

DOROTHY SUE COBBLE

Dishing It Out

*Waitresses and Their Unions in the
Twentieth Century*

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS PRESS
Urbana and Chicago

Contents

	Preface	xi
	Introduction	i
	<i>I The Occupational Community of Waitressing</i>	15
CHAPTER ONE	The Rise of Waitressing: Feminization, Expansion, and Respectability	17
CHAPTER TWO	Work Conditions and Work Culture	34
	<i>II Waitresses Turn to Economic and Political Organization</i>	59
CHAPTER THREE	The Emergence and Survival of Waitress Unionism, 1900–1930	61
CHAPTER FOUR	The Flush of Victory, 1930–55	86
	<i>III The Waitress as Craft Unionist</i>	113
CHAPTER FIVE	Uplifting the Sisters in the Craft	115
CHAPTER SIX	Waitress Unionism: Rethinking Categories	137
	<i>IV Controversies over Gender</i>	149
CHAPTER SEVEN	“Women’s Place” in the Industry	151
CHAPTER EIGHT	“Women’s Place” in the Union	174
EPILOGUE	The Decline of Waitress Unionism	192
APPENDIX	Tables and Figures	205
	Abbreviations Used in the Notes	219
	Notes	223
	Index	301

Preface

There have been few points in my life when I have felt that my Southern working-class heritage and my intellectual, feminist aspirations were not in tension. This book represents one such moment. Like the novelist who must somehow write first her autobiography, no matter how disguised, I knew that my first major academic project would be a response to my life experiences as well as to those of the classroom.

My interest in unionism—and more specifically unionism in a traditionally female occupation—undoubtedly had its roots in my own particular family history and my desires to recast that history. From my father I learned male union traditions, both noble and shortsighted. The railroad brotherhood gave him a route to dignity and an alternative to upward mobility, but the battles against technological change, an inept railroad management, and the dissolving fraternity of craftsmen inspired more bitterness than hope. His union culture also offered few resources for a revaluing of the contributions and power of those outside the white male craft brotherhood. In contrast, my mother operated in inclusive ways and seemed infinitely flexible in the face of political, social, and economic upheaval. Yet she found it difficult, if not impossible, to see her own work in a nonunion department store as worthy of romance and a living wage.

Was there a working-class institution that captured the best of these traditions? One that could lay claim to rights, provide a sense of identity and power to its members while granting the same to those outside its ranks? An institution to which I as a woman could belong? Perhaps only a union built by women could forge such a vision. What I found, however, was that history resists mythology, and that my desire to revise the work and union histories of my parents was not to be fulfilled in the ways I anticipated.

The jobs I held also left their mark on this book, as did the years I spent working with and teaching trade unionists. My union job (longshore work) offered more money than I had ever seen, a reasonable, self-regulated work pace, autonomy, and pride, and—had I been a man—would have provided a remarkably tight-knit workplace community. My nonunion jobs (magazine editor, waitress, art model, file clerk, receptionist) all paid close to minimum wage, and only the editing job compensated with status and expensive annual

company luncheons. How were these extremes to be explained? Because all my nonunion jobs were also “women’s jobs,” I could hardly look simply to the gendered nature of the work. What would it mean to “women’s work” for it to be unionized?

Because my string of working-class jobs and my frustrated urge for time to read, think, and write were fast propelling me back into school and into an academic career, I decided that my approach to answering such questions would be through historical texts rather than through the accumulated bruises of personal experience. The trade unionists I was teaching and my deepening involvement in labor politics gave me yet another set of questions. What would be the future of trade unionism and hence of worker power in the new postindustrial society? Could labor appeal to the growing female-dominated service work force, or was it historically and irredeemably linked to the anchor of the blue-collar male worker?

The history of waitresses and of waitress unionism only gradually revealed itself as the door behind which I might find answers. My one stint as a waitress had been short-lived—I was fired for not smiling enough—and I, like most of my generation, hardly associated waitressing with union solidarity. Yet, as I began to explore the histories of various female-dominated occupations, waitressing emerged as one of the few in which women had organized viable unions and had sustained those unions.

My book began formally as I worked on my dissertation in history at Stanford University. As a graduate student I was the lucky beneficiary of wise counsel from faculty and fellow students. My advisor, Carl Degler, was a model for me as a scholar and mentor: forthright in his criticisms, yet genuinely supportive of my work. Throughout my graduate years, Carl Degler treated me with respect personally and intellectually, took my work and my ideas seriously, and expected from me the highest standards of scholarship. Estelle Freedman offered keen theoretical insights and painful but sound editorial advice. Friends and colleagues in my Stanford dissertation group and in the Bay Area Labor History Workshop read various drafts and saved me from numerous grammatical and theoretical lapses. David Brody, Tony Fels, Michael Kazin, and Ruth Milkman read my unwieldy first drafts and have continued to give me substantive comments that have been instrumental in shaping my overall arguments.

