

## Relations industrielles Industrial Relations



*Hired Hands or Human Resources? Case Studies of HRM Programs and Practices in Early American Industry*, By Bruce E. Kaufman, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010, 254 pp., ISBN 978-0-801-44830-0.

Anthony M. Gould

Volume 65, Number 3, Summer 2010

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/044897ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/044897ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Département des relations industrielles de l'Université Laval

ISSN

0034-379X (print)

1703-8138 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Gould, A. M. (2010). Review of [*Hired Hands or Human Resources? Case Studies of HRM Programs and Practices in Early American Industry*, By Bruce E. Kaufman, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010, 254 pp., ISBN 978-0-801-44830-0.] *Relations industrielles / Industrial Relations*, 65(3), 520–521. <https://doi.org/10.7202/044897ar>

Tous droits réservés © Département des relations industrielles de l'Université Laval, 2010

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

l'analyse et à l'évaluation des situations de travail.

En terminant, l'aspect intéressant de l'ouvrage réside dans la réunion de courtes contributions qui constituent autant d'entrées dans le thème à l'étude et renvoient aux autres travaux des auteurs; leur juxtaposition permet un regard croisé et interdisciplinaire sur l'objet, que synthétise utilement la conclusion rédigée par Gilbert de Terssac. Toutefois, comme beaucoup d'ouvrages collectifs, celui-ci a les défauts de ses qualités, la mise en commun de contributions diversifiées se traduisant parfois un manque d'unité, ce qui rend sa recension difficile, et par le caractère redondant de certains éléments de mise en contexte ou de problématique.

**Martine D'Amours**  
Université Laval

### **Hired Hands or Human Resources? Case Studies of HRM Programs and Practices in Early American Industry**

By Bruce E. Kaufman, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010, 254 pp., ISBN 978-0-801-44830-0.

Bruce Kaufman's book titled *Hired Hands or Human Resources* addresses labour relations in America from the mid 1870s until the early 1930s, the beginning of the New Deal. His work covers theory as well as fifteen case-studies of major corporations. Kaufman's thesis is that, historically, employers have failed to appreciate that labour and product markets have different characteristics. These differences have management consequences. The book is a logical progression from his first volume entitled *Managing the Human Factor* which addresses similar subject matter during the same time frame.

*Hired hands or Human Resources* is in two parts. The first covers nine case-studies and concludes just prior to the emergence of PIR, a term used shortly after World War 1 to describe personnel management and industrial relations issues. Part two investigates six case studies of firms covering the period 1923 until 1930. This era saw the birth of welfare capitalism which shifted labour supervision from the hired-hand approach to a more sophisticated style which embodies human resources principles.

Kaufman has investigated a broad range of issues impacting labour management in America over a period of fifty five years. I will not discuss all of the book's case-studies. However, I have addressed some points made by Kaufman in those focusing on women workers, in particular. This issue informs contemporary debates addressing work-life balance. The book's consideration of the matter represents a key contribution of the work. I have also chosen to discuss case-studies which struck me as having something revealing to say about early management practice and which get beyond the stereotype that employers have become incrementally more humane in what they consider to be acceptable worker treatment.

Kaufman writes of the Ford Motor Company's initiative in 1914 of bringing to its workplace a policy of profit-sharing in-tandem with a plan to pay its workers \$5 per day – double their previous wage. Ford's action was visionary. To qualify for these benefits, a worker had to be a married man of any age; or a single man over twenty two years old with dependents; as well meet other criteria. Later, benefits to women were to be included in the scheme; an act which may be viewed as progressive but may also be seen as tokenism because Ford's plant in Michigan only employed two hundred and fifty women from a total work-force of sixteen thousand. Nonetheless, the point is thought-provoking and, at least for me, gives a more nuanced portrayal of Henry Ford.

