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Main content

Article Preview :

Out of Work: The First Century of Unemployment in Massachusetts.

By Alexander Keyssar. New York, Cambridge University Press, 1986. 469 pp. \$49.50, cloth; \$14.95, paper.

Alexander Keyssar's book is a scholarly contribution and a valuable resource to economists, labor historians, trade unionists, and policymakers. Keyssar investigates labor markets from the 1870's to the 1920's, a period often passed over by present-day economists and economic historians who tend to direct more attention to the Great Depression and Industrial Revolution in the United States. (John A. Garraty's *Unemployment in History: Economic Thought and Public Policy* and Gordon, Edwards, and Reich's *Segmented Work, Divided Workers* are notable exceptions.) He blends an abundance--sometimes an overabundance--of empirical data with impressionistic evidence depicting the extent and character of the period's unemployment.

Idle labor is a centuries-old phenomenon. But as the structure of production shifted toward manufacturing throughout the 19th century, the consequences for a typical jobless worker became harsher by the 1870's with the disappearance of alternative activities such as household production.

With the stage set, Keyssar then offers four original viewpoints in *Out of Work*. First is his chronicling of the unbelievably...

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Unemployment Assistance (DUA) is responsible for overseeing this public benefits program. UC, which is also referred to as unemployment insurance (UI), provides workers with financial assistance while they are without jobs. The sections below will explain the program's eligibility for unemployment requirements. Furthermore, additional portions will outline what types of documents petitioners need to bring when they file their claims, where to apply and what to do if they are denied benefits. Redefining the way we think about unemployment in America today, *Out of Work* offers devastating evidence that the major cause of high unemployment in the United States is the government itself. An Independent Institute Book. eISBN: 978-0-8147-8846-2. Of the five centuries during which the United States has been settled by Europeans, in only one, the twentieth century, has unemployment been a dominant political and economic issue. Whereas in nineteenth-century America passions erupted over inflation and deflation, tariffs and taxes, slavery, the disposition of public lands, central banking, and the regulation of monopolies, public debate about the "unemployment problem" was sporadic and localized. Unemployment -- Massachusetts -- History -- 19th century, Unemployment -- Massachusetts -- History -- 20th century, Chômage -- Massachusetts -- Histoire -- 19e siècle, Chômage -- Massachusetts -- Histoire -- 20e siècle, Social conditions, Unemployment, Werkloosheid, Arbeitslosigkeit, Geschichte, Chômage -- États-Unis -- Massachusetts Focusing on the state of Massachusetts, Professor Kevssar analyses the economic and social changes that gave birth to the modern concept of unemployment. Drawing on previously untapped sources - including richly detailed statistics and vivid verbatim testimony - he demonstrates that joblessness was a pervasive feature of working-class life from the 1870s to the 1920s.