Book Review: Conflicting Commitments: The Politics of Enforcing Immigrant Worker Rights in San Jose and Houston, by Shannon Gleeson

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or grandchildren, or from volunteer burnout. What Vita offers is a sense of purpose, a feeling of doing something productive and worthwhile, a sense of community or family with a bunch of like-minded seniors, and work routines that reinforce rather than frustrate desire to have some control over one's time. There is a remarkable degree of flexibility in work hours. One worker regularly starts work at 4 in the morning because he suffers from sleep problems; others can just stop working for the day if they are tired or something else comes up. This discretion over time works because of the scope for considerable flexibility in the deployment of labor. Workers can do many of the tasks on the shop floor so that they can be moved around as production demands; if someone leaves, someone else can step in.

This brief account of the "benefits" of working at Vita show all too clearly how exceptional the workplace is and how difficult it would be to replicate these conditions in a different setting. Nevertheless, we can take away very important points about some of the "frustrations" people experience in retirement and how work that is flexible, sociable, and real may encourage more of us to continue working past normal retirement ages. For this reason the book comes highly recommended. The first part is, for this reader at least, more interesting than the second part because it gives us a rich account of why some may be happy to have their working lives extended.

Gleeson, S. (2012). *Conflicting Commitments: The Politics of Enforcing Immigrant Worker Rights in San Jose and Houston*. Ithaca, NY: ILR Press. 269 pp. $24.95 (paper).

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Immigration is of central importance to the American labor market. However, there is a growing disconnect between low-wage immigrant workers'—and in particular undocumented workers'—labor market experiences and their formal employment protections. Employer sanction provisions of immigration law have made it illegal to hire undocumented workers. Despite these provisions, some employers have continued to hire undocumented workers. In some cases, unscrupulous employers will take advantage of immigrants' precarious situation and undermine working conditions since undocumented employees are vulnerable and fear deportation. Federal labor and employment law, however, stipulates that *all* workers must receive basic labor protections where employers must adhere to antidiscriminatory laws, implement

health and safety standards, and pay the minimum wage. Given the prohibition against undocumented immigrants' employment, and the law violation that this entails, how can immigrants receive the protections to which they are entitled?

In *Conflicting Commitments*, Shannon Gleeson analyzes how undocumented workers access legal rights under labor and employment law. She compares the traditional immigrant receiving areas of San Jose, California, and Houston, Texas, two cities "born of the same womb" (p. 90), but with political economies that deviate dramatically. While San Jose boasts a 7.5% private-sector unionization rate and is in a state with the most expansive antidiscrimination protection in the United States, Houston holds a 3.6% private-sector unionization rate and is in a state that is ripe with pro-business legislation such as right-to-work laws. The strategies of the institutions that aid immigrants in the claims-making process, therefore, vary within a local labor market context. Gleeson draws on 90 interviews of individuals in institutions that focus on Mexican immigrants and immigrant worker rights between October 2005 and June 2009. She pays careful attention to how unions, consulates, worker's centers, faith-based groups, and the like aid in the claims-making process. But the interplay between these groups and immigrants varies in both cities.

Gleeson finds that the political economy of both cities affects how immigrant workers' rights are enforced, through what channels they enter, and what issues advocates choose to challenge. In San Jose, a "specialized enforcement approach" has emerged where civic organizations are able to rely on local labor standards enforcement agencies that address workplace violations. Unions, faith-based groups, worker's centers, and the like strategically refer immigrants to community-based law centers and enforcement agencies that aid in the claims-making process. The claims process is long, which may make it difficult for immigrant workers to see the process through, but this route leaves civic organizations free to focus on organizing campaigns and policy reform. In Houston, by contrast, there is no presence of state-based labor standards enforcement and civic organizations must therefore focus efforts in aiding immigrants in the claims-making process. However, powerful forces that work against these organizations and limited resources have forced a "diversified enforcement approach" where collaboration and coordination between civic organizations becomes essential. Because these groups have limited resources, however, they focus on grassroots goals, which leave little for policy reform and organizational drives. Thus, Gleeson shows that strategies of advocates and groups vary within the local context despite national laws and institutions that govern worker rights. She therefore

calls for better understanding of local political contexts that aid in protecting undocumented workers.

Conflicting Commitments uncovers the institutional dynamics of enforcing immigrant worker rights in San Jose and Houston. These different strategies raise the question of whether San Jose's specialized approach or Houston's diversified approach works best. Gleeson does not provide a concrete answer, suggesting that "limited data make finding the answers to these questions difficult" (p. 199). Rather, she argues that it is more useful to draw conclusions from her case studies by considering the interplay between rights enforcement, organizational behavior, and how these relationships develop over time. However, Gleeson does not engage with the literature on ethnic and enclave communities where many immigrants find jobs. Immigrants who identify with their boss may be less likely to claim worker protections that they are afforded. Her analysis also covers the Great Recession of 2008, which was particularly harsh on immigrants, unions, and other civic institutions. The recession may have altered the design of the claims-making process in both cities, and workers may fear exercising their rights during times of high unemployment if there is a strong chance of losing their job. Gleeson's conclusions may not have changed had she analyzed how ethnic communities and historical contingencies affected the enforcement of immigrant worker rights, but doing so would have provided a more complete understanding of these processes. Nevertheless, scholars interested in the politics of worker's rights will find *Conflicting Commitments* an interesting and worthwhile read.