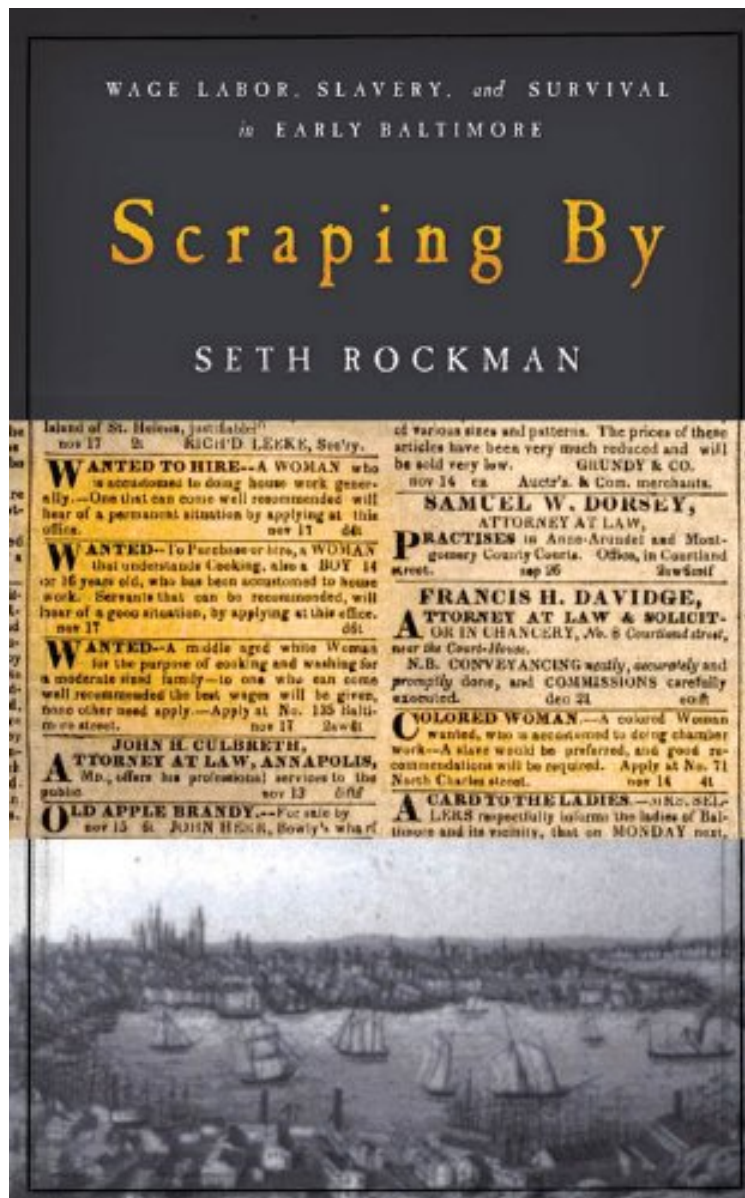


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Scraping By (Studies in Early American Economy and Society from the Library Company of Philadelphia)

