

Race, class, steel strike & football: 1959 in Western Pennsylvania

By [Alan Wallace](#)

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In “Striking Gridiron: A Town's Pride and a Team's Shot at Glory During the Biggest Strike in American History” (Thomas Dunne Books, available Tuesday), Greg Nichols illuminates Western Pennsylvania milltown race, class and labor-management tensions 55 years ago through the prism of high school football.

Rich with detail about life back then, it's a book whose author initially intended it to be about efforts to revitalize struggling Rust Belt towns, according to the publisher. But when Nichols visited Braddock repeatedly, residents kept mentioning Coach Chuck Klausing's 1959 Braddock High School Tigers. And when Nichols found Klausing in Indiana, Pa., he found his narrative thread.

When the 1959 season began, a half-million steelworkers nationwide continued a strike begun in mid-July. That made for especially tough times in Braddock. But the town found solace in the prospect of a sixth straight undefeated season — and a new national record for consecutive games without a loss — for the Tigers. By early November, they needed one more win to claim that record — against North Braddock Scott High at their shared stadium.

Many in both towns toiled at U.S. Steel's Edgar Thomson Works in riverside Braddock, which was less affluent, with more of a black community, than North Braddock on the hillside above. White and black sons of union members and managers both competed and cooperated in football, and amid the heightened atmosphere as that high-stakes game approached, Klausing, coaching an integrated team, was subjected to death threats.

Braddock won that pivotal game. The next day, the U.S. Supreme Court issued a ruling upholding the Taft-Hartley Act that put an end to the steel strike, which lasted 116 days and brought hardships that Nichols vividly describes.

The mill remains, providing far fewer jobs, but much else has changed in Braddock and North Braddock, for better and worse. “Striking Gridiron” captures a slice of Western Pennsylvania as it was, offering an intriguing contrast to today.

GOOD INTENTIONS, BAD RESULTS

“Aftermath: The Unintended Consequences of Public Policies” by Thomas E. Hall (Cato Institute) — The author, an economics professor at Miami University of Ohio, touches on many examples but focuses on four case studies to highlight the importance of finding better ways to avoid unintended consequences of new taxes, laws and regulations at a time when government's growth reaches into ever more aspects of American life. Examining cigarette taxes, Prohibition, the minimum wage and the federal income tax, he explores how each was implemented, the political factors that applied at the time, unintended results and why three of these policies still exist — plus the lessons that Prohibition's failed alcohol ban holds for current and future drug policy. Noting that many unintended consequences of government rule-making can be severe, he urges that whenever any new policy is considered, government officials must review all potential unintended consequences much more thoroughly than they typically have.

SLAVERY AS BUSINESS

“The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism” by Edward E. Baptist (Basic Books) — The Economist's retraction of a sharply criticized review has raised the profile of this book and its controversial premise. The author, a Cornell University history professor, contends that historians too often have portrayed slavery outside the larger context of the U.S. economy and without sufficient emphasis on its evils. Drawing on thousands of slave narratives and plantation records, he argues that slavery was integral to the U.S. economy's dramatic 19th-century growth and to modern U.S. capitalism's development, describing cruelties inflicted by slave owners as methods to improve slaves' efficiency — and thus, their own bottom lines as they created a near-monopoly on cotton production. And with cotton a key raw material of the Industrial Revolution, he says, slavery was a factor in enabling America to become a prosperous, globally influential nation.

IN THE PIPELINE

Forthcoming titles from both ends of the political spectrum:

Conservative

- “Roar: The New Conservative Woman Speaks Out” by Scottie Nell Hughes (Worthy Publishing, Tuesday)
- “Putin's Kleptocracy: Who Owns Russia?” by Karen Dawisha (Simon & Schuster, Sept. 30)
- “Eisenhower: The Public Relations President” by Pam Parry, foreword by Mary Jean Eisenhower (Lexington Books, Oct. 16)

- “The Seven Deadly Virtues: 18 Conservative Writers on Why the Virtuous Life is Funny as Hell” edited by Jonathan V. Last (Templeton Press, Oct. 27)
- “Right for a Reason: Life, Liberty and a Crapload of Common Sense” by Miriam Weaver and Amy Jo Clark (Sentinel, Oct. 30)

Liberal

- “The All New Don't Think of an Elephant: Know Your Values and Frame the Debate” by George Lakoff (Chelsea Green Publishing, Sept. 23)
- “We Are Better Than This: How Government Should Spend Our Money” by Edward D. Kleinbard (Oxford University Press, Oct. 1)
- “Shadow Government: Surveillance, Secret Wars and a Global Security State in a Single Superpower World” by Tom Engelhardt, foreword by Glenn Greenwald (Haymarket Books, Oct. 7)
- “Worthy Fights: A Memoir of Leadership in War and Peace” by Leon Panetta with Jim Newton (The Penguin Press, Oct. 7)
- “Censored 2015: Inspiring We the People; The Top Censored Stories and Media Analysis of 2013-2014” edited by Mickey Huff, Andy Lee Roth and Project Censored, introduction by Ralph Nader (Seven Stories Press, Oct. 7)