My greatest debt then as now is to Lucy Kendall, a veteran waitress, political activist, and self-taught intellectual, who devoted countless hours to making this book a reality. Lucy worked with me at every step, from typing the initial correspondence to libraries and unions, to spending hours tracing obscure references, to offering critical comments on my successive written attempts to bring her world—the world of waitressing and of waitress union-

ism—alive. I will never quite understand how I became the lucky recipient of Lucy's research and clerical skills and her boundless energy, but I do know that if Lucy had not been there with flashlights, gloves, and steel nerves, the records lying untouched for fifty years in the cellar under the basement of the San Francisco restaurant workers' union might still be there collecting yet another layer of dirt and mold.

When I somewhat reluctantly left the Bay Area after fifteen years, my book project traveled with me to Rutgers University. In New Jersey I entered another community of scholars who took me into their fold and shared their diverse and stimulating perspectives. I owe a great deal to the thoughtful promptings of Ava Baron, David Bensman, Patricia Cooper, Adrienne Eaton, Mary Hartman, Alice Kessler-Harris, Suzanne Lebsack, Patricia Roos, Deborah White, and the members of the Industrial Relations Seminar at the Institute of Management and Labor Relations. In particular, Dee Garrison and Michael Merrill have been generous friends and intellectual companions.

The labor education department at Rutgers University provided me with financial and research assistance. Thanks go to Steve Meicke, Karen Behmke, Su-Fen Chiu, Seth Grodofsky, Rochelle Suster, Larry Evans, Carmen Martino, Mary Paige Lang, Mary Alice Fuster, Maria Nogueira, and Aline LaBorwit for tracking down elusive references and patching botched footnotes. Irene Bouton and Angie Jackson offered clerical help; Mamata Datta, Eugene McElroy, and Majorie Watson, librarians at the Institute of Management and Labor Relations, added their research skills. I also received critical funding for research and travel from the National Endowment for the Humanities; the American Council of Learned Societies; the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Walter Reuther Library; the Albert J. Beveridge Foundation of the American Historical Association; the Rutgers University Research Council; and the Faculty Academic Study Program of Rutgers University.

This book would never have been written had not certain individuals from the labor movement offered their resources and support. Charles Lamb and Sherri Chiesa, officers of the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union, Local 2, gave me access to their materials and guided me to sympathetic international officers. Jack Kenneally, former general vice president of the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union, and Anne Esper, administrative assistant to the general president, opened the voluminous files of the international union to me, patiently answered my inquiries about various extant locals, and made my stay in Cincinnati a pleasant one by taking me to numerous union restaurants and bars. (Firsthand observation was an indispensable aspect of my research, I then decided.) I am also grateful to Cindy Young, Jackie Walsh, Jeri Powell, Flo Douglas of HERE Local 2 in San Francisco, the late Charles Paulsen, international organizer of

HERE, Florence Farr of HERE Local 24, and the other men and women in the culinary industry who discussed their work and life with me. Bob Dixon, editor of Local 24's *Michigan Hotel Bar Restaurant Review*, I'm sure, spent more time than he would like to remember sorting through long-forgotten boxes of photographs and newsclippings.

No researcher can do justice to a topic without the help of archivists and librarians. Debra Bernhardt guided me through the considerable collection at the Tamiment Institute Library, Robert Wagner Labor Archives in New York City, helped me contact the officers of HERE Local 6, and spent a week with me in yet another damp unlit basement culling unaccessioned records. Jerry Hess from the National Archives and Records Service, Bette Eriskin in the Social Science Library, University of California, Berkeley, and Jim Knox and Hallie Perry of the Stanford University Green Library were extremely helpful. Special thanks also go to Richard Wentworth, Karen Hewitt, and Mary Giles of the University of Illinois Press for their sympathetic and meticulous attention to the project through the various stages of the production process.

Finally, I want to thank John Marron for his love and support; I only hope he realizes how much that has meant.

Introduction

For twenty-seven years, the restaurant had been a “haven for many West Hollywood singles, old and young.” The menu was nothing fancy—“the usual eggs and burgers available all over town”—and the decor was “all-American coffee shop,” but customers were fiercely loyal, “drawn by what one called the waitresses’ good will.” Yet when a new owner took over in 1984, he replaced “the doting middle-aged women—many of whom had been at the job 10 years or more” with younger help. The fired employees, ranging in age from sixty to seventy, organized as “the granny waitresses” and refused to go quietly. They hoisted picket signs proclaiming “Good Loyal Service Demands Honest Recognition” and began walking back and forth in front of the restaurant, sometimes for eight hours a day. The close-knit workplace community the waitresses enjoyed spilled over into the picket line. Waitresses brought each other “baked noodles and sandwiches, and pass[ed] the time discussing diets, illnesses and customers—just like it used to be on the job.” One sixty-year-old waitress volunteered matter-of-factly that she picketed in part because she missed her co-workers of fourteen years.

