

Bodies of Work



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Pittsburgh emerged as a major U.S. manufacturing centre at the turn of the twentieth century. Its rise as a leading producer of steel, glass, and coal was fuelled by machine technology and mass immigration, developments that fundamentally changed the industrial workplace. In the Steel City, where the major industries were almost exclusively male and renowned for their physical demands, the male working body came to symbolize multiple, often contradictory, narratives about strength and vulnerability, mastery and exploitation. Combining labour and cultural history with visual culture studies, Edward S. Slavishak explores how Pittsburgh and the working body were symbolically linked in civic celebrations, the research of social scientists, the criticisms of labour reformers, advertisements, and workers' self-representations. With "Bodies of Work", Slavishak chronicles a heated contest to define the essential character of the Steel City at the turn of the twentieth century: a contest conducted largely through the production of competing images. Slavishak focuses on the workers whose bodies came to epitomize Pittsburgh: the men engaged in the arduous physical labour demanded by the city's metals, glass, and coal industries. At the same time, he emphasizes how conceptions of Pittsburgh as quintessentially male limited representations of women in the industrial workplace. The threat of injury or violence

loomed large for industrial workers at the turn of the twentieth century, and it recurs throughout "Bodies of Work": in the marketing of artificial limbs, statistical assessments of the physical toll of industrial capitalism, clashes between labour and management, the introduction of workplace safety procedures, and the development of a state-wide workmen's compensation system.

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