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THE PRODUCTION OF DIFFERENCE

RACE AND THE MANAGEMENT OF LABOR IN U.S. HISTORY

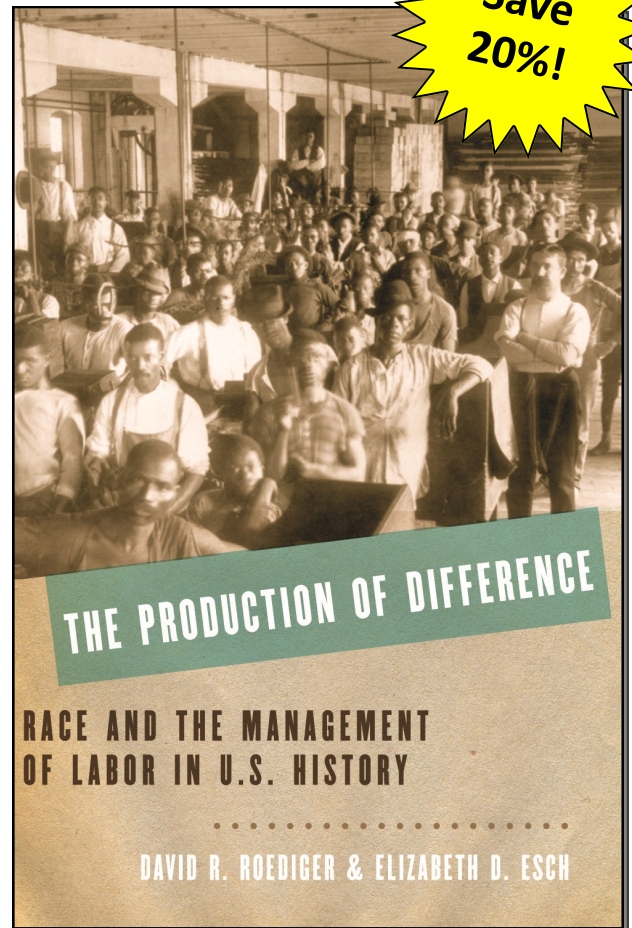
by David R. Roediger and Elizabeth D. Esch

In 1907, pioneering labor historian and economist John Commons argued that U.S. management had shown just one "symptom of originality," namely "playing one race against the other."

In this eye-opening book, David Roediger and Elizabeth Esch offer a radically new way of understanding the history of management in the United States, placing race, migration, and empire at the center of what has sometimes been narrowly seen as a search for efficiency and economy. Ranging from the antebellum period to the coming of the Great Depression, the book examines the extensive literature slave masters produced on how to manage and "develop" slaves; explores what was perhaps the greatest managerial feat in U.S. history, the building of the transcontinental railroad, which pitted Chinese and Irish work gangs against each other; and concludes by looking at how these strategies survive today in the management of hard, low-paying, dangerous jobs in agriculture, military support, and meatpacking. Roediger and Esch convey what slaves, immigrants, and all working people were up against as the objects of managerial control. Managers explicitly ranked racial groups, both in terms of which labor they were best suited for and their relative value compared to others. The authors show how whites relied on such alleged racial knowledge to manage and believed that the "lesser races" could only benefit from their tutelage. These views wove together managerial strategies and white supremacy not only ideologically but practically, every day at workplaces. Even in factories governed by scientific management, the impulse to play races against each other, and to slot workers into jobs categorized by race, constituted powerful management tools used to enforce discipline, lower wages, keep workers on dangerous jobs, and undermine solidarity.

Painstakingly researched and brilliantly argued, *The Production of Difference* will revolutionize the history of labor and race in the United States.

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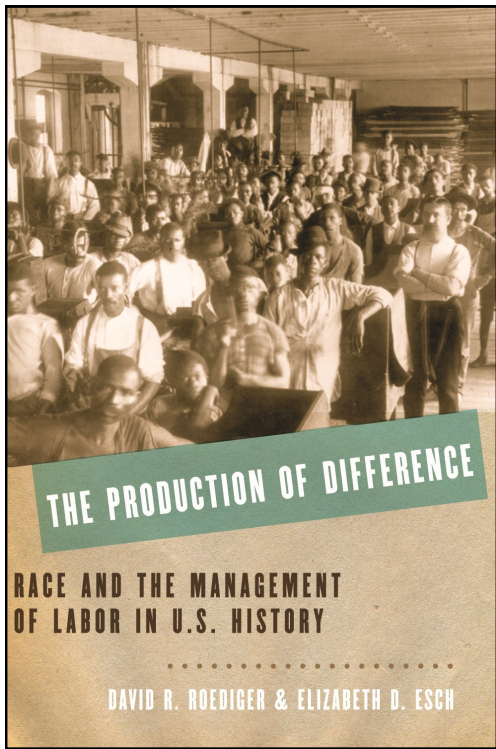
David R. Roediger is Babcock Professor of History, University of Illinois, Champagne-Urbana, and the author of *How Race Survived U.S. History* and *The Wages of Whiteness*, among other titles.

Elizabeth D. Esch is Assistant Professor of History and American Studies and a member of the Consortium for Critical Interdisciplinary Study at Barnard College-Columbia University.

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Praise for *The Production of Difference*

"*The Production of Difference* is a masterful work that should revolutionize the research and teaching of U.S. management history. Breaking much new ground, Roediger and Esch's book vividly demonstrates that the management of U.S. labor originated not with Frederick Taylor and scientific management but instead with U.S. slavery's plantation system. Destined to become a classic, it is essential reading for every serious scholar, and should be assigned for all courses, in U.S. management history."

—Victor G. Devinatz, Illinois State University

"This book is a marvel of historical research. It puts new light on how slavery and westward expansion helped to embed racial thinking in 'labor management' and how racial thinking continued as a means to divide and rule and to maximize profits. *The Production of Difference* requires us to rethink root causes of the persistent perpetuation of racism in American life."

—Michael Honey, author of *Going Down Jericho Road: The Memphis Strike, Martin Luther King's Last Campaign*

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