The collective response of the granny waitresses was nurtured by their occupational community, pride in their service, and sense of connectedness with their work and customers. “You know when you get up in the morning, put a cup of coffee on the table for your husband? That’s the kind of relationship it was with the customers,” explained one veteran of the coffee shop. Once on strike, the waitresses relied on tactics traditional to their craft: they convinced the public to honor their lines; they reached out to the middle-class women’s community—gaining the pledge of the National Organization of Women “to take the plight of senior waitresses around the country”; and they turned to their male allies in the labor movement. Because the new owner legally could ignore the previous union contract, hire permanent nonunion replacements, and enjoyed statutory protection from secondary boycotts and sympathy strikes, however, the waitresses settled in for a long battle. As one picketer said, “I worked here for 14 years. I guess I can walk that long.”¹

When I first began thinking about waitresses as a subject for a book, I had no idea I would find the story of the granny waitresses reenacted in various

guises as I leafed through the archives.² Neither did I anticipate how fully those waitresses—with their intense ties to each other, to their customers, and to their work and union—were products of a different era, one that by the 1980s had disappeared almost completely. I knew little about the historical evolution of waitress work, the values engendered by its performance, or the workplace practices and organizations waitresses created. No book-length historical study of waitresses had been written; in fact, only a few studies from any disciplinary perspective existed.³

Yet the more I read about their history and the more I thought about their variegated reality, the clearer it became that here was a subject that had appeal at many levels. In some ways, waitressing is the quintessential female job. Probably more women at some point in their lives have held waitress jobs than any other. And, as the New York artist Jerri Allyn has said in one of her many performance pieces about food, money, and work, “waitressing is not just a job but a metaphor.” All women are waitresses because all women feed and nurture those around them. Waitresses are simply the “professional nurturers.”⁴

Waitressing reveals the deeply gendered expectations surrounding the world of work. In the theater of eating out, the waitress plays multiple parts, each reflecting a female role. To fulfill the emotional and fantasy needs of the male customer, she quickly learns the all-too-common scripts: scolding wife, doting mother, sexy mistress, or sweet, admiring daughter. Other customers, typically female, demand obsequious and excessive service—to compensate, perhaps, for the status denied them in other encounters. For once, they are not the servers but the ones being served.

The food service encounter is structured by a gendered and class-bound culture. Yet the specific content of that interaction arises from the symbolic, unconscious emotional lives of the participants themselves. More than food is being consumed at the restaurant site. And those who serve it are responding to hungers of many kinds. Eating stirs sexual and emotional associations of the most primitive order. “For there are expectations and intimacies and memories tied up with food,” one journalist has written, that no one escapes.⁵

Waitress work is also prototypic of the new service work force. If present labor force trends persist, the personal service worker will be more representative of the postindustrial economy than the computer programmer or the data-entry clerk.⁶ Projections target building cleaners, nurses, cooks, and waiters—all personal service jobs—as among the fastest-growing occupations. Waiting work, already one of the most frequent occupational “choices” for women, is second only to retail sales in the number of new openings projected for the 1990s.⁷

Waiting work, however, was not always a prominent occupation for women. In 1900, barely a hundred thousand people worked as waiters, and only a third

of these were female; as late as the 1920s, men still retained close to a half of all wait jobs. But by 1970, more than a million people served food, and 92 percent were women.⁸

Yet despite the feminization and expansion of food service, sexual and racial stratification persisted. Invariably, men monopolized the better-paying, more prestigious jobs where formal service was the rule, with white waiters occupying the choicest positions. Women worked where remuneration was the lowest: in coffee shops, in tea rooms, and on the breakfast and lunch shifts of neighborhood cafes and full-service restaurants. Waitresses were also primarily white. The few black women who found employment in the trade—black women averaged only 7 percent of all waitresses over the course of the twentieth century—toiled in the worst waiting jobs or accepted employment as “busgirls” or waitress assistants.

