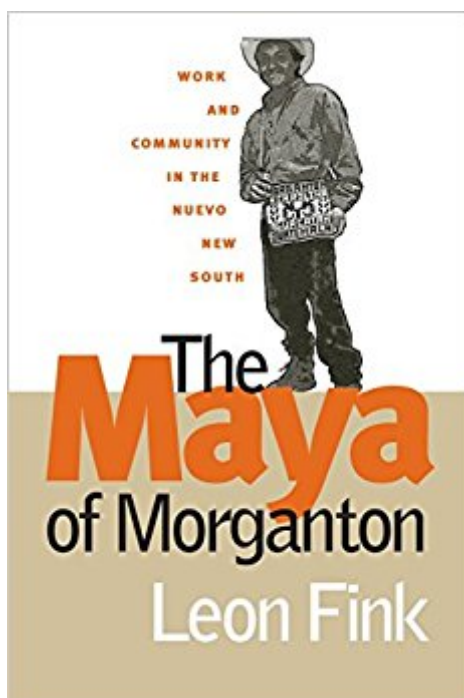


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# The Maya Of Morganton: Work And Community In The Nuevo New South



## Synopsis

The arrival of several hundred Guatemalan-born workers in a Morganton, North Carolina, poultry plant sets the stage for this dramatic story of human struggle in an age of globalization. When laborers' concerns about safety and fairness spark a strike and, ultimately, a unionizing campaign at Case Farms, the resulting decade-long standoff pits a recalcitrant New South employer against an unlikely coalition of antagonists. Mayan refugees from war-torn Guatemala, Mexican workers, and a diverse group of local allies join forces with the Laborers union. The ensuing clash becomes a testing ground for "new labor" workplace and legal strategies. In the process, the nation's fastest-growing immigrant region encounters a new struggle for social justice. Using scores of interviews, Leon Fink gives voice to a remarkably resilient people. He shows that, paradoxically, what sustains these global travelers are the ties of local community. Whether one is finding a job, going to church, joining a soccer team, or building a union, kin and linguistic connections to the place of one's birth prove crucial in negotiating today's global marketplace. A story set at the intersection of globalization and community, two words not often linked, *The Maya of Morganton* addresses fundamental questions about the changing face of labor in the United States.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Leon Fink's extraordinarily revealing probe into the immigrant world of a North Carolina poultry plant is essential reading for anyone seeking to understand the twenty-first-century meaning of globalization. No one writes with more sympathy, more insight, or more genuine radicalism."Leon

Fink's extraordinarily revealing probe into the immigrant world of a North Carolina poultry plant is essential reading for anyone seeking to understand the 21st-century meaning of globalization.

(Nelson Lichtenstein, author of "State of the Union: A Century of American Labor")

[Fink] considers the Maya's lives and reception in Morganton, how varied past experiences of war and deprivation in Guatemala shaped their decisions on whether to take labor action, and how churches, a burial society, and other immigrant community institutions reinforced their communal resolve.--Chronicle of Higher EducationA highly sophisticated analysis of migration, community, and the multiple consequences of globalization. . . . For a powerful example of how and why the South has been changing, read this book.--North Carolina Historical ReviewThis highly nuanced study puts faces and names on a working class of economic and political refugees that reflects the demographic transformation of the United States labor force in an era of extensive globalization.--Journal of American HistoryFink brings this heroic yet ultimately tragic story to life with vivid portraits of in-plant leaders, rank-and-file workers who waged (and sometimes gave up) the fight, their helpers in local churches and community groups, and various outside union organizers and lawyers, who joined the fray along the way.--New Labor ForumLeon Fink's extraordinarily revealing probe into the immigrant world of a North Carolina poultry plant is essential reading for anyone seeking to understand the twenty-first-century meaning of globalization. No one writes with more sympathy, more insight, or more genuine radicalism.--Nelson Lichtenstein, University of California, Santa Barbara [The Maya of Morganton] is a tale of no small amount of heartbreak. . . . Yet this is also a tale of immense bravery and solidarity against incredible odds and forces. . . . Fink has an informed heart, which prompts him to say quite poignantly what seems just and humane.--Chicago TribuneLeon Fink's outstanding new book on the struggles of Mayan immigrants at the Morganton Case Farms plant in the 1990s is an important contribution towards debates over immigration, globalization, ethnic identity formation, Indigenous studies, and labor history. . . . [The Maya of Morganton: Work and Community in the Nuevo New South] is a book full of astonishing insights on the decline of freedom.--Journal of American Ethnic HistoryWith a historian's eye and sensitivities, Fink captures the significance of individuals in shaping social outcomes. . . . The Maya of Morganton adds significantly to our understanding of the new immigration and its consequences for work, workers, and rural communities in 21st century America.--American Studies

Thought provoking! I recommend this book for everyone interested in a lesson on community, labor

rights and respect. Sadly, Fink is able to highlight how we Americans take so many things for granted and focus on differences and not similarities. So common that we want to take advantage of individuals who don't speak the same language, wear they same type of clothes and are are willing to do jobs we believe are beneath us. This goes for people in our immediate communities and communities of the world. The Guatemalan taught the Morganton's some valuable lessons we should all aspire to learn and practice. Makes you want to act!