Seth Rockman

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Seth Rockman : Scraping By (Studies in Early American Economy and Society from the Library Company of Philadelphia) before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Scraping By (Studies in Early American Economy and Society from the Library Company of Philadelphia):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A Great Polemic. Capitalism is Slavery. By RDD Seth Rockman's *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore* examines the economics of the working class in early republic Baltimore. The book speaks to economic history, social history, labor history, the history of the South, and gender history. Rockman wants to know what life was like for the average person in the early republic and how that differed from the groups historians typically examine in this period. Rockman argues, "Early republic capitalism thrived on its ability to exploit the labor of workers unable fully to claim the prerogatives of market freedom." Rockman structures his work around examinations of different types of work, from drudgery, like on the mud machine, to women's work, in the form of sewing and domestic service, to the options available to the poor. While much history of the early republic focuses on the new opportunities, Rockman demonstrates that, in Baltimore, the employers were the most opportunistic, relying on a combination of free and slave labor from men, women, and children. Rockman's analysis of women's work offers a counterpoint to the usual narrative of Republican Motherhood. He writes of female labor, "Reputation could trump both skill and demographic background as a qualification for hire." Rockman continues, "The creation of knowledge around women was particularly problematic in a patriarchal culture that reduced female character to sexual chastity and condoned misogynistic violence against 'disorderly' women." After a woman had secured a job and navigated the intricacies of the gendered system, she still might not receive a decent wage. Rockman writes, "Women acting collectively in the early republic had to carefully navigate the gender boundaries of American society... Arguing from the position of motherhood enabled some women to make claims on government." Even then, however, their options were limited in a society that continued to view men as the primary wage earners and considered women's work a temporary measure until they married. Rockman's discussion of slavery in Baltimore draws heavily upon Walter Johnson's capitalist examination of chattel slavery. Rockman argues against historians such as Gordon Wood, Joyce Appleby, and David Walker Howe who argued that "political democratization and economic prosperity went hand-in-hand" in the early republic. Rockman relies on tax records, letters, and job advertisements for his source base. He frequently writes that the individuals upon whom he focuses left very few records as most did not earn enough in their day-to-day living to appear on the tax records. Payroll records often omitted the names of employees as well. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. By uncovering history of the working poor, Rockman provides not only a window into the ... By Love's history By uncovering history of the working poor, Rockman provides not only a window into the development of capitalism in the early American Republic, but also a moving portrait of a group of people whose lives and labor are too often overlooked. This is a carefully researched and clearly written book that should be required reading for anyone who has ever relied on the labor of others. 7 of 8 people found the following review helpful. Simply the Best By John G. Sharp I recently read Seth Rockman's *Scraping By*, with surprise and delight. *Scraping By* is simply the best study of wage labor that I have read. Particularly helpful for me was Rockman's discussion, of race, labor and working class culture. Reading this fine account of Baltimore's, enslaved mariners, mud machine operators, white seamstresses, Irish dockhands, free and enslaved black domestic servants, and native-born street sweepers brought to mind E.P. Thompson's, *The Making of the English Working Class* and Sean Wilentz's *Chants Democratic New York City the Rise of the American Working Class 1788-1850*. What I found most remarkable in *Scraping By*, was Rockman's ability to recover the lives and aspirations of a hitherto largely ignored group, day laborers or per diem workers, here they truly come alive. While Thompson and Wilentz can rely on political pamphlets of the early 19th century, autobiographical accounts, and related literary sources to gain their insights, Rockman faced and overcame a more daunting challenge. Day laborers, enslaved and free, rarely have a voice in labor history; Rockman has made certain they will no longer remain in the margins of labor history. His brilliant use of the newspapers of the era and his impressive array of data from the early business, census and tax records support his study superbly and make his work unique. Fortunately for the reading public, Rockman's *Scraping By* shares with Wilentz and Thompson, that unique ability to write well and honestly about working men and women without resorting to academic jargon or as E.P. Thompson once put it "the enormous condensation of posterity." This is by far one of the best books on labor history ever!

Enslaved mariners, white seamstresses, Irish dockhands, free black domestic servants, and native-born street sweepers all navigated the low-end labor market in post-Revolutionary Baltimore. Seth Rockman considers this diverse workforce, exploring how race, sex, nativity, and legal status determined the economic opportunities and vulnerabilities of working families in the early republic. In the era of Frederick Douglass, Baltimore's distinctive economy featured many slaves who earned wages and white workers who performed backbreaking labor. By focusing his study on this boomtown, Rockman reassesses the roles of race and region and rewrites the history of class and capitalism in the United States during this time. Rockman describes the material experiences of low-wage workers -- how they found work, translated labor into food, fuel, and rent, and navigated underground economies and social welfare systems. He also explores what happened if they failed to find work or lost their jobs. Rockman argues that the American working class emerged from the everyday struggles of these low-wage workers. Their labor was

indispensable to the early republic's market revolution, and it was central to the transformation of the United States into the wealthiest society in the Western world. Rockman's research includes construction site payrolls, employment advertisements, almshouse records, court petitions, and the nation's first "living wage" campaign. These rich accounts of day laborers and domestic servants illuminate the history of early republic capitalism and its consequences for working families.