Yet research on service work, particularly personal service occupations, continues to lag despite the centrality of such work to the burgeoning post-industrial economy and the daily lives of countless individuals. Without such research, a critical sector of the work world will remain understudied, and the research biases of the past will go unchallenged. Basic sociological and historical assumptions—from theories of “alienation” to concepts of “militancy,” “working-class culture,” and “skill”—have rested on studies of male, blue-collar labor and are increasingly ill-suited as generalizable theoretical frameworks.⁹ The empirical base must be broadened to encompass the service sector as well as the female worker.¹⁰

To my delight, as I delved into the archives I realized that the history of waitress unionism, unfolding daily before my eyes, also offered intriguing scholarly possibilities. Although many groups of women workers developed strong work cultures, waitresses were one of the few to institutionalize their informal workplace practices and build permanent labor organizations.¹¹ Beginning in 1900 with the founding of the Seattle waitresses' local, waitresses formed all-female unions in Chicago, San Francisco, and other communities across the country; they also joined mixed culinary locals of waiters, cooks, and bartenders. In contrast to the sporadic organizing among women telephone operators, clericals, and other female service workers, waitresses sustained their organizational impulse for more than seventy years.¹² At their peak in the 1940s and 1950s, union waitresses represented nearly one-fourth of the trade nationally. In such union strongholds as San Francisco, Detroit, and New York, a majority of female food servers worked under union contract.¹³ Indeed, only the institutions built by women in the garment trades appeared to rival waitress unions in terms of influence and longevity.¹⁴

Union waitresses also enjoyed a degree of institutional independence and autonomy experienced by few other groups of organized women. Throughout

the twentieth century, union waitresses were affiliated almost exclusively with the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union (HERE), a male-dominated international representing primarily bartenders, cooks, and waiters. Yet from the earliest days of unionization, waitresses resided in their own separate craft- and sex-based locals. With the rise of industrial unionism in the 1930s and 1940s, waitresses increasingly joined mixed-sex and mixed-craft organizations, but the all-female waitress locals, almost all of which had been initiated before 1930, remained among the largest and most powerful organizations within HERE until the 1970s.¹⁵ Because of this decentralized, craft structure, waitresses elected their own female officers, developed their own bylaws and constitutions, devised their own bargaining agenda, and determined their own stance on legislative matters. In addition, the local market economy in which bargaining took place in the hotel and restaurant industry reinforced the autonomy of culinary locals.¹⁶

The extensive and previously untapped records of these female-led and female-dominated organizations offered an unusually direct and unmediated view of the attitudes and perspectives of wage-earning women.¹⁷ Looking at union institutions, particularly those constructed by women, seemed to open new vistas on working-class culture, the social construction of gender, workplace activism, and a myriad of other issues.¹⁸ Indeed, writing a national history of waitresses and their unions would allow for a synthesis of the new labor history with the old. The study would not focus on a neighborhood or a workplace per se as has been the dominant approach of the new labor history. But by reconceiving of the union as a community and as a site of cultural inquiry, the methods and the concerns of the more locally focused studies would not be lost. They would simply be used in a new arena.¹⁹

I began to formulate the group of questions which would constitute the core of my project. I wanted to know why this particular group of women chose unionism, how they sustained their collective impulses, and what difference gender made to their unionism. What issues would they define as central? What distinctive strategies for collective advancement, if any, would be forged by these women unionists? And how would their story reshape the conventional concepts and narrative of labor history, if at all?

Many waitress locals, in fact, defined their goals in explicitly sex-conscious ways, announcing their intent "to further the rights of working women" and to bring about economic and political equality with men.²⁰ What did "equality" and "advancement" mean to working-class women? How did the meaning(s) of these concepts change over time? And, of equal importance, what would a consideration of waitress unionism disclose about the class dimensions of female consciousness and activism?²¹

The answers any historian finds to questions like these are partial. The

sources fall silent at critical junctures; generalizations based on a single occupational group are risky at best. Only as more case studies of female unionism and of working-class female institutions are written will definitive propositions be forthcoming.²² Yet as the documents accumulated and the contours of the history of waitresses began to take shape, I found myself reaching a number of conclusions—conclusions that suggest fresh perspectives on several emerging scholarly debates.

A study of waitresses and the unions they created throws into relief the gendered nature of our understandings of work and unionism. Despite the pathbreaking work of Mary Blewett, Joan Scott, Patricia Cooper, and others, many labor historians have continued to write the history of male unionism in a fairly unself-conscious fashion.²³ Few disclaimers are offered about the possible gender biases of conclusions; few attempts are made to speculate about which elements of that history are distinctive to male or female trade unionism and which elements are universal. Waitress unionism diverged sharply from the male-dominated labor movement; it also resembled it in surprising ways. Both the differences and the similarities are instructive.

The goals waitresses pursued, for example, were often at odds with those espoused by their union brothers. Waitresses vehemently opposed the men in their International who argued for legislative and contract provisions preserving liquor service for men. They also initially took umbrage at equal pay proposals advanced by male co-workers because they believed that with the protective laws restricting women's hours, equal pay would mean the loss of their jobs to men.