A case-study of the Mega-Watt Light and Power Company (3000 employees) in 1927 notes that there were only two positions in the entire company that explicitly dealt with industrial relations: the Safety Engineer; and the Matron of Women who was responsible for disciplining the female clerical staff and monitoring their absenteeism and tardiness. The only printed material of the company governing employment relations concerned dignified conduct on the part of the female staff. The firm also had a rule that women must resign from their jobs upon marriage. Here the message is not that women today fair better in the workforce than perhaps they once did. Rather, conceptions of fair treatment have changed; moving in particular from notions of paternalism to ideas of genuine equality.

A case-study in 1930 of New Era Radio (23816 employees) notes that it was company policy to pay women about two-thirds of the rate for men – even for identical jobs. The rationale for this approach was complicated. It involved a distorted analysis of a woman's productive capacity compared to that of a man. What struck me as interesting here was that the issue of unequal pay was associated with employer logic rather than being arbitrary or massively influenced by the prevailing moral zeitgeist. Such logic, despite being somewhat ill-conceived, was at least based on a rudimentary conception of fairness. Once again, this discussion challenged certain of my preconceptions about early industrial-age jobs.

Kaufman's case-studies are thought provoking. He comments that although contemporary employment practices in some American companies are less than good, they are substantially more generous than even the best jobs that existed at the beginning of the twentieth century. The book is also interesting to read. I was taken in by Kaufman's evocative descriptions of mobs of anxious workers gathered at factories at dawn each morning and how such people were desperate to be hired for the day to get a pitiful sum of money to keep themselves and their families from destitution.

It was not until the 1930s, after the Great Depression, and during the time of the New Deal, when the face of workplaces changed. From this point, collective bargaining and unionization began to redress the worst excesses of an unchecked commodity view of labour. In relation to this post-New-Deal enlightenment, Kaufman notes – using his case-studies to underscore the point – that employers began to realize that there is no one-best-way to do a job or carry out a task. This portrayal gives readers a well-developed sense of how scientific management came to be unfashionable. I liked this way of drawing attention to the shortcomings of Taylorism and Fordism and think that it has widespread instructional value.

Kaufman's books *Hired Hands or Human Resources* and *Managing the Human Factor* are obviously the end-result of a great deal of archival research as well as disciplined analysis of both the relevant historical context and specific work situations. His conclusions are

compelling and are integrated to produce an overall argument. In developing his thesis, he reminds readers of humanitarian as well as practical reasons why labour markets should be considered different from product markets.

Kaufman's work has wide appeal. I think that it can be treated as a non-fiction piece that incorporates substantial entertainment and interest value. Kaufman is not only a master of his subject but has a great feel for how to write about it.

**Anthony M. Gould**

Université Laval

### **Le Japon au travail**

Par Bernard Bernier, avec la collaboration de Vincent Mirza, Montréal : Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2009, 253 p., ISBN 978-2-7606-2090-2.

Cet ouvrage exceptionnel traite des conditions et des significations du travail au Japon de la période d'Edo (1615-1868) à nos jours. Tel qu'indiqué en introduction, c'est d'abord « sa qualité de premier pays non occidental à s'industrialiser avec succès » qui fait l'intérêt particulier du Japon pour l'anthropologie du travail, car ceci « donne pour l'analyse une certaine profondeur historique dans l'étude de la mise en place et des transformations de structures de travail de type 'capitaliste' » (p. 10). L'intérêt particulier d'une étude anthropologique du travail au Japon découle aussi du fait qu'« il s'agit précisément d'un pays hors de la zone occidentale, donc avec une tradition qui diffère grandement de celle qui a modelé ce même type de développement en Occident; et c'est enfin le fait que le Japon a connu entre 1991 et 2003 une crise importante qui a entraîné des conséquences majeures dans tous les domaines, y compris le travail » (p. 10, 195-232, *passim*).

L'argument théorique et historique principal du professeur Bernier est à l'effet que, « sauf dans les périodes transitoires, le travail est intégré à un ensemble de modes d'organisation et de significations » qu'il nomme ici « régime de travail ». En adaptant ainsi le concept de « régime d'entreprise » formulé par le sociologue Michael Burawoy, Bernier examine les différents régimes de travail qui se sont succédés au Japon depuis la période « préin-