issues affecting employment today, and offers encouragement for the future.

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Indian wages

Native Americans and Wage Labor: Ethnohistorical Perspectives. Edited by Alice Littlefield and Martha C. Knack. Norman, OK, University of Oklahoma Press, 1996, 351 pp. \$32.95.

The wealth of a nation lies in land, labor, and capital, according to conventional economic theory. And in the minds of most, while Euro-Americans and Black Africans have been associated with the American labor force from early colonial times, American Indians have been identified with the land. As ethnologist Stephen Cornell has said, “With the exception of the early Southwest,

only in the fur trade was Indian labor either critical to colonial United States or trans-Atlantic economics or a foundation for Indian-white relations.”

English colonists complained that Indians made unsatisfactory slaves, largely because they could escape successfully to other Native communities. Native slaves were replaced with those imported from Africa. But unlike the French and English, the Spanish lacked easy access to the transatlantic trade in African slaves, and settlements on their northern frontier did not attract large numbers of Spanish or other European immigrants. Consequently, their need for Indian labor remained significant throughout the colonial period and beyond, and they controlled it as a matter of policy.

But Indians who did not produce commodities for sale, such as furs, or provide unpaid labor as slaves, were employed for wages in the northern English colonies at a very early period, in the Massachusetts Bay Colony as early as 1630.

In 1990, at meetings of the American Society for Ethnohistory (ASE), those assembled discovered a common interest in a neglected subject—wage labor on the part of North American indigenous people. A plan came about to organize a symposium around the subject for the ASE meeting in Tulsa, OK, a year later, and then at the American Anthropological Association meeting.

From this came the book *Native Americans and Wage Labor*, edited by Alice Littlefield and Martha C. Knack, and published by the University of Oklahoma Press.

Here are some of the points that the essayists included in the book agree upon: Native labor participation during the 19th century was largely self-motivated. It may even be said that commitment to wage employment can serve as an index of the extent to which Indians had lost control over the land on which they could practice their traditional subsistence activities of hunting, farming, gathering, and intertribal trading. The

Dawes Allotment Act of 1887, although justified as a mechanism to enable Indians to obtain the idea of independent subsistence farming, separated Native people from two-thirds of their remaining land-based resources within 50 years, contend the authors.

Paradoxically, the Depression years brought some Indians into wage employment for the first time. To some extent, this was the result of Federal programs aimed at general economic stimulation. Across the Nation, for example, large numbers of Native youth (25,000 in 1933 alone) joined the Indian version of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). By the time this program was ended in 1942, more than 85,000 Indians had participated on more than 70 reservations, which had benefited from over \$72 million in CCC funding for reforestation, range development, erosion control, and other conservation measures.

Even as barriers of discrimination fell and Indians entered jobs from which they had previously been excluded, patterns of differential pay persisted.

Casting aside John Collier's assumption that reservation economies could be improved sufficiently to provide a living for the resident population, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) began in 1952 to encourage Indians to relocate for the presumed economic benefits of employment available elsewhere. Between 1945 and 1957, partially as a result of BIA and partially as a result of economic necessity, an estimated 100,000 Indians left reservations for towns and cities, contributing to the rapid rise of the urban Indian population. By 1960, one Indian in three was living in a city.

The civil rights movement of the 1960s created political support for a series of minority benefit programs. The Economic Development Administration, Manpower Training Program, Office of Economic Opportunity, Small Business Administration, and numerous other Federal programs were created to encourage the establishment of minority-owned businesses. Federal contracting gave pre-

ference to these companies. But despite Federal programs, by the mid-1970s, most of the few businesses still operating in reservations were owned by non-Indians.

By 1980, American Indian residence had shifted from over 90 percent rural in 1900 to 50 percent metropolitan. Wages and salaries became the major source of income for Indians nationwide, contributing over 80 percent of all income for Indian males. Cyclical migration became a relatively common feature of the indigenous scene. This was true in the industrialized East as it was in the West. Employment patterns continued to be characterized by low wages, high rates of unskilled labor, high job turnover, and frequent trips back to reservation areas, sometimes for months or years.

Exploiting the legal opportunity posed by the exemption of reservations from State law, tribes responded to their grim economic scene by building gaming facilities (over 150 by 1991) which succeeded in reducing unemployment rates for some reservations, especially those close to major urban areas.

Although beneficial in many respects, the continued restructuring of the reservation economies also raised new issues. Internally, the divisions of the tribal work force into bosses and workers led to a new process of class formation within Indian communities. Externally, as tribes and tribal enterprises grew into major regional employers, and Indian youths gained the educational experience to assume managerial and specialist roles in these enterprises, Euro-Americans began to work for Indians, radically restructuring larger patterns of interethnic relations in some localities.

The public has often wanted to romanticize, emulate, and sanctify American Indians. Whether the American Indian stands as an ideal for New Age religions, a fetish for chic interior designs, or an icon for wilderness preservation, the use of this image making and its impact on the work Native Americans perform cannot be ignored whether now or in the past. Some of the stereotypes would seem to lock In-

dians into unstable, poorly paid, labor intensive jobs, as stereotypes have done to other ethnic people.

Disassociating Native American work from the large economies in which it was nested served as a rationale to disenfranchise them from their land and sources of livelihood, says Patricia C. Allers, professor of anthropology and associate director of the American West Center at the University of Utah, Salt Lake City. "In truth, Native Americans were able to work their lands successfully, but the conjunction of a variety of economic forces with Federal policy-making ultimately prevented them from doing so," she says.

The continuing focus on land and resources in the development of Native American identity and political consciousness is understandable, given their legal status within modern nation-states, say the authors. But it does have serious policy ramifications. In the United States, many tribes have felt tremendous pressure to become involved in natural resource extraction—often in contradiction to their own cultural interests. In the face of unsubstantiated plans for generating employment, the tribes have ventured into a wide variety of development efforts, only to find that the jobs produced are few and that most require skills their members do not have. The track record for using trust estates to generate employment has been dismal. Part of the problem has been that tribes do not have enough legal-political muscle to ensure that corporate developers honor agreements to hire and train local laborers.

— Mary Ellen Ayres
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