Even when waitresses shared similar goals with male workers and voiced these objectives in language common among trade unionists, the words themselves held different meanings for women than for men. The very definition of terms was gendered. For the majority of male workers, the "family wage"—or the "sum necessary to sustain family members" was reserved for men only. In contrast, waitresses argued that any wage earner, male or female, whose contribution to family support was crucial deserved a "family wage." For them, the term legitimized higher wages for women rather than deference to male financial needs.²⁴

The definition of skill was reformulated as well. Waitresses claimed to be skilled craftswomen despite the larger societal view of their work as unskilled and despite the fact that they acquired most of their training and experience on the job. For them, "skill" encompassed social abilities. "Nurturing" and "caring"—what sociologist Arlie Hochschild has called the "emotional labor" in women's service jobs—deserved respect and compensation just as did physical strength and "technical" know-how.²⁵ Although they never achieved the power and prestige accorded the "elite" trades, unionized waitresses did gain many of the protections and benefits that organized men enjoyed. Their

history demonstrates that, for workers, *craft* and *skill* were flexible terms encompassing a wide range of ability and job know-how. The achievement of skilled status was based on workplace struggle, not simply on some “objective” measure of expertise.

Likewise, the achievement of such union objectives as “respectability” occurred on gendered terrain. Respectability for women was intimately intertwined with sexual respectability. For waitresses, respectability proved elusive because waiting work involved close personal interaction with male strangers in an environment laden with sexual overtones. Sexuality was always a double-edged sword for waitresses because its expression enhanced their earnings while lowering their status. What image could be projected by the waitress which would achieve both the respectability of being “well-paid” and morally upright? And how could the more explicitly sexualized service encounters be controlled so that the server maintained her dignity as well as her earning potential?²⁶

Waitresses, along with other women workers, devised different routes to achieve their ends than did their male counterparts. First, as personal service workers with strong bonds to their clients, they relied on their customers for both individual and collective advancement. Historically, “sexual service” work has been one of the few ways for women to earn a living wage.²⁷ Companionship, sexual flirtation, and more explicit sexual services were offered in exchange for money. Only through this primitive exchange relationship with individual men could working-class women earn more than a poverty wage. Waitresses also relied on patron support in helping pressure employers into union recognition and bargaining breakthroughs. To the degree that good service and strong personal bonds built patronage, waitresses had a leverage with their employers that workers in many other occupations lacked.

Second, waitresses looked to cross-class alliances with their sex more frequently than did male workers, and in part because of these ties, they also used the legislative arena to a greater degree. Waitresses in New York, Chicago, and other cities, for example, depended on the Women’s Trade Union League (WTUL) for assistance in leadership training and legislative activity. Their legislative activism spanned the course of the twentieth century, from Progressive Era campaigns for wage and hour legislation to the drives after World War II for equal pay, maternity leave, and sex-based wage and hour laws.

Despite these considerable differences from the unionism espoused by men, waitresses thought of themselves as craftswomen, and in certain crucial ways, their unionism was similar to that devised by male craft unionists. They spoke of their work as a skilled craft, and they engaged in practices that have long been associated with craft unionism: organization along craft lines, emphasis on craft identity and specialization, restrictive membership rules, and union monitoring of performance standards.²⁸

Recognizing the essential craft nature of waitress unionism extends the reassessment of male craft unionism that has emerged in the writings of Michael Kazin, David Montgomery, and Christopher Tomlins. The earlier monolithic view of craft unionists as a conservative, apolitical elite who were hopelessly out of touch with the rank and file by the 1930s has crumbled in the face of the new revisionist scholarship. The poor reputation of the AFL—a reputation fostered in part by the industrial unionists of the CIO and taken up uncritically by labor historians sympathetic to the “new unionism”—has also come under reconsideration.²⁹

Michael Kazin’s work on the building trades in San Francisco during the Progressive Era attacked the conventional wisdom at its core. A group long thought to be the archetypal, apolitical business unionists were revealed as prominent urban progressives who combined a practical wage-worker consciousness with a social reform mentality whose roots lay in the nineteenth-century soil of antimonopoly and producer republicanism. David Montgomery’s *Fall of the House of Labor* undercut yet another aspect of the traditional portrait. All kinds of unionists found a home in Montgomery’s AFL: unskilled and semiskilled, immigrant and native born, socialist and republican. Christopher Tomlins moved the reassessment into the 1930s. In a 1979 essay, one of the first to challenge the standard interpretation of the 1930s as the triumph of the CIO, Tomlins contended that labor’s resurgence was based in large part on the success of AFL organizational drives. His later book, *The State and the Unions*, also evidenced sympathy for the AFL’s belief in the inherent right to collective activity and its goal of creating a more neutral state.³⁰

My work moves further along this revisionist road. If the history of waitress unionism is any indication, craft unionism encompassed semiskilled and unskilled workers in the early decades of the twentieth century, and these workers voluntarily adopted the craft perspectives pioneered by skilled workers. Moreover, rather than dismiss craft unionism as conservative and dysfunctional in advancing the interests of workers by the 1930s, I contend that the craft style of organization was crucial to the survival of unionism among many groups of workers. In short, craft union approaches had a vitality and a durability that have gone unrecognized.

