

**Glenna Matthews.**

**Silicon Valley, Women, and the California Dream:  
Gender, Class, and Opportunity in the Twentieth Century.**

Stanford University Press, 2003, 313 pp.

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*Silicon Valley, Women, and the California Dream* is a carefully documented economic history of California's Santa Clara Valley. Matthews traces its transformation from a fruit-growing and canning capital in the early 20th century (then known as the 'Valley of Heart's Delight') to its contemporary reincarnation as the high-tech capital of America.

Matthews' work fits within a tradition of feminist labour history attentive to intersections of class, gender, ethnicity and migration. She documents the early struggles to organize mostly women workers in the fruit-canning industry, and their success in attaining Fordist wages that enabled them to live the 'California dream'. With the decline of the orchards and emergence of the micro-technology industry after the Second World War, with its connections to the Cold War and defense contracts, the conditions of blue collar women's work declined. Employers in 'Silicon Valley' have pursued persistent, and successful, anti-union strategies, that have massively increased the gaps between professional engineers and researchers (largely men) and the production workers who make the chips (largely immigrant women).

A strength of Matthews' book is her attention to the ways in which new waves of immigrants are integrated into the local gendered-economy as employers draw on racialized stereotypes and material insecurities that accompany migration, especially for those recruited through temporary work visas. The exploitation of immigrant labour occurs throughout the occupational hierarchy in the high-technology industry as contract workers are imported on work visas to staff both professional and assembly line jobs.

Matthews also attempts to link these changes in the local economy to trends in local politics. She highlights the somewhat incongruous predominance of masculinist culture in the high-tech industry, while simultaneously significant numbers of women are elected in local politics. Indeed, Santa Clara Valley has earned itself the title of the 'feminist capital of the nation'. But herein lies a chief weakness of the book: the forays into electoral trends in the various periods of the Valley's history are not well connected to the main themes that centre on work. These sections on politics appear more as a diversion than an integrated piece of the narrative.

A significant weakness of Matthews' book is her failure to include any theoretical context for her work. In this she follows the tradition of many historians who eschew discussion of their conceptual framework. For sociologists this makes the book much less interesting than it might otherwise be, since she never draws out the theoretical implications of her case study. Without any theoretical discussion, the book often reads like a catalogue of events over the last century, rather than a more synthetic analysis of changing conditions of life for working-class, immigrant and non-immigrant women in Santa Clara Valley. This heavy emphasis on chronology is accentuated by the absence of

women workers' voices. The study would be greatly enhanced with more use of oral histories and ethnography to add more depth and richness to the documentary analysis.

In conclusion, *Silicon Valley, Women, and the California Dream* is a carefully documented feminist economic history that will be of interest to sociologists and others who work in this field, but will have much less interest for those pursuing more theoretical research on intersectional inequalities.

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