In perfect condition.

We are constantly reminded these days of the overwhelmingly global nature of capital. Not only can we see multi-national corporations all over the world trying to quench their werewolf hunger for profit by exploiting human communities, human labor, and the environment. We can also look around us and see many different types of people that probably wouldn't find themselves here in the U.S. if it weren't for the ever-new boundaries and needs produced by the expansion of capital. THE MAYA OF MORGANTON by Leon Fink describes one unlikely community and its struggle against the unfair labor practices of Case Farms poultry processing plant in Morganton, N.C. This community is almost completely composed of indigenous highland Guatemalan Mayans, mainly of the Q'anjob'al, Aguacateco (split between the two main ethnic groups, the Awakateko and Chalchiteko), K'iche', and Mam ethnicities. There were also a handful of Mexican workers that took an active part in the strikes and unionizing campaigns. Throughout the whole book, Fink allows 100-odd workers, strike leaders, and community members to "speak for themselves" through extensive interviews. It gives the feel of a fluid dialogue between the author and participants, and allows for complexities in the telling of the story straight from the mouths of those involved. The first sign of wildcat worker resistance to conditions at the plant was in May 1993, "when approximately 100 workers stood up in the plant cafeteria and refused to work unless the company addressed a list of alleged abuses--including unpaid hours, the lack of bathroom breaks, poor working materials, and unauthorized company deductions for safety equipment like smocks and gloves, as well as inadequate pay." But it wasn't until two years later, in 1995, that organized labor got involved. After a dramatic unionization drive and vote, the Laborers International Union of North America (LIUNA) won the right to represent the workers. Throughout the approximately six years of labor struggle that the book covers, management never respected the workers' decision and took all of the typical steps, from stalling recognition of the union to stymying and breaking off contract talks with the workers. One aspect of the workers' experience was not unique to them and is a recurring theme in

American labor history--the speed-up. In citing a study done by the National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice, Fink shows that the most frequent complaint of workers, "concerned the 'dangerously high speed' of the production line. Combined with the rigidity of work assignments (there was no rotation of jobs at the plant), the line speed only exacerbated repetitive motion injuries frequently reported in most poultry-processing plants."It brings to my mind something very important to Marxist-Humanist theory and history, the automation of the "continuous miner" that miners in West Virginia fought so hard against in the 1950s, when the question of "what kind of labor should man do?" was raised by the miners. The fact that today this same type of automation permeates capitalist production everywhere would seem completely overwhelming if it weren't for the repeated struggles of rank-and-file workers at the point of production. But interestingly, the unique thing about this book is that its subject matter--or better put, Subject, with a capital "S"--is not the typical rank-and-file worker one might envision. To be sure, many of the miners who initiated the wildcat strikes against automation in the '50s were European immigrants. But in capital's latest stages of globalization in which its hand reaches out blindly across borders to find cheaper and cheaper labor, it has encountered and in many ways uprooted, indigenous peoples from Central America. Many of these people still have a very strong tie to traditional culture, language, and communal ways. This is, I believe, Fink's focus throughout the book: the interplay between the traditional cultures, and the way in which globalization has eroded or strengthened certain aspects of them. "How the dead helped to organize the living" is a phrase Fink uses to reconcile the phenomenon of a rich and sometimes tragic Mayan history of struggle and repression with a small diaspora in North Carolina fighting a Southern boss at a poultry plant. To do this, he gives some interesting historical and sociological analysis of Morganton, and the workers' home communities in Guatemala in order to properly situate the events of the book. This meant delving considerably into the social turmoil and civil war that plagued Guatemala throughout the 1980s and '90s. THE MAYA OF MORGANTON helped remind me that while capitalist globalization is busy redrawing borders and repressing human communities on a global scale, it also calls into existence new Subjects of revolt. The complex, multi-dimensional character of an indigenous Mayan community fighting the boss in North Carolina, USA is something that a whole new generation of radical internationalist activists can look to as we try to build a movement against capital and for true human development.

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