Many trades, especially those connected with manufacturing, faced “de-skilling” in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, or, in the words of other scholars, were being moved from “batch production” to “mass production” technologies.³¹ And for these workers, a new unionism was necessary. The transformation of their work, however, and their subsequent need for a new form of unionism should not blind researchers to the much different history of the nonmanufacturing trades. De-skilling may not have occurred until much later, if at all, for service workers, and they continued to work primarily

in small shops with informal systems of work organization.³² It is not surprising that their different relation to work resulted in the creation and maintenance of a different form of unionism.

In an industry of small employers and a highly mobile labor force, such as the restaurant sector, for example, workers needed to be bound together by more than antiemployer animus or the promise of protection from unjust discharge and discipline. The emphasis on building solidarity through craft identity, on upgrading the status of the trade by monitoring entrance standards and workplace job performance, and on providing benefits and services that would travel with workers from jobsite to jobsite all created sources of loyalty among workers that allowed unions to sustain themselves and exert power over multiple small worksites.

True, certain aspects of the craft union model could result in negative consequences. Rigid jurisdictional rules bred intercraft bickering and a "protect-your-own" mentality. The extensive web of craft rules that provided protection from employer abuse could also inhibit workplace flexibility and reinforce a hierarchical system of highly specialized job classifications. And, most disturbingly, the exclusionist tendencies of craft unionism often meant that union membership was reserved for white workers only. Waitress unionism fell prey to these problems just as did male craft unionists. Nevertheless, an awareness of the deficiencies of craft unionism should be combined with a recognition of its innovations and strengths.

The organization of workers along craft and sex-based lines held advantages for women workers as well. The few writers who have explored the relation between union organizational structure and women's subordinate status have emphasized the superiority of industrial unionism. As sociologist Ruth Milkman has observed, the "logic of industrial unionism" has often meant the admittance of women into unions whereas "craft logic" dictated their exclusion.³³ Yet, the success of waitress unionism demonstrates how an organizational structure based on the logic of craft, rather than being incompatible with female mobilization, proved instrumental in its creation and maintenance. The separation of workers by trade provided women with a space apart from male hostility and allowed the development of female perspectives and leadership skills. The tradition of local control and decentralization—so characteristic of craft unionism—also allowed for female autonomy. In contrast to the experience of women organized primarily into mixed-sex, industrially based locals, waitresses enjoyed an unusual degree of participation within their International union and an institutional base from which they could and did raise issues of concern to women. Thus, although industrial union structures were more conducive to the entrance of women into unions, craft structures may have been superior in sustaining female participation and leadership.

Further, twentieth-century craft unionism was in fact quite radical in its

demands for workplace control and self-management. The collapse of the “progressive bloc” within the AFL in the 1920s, as David Montgomery has suggested, certainly dampened the struggle for workers’ control, but the demise of the radical traditions of nineteenth-century craft unionism has perhaps been overdramatized. Twentieth-century AFL craft workers sought not simply “bread and butter” advances in their negotiations with employers, but what Selig Perlman called “liberty in the shop” or what I have termed “peer management.”³⁴ The work rules and contracts devised by these mainstream craft unionists remained intact into the 1960s, and although they did not involve a challenge to state power or to the ownership of their enterprises, in the context of American management’s exceptional penchant for unilateral control, their demand for power on the shopfloor was a radical assault on a central tenet of capitalism as practiced in the United States.³⁵ In short, any analysis of the AFL or of craft unionism that purports to assess its achievements in representing workers, both male and female, must look to its accomplishments in the collective bargaining arena as well as its activities and pronouncements in the political realm.

Finally, the history of waitress unionism suggests that a different kind of unionism did develop in the 1930s and 1940s, but that its distinguishing characteristics have been only partially understood. The industrial form of unionism meant a more inclusive approach in which a multitude of trades coexisted in one organization unit, but it also meant a new system of organization and shopfloor representation. A critical paradigmatic shift was occurring: from what I call “occupational unionism”—an approach which emphasized the occupational identity of the worker and tied union power to control over those within the occupation—to what can be seen as “worksites unionism”—a form of unionism where rights and protections were linked to a particular worksite.³⁶

In other words, I am suggesting a new typology of unionism—one that parallels the conventional craft/industrial typology but recognizes the distinctive workplace representation systems adopted by unions as well as their decision to organize horizontally (by trade) or vertically (by industry). Hopefully, the use of a new typology of unionism and the adoption of new terms to describe the dominant union forms in the twentieth century will call attention to the problematic nature of the terms *craft* and *industrial* unionism and open up for debate the question of what in fact has distinguished different forms of unionism historically.

The history of waitresses also intersects with many important streams of research in women’s history. Scholars of women increasingly have been concerned with differences among women, primarily of class, race, and ethnicity, and the ways in which the history of these marginalized groups forces a re-

thinking of the standard conceptual frameworks in the field. Assertions of a homogeneous cross-class culture for women and a single explanatory schema have been reevaluated.³⁷ One important aspect of this new scholarship has involved the reconstruction of the distinctive values and experiences of wage-earning women.

Sarah Eisenstein, for example, argued that working-class women rejected specific elements of Victorian morality, in particular the notion that female wage work in the public sphere was incompatible with moral womanhood. Other scholars such as Jacquelyn Hall, Joanne Meyerowitz, Christine Stansell, and Kathy Peiss have posited a separate female working-class morality which held distinct views on the boundaries of acceptable female behavior, condoning the expression of female sexuality, sexual mixing with men, and even premarital intercourse.³⁸ My research on waitresses confirms many of these observations. Waitresses held views toward female participation in the paid work world, female sexuality, respectability, and other issues that diverged from the dominant middle-class ethos.

Waitresses also articulated and acted upon a feminist vision that was shared historically by many working-class women and their allies, but that has been almost completely eclipsed by the more middle-class feminist perspectives that became dominant in the 1960s.³⁹ Middle-class feminist activists of the 1960s emphasized "equal treatment," "equal opportunity in the workplace," and "integration of the spheres." Often these approaches were conflated with "feminist" thinking; other strategies were viewed as antifeminist or "false consciousness." In the last decade, however, a renewed awareness of the multiplicity of feminisms and of the rich, diverse traditions of female consciousness has emerged.⁴⁰ The working-class feminism advocated by waitress unionists represents one of these lost traditions.⁴¹

Waitresses advocated a feminism that stressed "difference" and "separateness" rather than "sameness" and "integration." Rather than abandon the advantages of special protections, of sex-based legislation, of separate-sphere alternatives in their workplace and their union, they tried to reconcile such differences in treatment with concepts of equality and "equal opportunity."⁴² They wanted equality and special treatment and did not see the two as incompatible.

They also sought a feminism that balanced the needs of the individual woman with the needs of the working-class community and the family of which she was a part. They argued that economic justice and fair treatment for the majority of women can only be provided through employee representation and collective power not individual upward mobility. Rather than focus primarily on moving individual women into the higher-paying jobs held by men, they opted for improvements in the jobs traditionally held by women. Upward mobility for a few did not seem as important as the economic security of the

larger group. Class loyalties and communitarian “class” values shaped their concepts of justice and equality.⁴³ Advancement meant being better able to fulfill the responsibilities (and enjoy the pleasures) of motherhood and family life as well as improving life at the workplace.⁴⁴ Although their perspective differed in fundamental ways from other forms of feminism, waitresses were no less committed to the advancement of their sex.

Neither did their perspectives always set them apart from other feminist activists. In the Progressive Era, waitresses advocated separate, all-female locals and “woman-centered” organizing and bargaining. They defended such sex-based protective legislation as wage and hour statutes, night work, and laws restricting women from occupations seen as “morally and physically dangerous.” These approaches resonated with the dominant ideology emanating from the feminist movements of middle-class and elite women.

But after World War I, waitresses found themselves at odds with emerging feminist groups such as the National Woman’s party or the National Federation of Business and Professional Women’s Clubs who advocated “equal treatment,” stressed the similarity of the sexes, and pushed for individual opportunity rather than collective advancement through unionization. Waitress unionists maintained ties with other similarly inclined working-class and middle-class feminists through the Women’s Bureau and the Women’s Trade Union League, however, and carried on their feminist vision, advocating sex-based legislative and contract provisions as well as pay equity and other forms of equal treatment.⁴⁵

In the 1960s, a new consensus arose within the women’s movement that united warring middle-class factions and eventually drew in certain union and working-class women.⁴⁶ In part because waitresses worked in jobs where sex-typing partially insulated them from direct competition with men, in part because of their own continuing distinct ideological perspectives on sexual equality, and in part because their roots lay in craft- and sex-based organizations, waitresses were one of the few organized women’s groups who continued to advocate sex-based legislation, sex-based organizational structures, and a separate “female sphere” within the work world.⁴⁷ Throughout the 1970s, they opposed the Equal Rights Amendment, arguing that it would decimate sex-based protective statutes, in particular those mandating limits on overtime and those requiring maternity benefits, rest breaks, seats, and other amenities. Waitresses insisted that the advantages of these “protections” outweighed whatever economic opportunities might become available in the absence of such laws. They also defended their sex-based locals against legal assault and pushed for the upgrading and revaluing of women’s jobs. Rather than end the sex-labeling of jobs and move women into work traditionally done by men, they sought to preserve and extend the female sphere.

Because of these stances, waitress leaders were often marginalized and mis-

understood. To many younger activists, the older, working-class generation's concern with sexual differences appeared rigid, inhibiting, and acquiescent to male privilege. Class tensions aggravated the breach. The most prominent waitress spokeswoman in this period, Detroit's Myra Wolfgang, railed against Betty Friedan as "a middle-class college 'intellectual'" who knew nothing about working women's real problems; she also saw ERA supporters as privileged women who wanted others to sacrifice on "behalf of a mythical equality" that would benefit only elite women. Yet Wolfgang considered herself devoted to women's equality, and she agitated for extensive public child-care support, equal pay, equal opportunity legislation, and campaigns to "expose male chauvinism."⁴⁸

In the 1980s, critics began reevaluating the strategies of the 1960s, pointing out the drawbacks of moving women into men's jobs and of rewriting divorce statutes and protective laws to ensure equal treatment.⁴⁹ New feminist voices assumed gender differences and revalued those differences.⁵⁰ An alternative tradition, carried on by waitresses and others, was resurfacing.

The adherents of the new gender politics of the 1980s differed in important ways from those who recognized difference in the past: they saw sex differences as more mutable and were more optimistic about men taking on greater responsibility in the domestic realm. Yet the recognition of the "dual role of women," the importance of "accommodating difference," and the inadequacies of "equal treatment" and "affirmative action" have all been prominent themes. The comparable worth movement, for example, rested squarely on the assumption that women's sphere must be upgraded and revalued and that women should not have to become men in order to be respected and well-compensated for their work.⁵¹

In seeking to compare the sensibility of waitresses with their male working-class counterparts as well as with their more elite sisters, I have thus far stressed the unanimity among this group of working-class women. Sisterhood and class solidarity had very real limits, however. The majority of waitress locals, for example, excluded black and Asian women from membership until the 1930s and 1940s. Although a few locals pursued issues of racial discrimination in hiring and promotion once the racial barriers fell, minority women continued to be relegated to the lowest-paid, least-desirable positions in the industry and remained underrepresented in the occupation as a whole.⁵² In addition, although waitress consciousness contained elements of class and gender identification, the strongest, most consistent aspect of their ideology appears to have been trade identification. When the interests of their trade conflicted with the larger interests of their class or sex, the needs of the craft often came first.

Throughout much of the twentieth century, the identity of white waitresses with the principles of a "craft sisterhood" overrode such divisive issues

as just exactly what constituted "sexual respectability" and "women's work," and held at bay the competitiveness of waitresses over customers, tips, and individual gain. It was the commitment to the collective advancement of the sisters in the craft that allowed waitresses to organize and maintain a collective presence. By the 1950s and 1960s, however, even that long-standing consensus had begun to unravel. Increasingly, the differences among waitresses came to undermine their unity of purpose and spirit. The story of waitress unionism is one of disintegration and conflict as well as growth and solidarity.

Dishing It Out is an attempt to address scholarly controversies. It is also an attempt to recreate the lives of a group of very nontraditional women. Waitresses worked in an occupation that historically was judged as immoral and degrading; they organized and sustained female unions with a vehemence unmatched by few other groups of women.

The story begins with the work itself. Chapter 1 details the expansion of commercial food service and its transformation into a female occupation. Particular attention is paid to what the case of food service reveals about the larger social processes of occupational segregation and feminization. Chapter 1 also recreates the work world, ethnicity, and family characteristics of waitresses.⁵³ In contrast to descriptions of wage-earning women that stress their primary identity with their family role and their perception of themselves as temporary, secondary wage workers,⁵⁴ I argue that waitresses exhibited a strong attachment to their work and their occupational community; they also developed a work culture rooted in a realistic appraisal of their needs and status as primary wage earners.

Chapters 3 and 4 present the story of the building of unions among waitresses and analyze the forces that promoted and inhibited their success. The case of waitress unionism refines the emerging theory concerning the conditions under which collective action among women could occur and endure.⁵⁵

Chapters 5 and 6 detail the impact of waitress unionism in the workplace and establish the essentially craft-like character of the organizations waitresses built. Here the achievements as well as the limitations of waitress unionism as a vehicle for class and feminist impulses become clear.

Chapter 7 traces the changing perspectives of both black and white waitresses on such questions as liquor service, equal pay, night work, and bartending for women and contrasts their views with those of their male co-workers. Chapter 8 focuses on the strategies devised by waitresses to enhance their power within their union and returns to the question of the sources of female activism and leadership among waitresses.

Dishing It Out concludes with an analysis of the decline of unionism among waitresses. In the decades after World War II, economic, political, and social forces radically reshaped the nature of work and labor-management relations

within the hotel and restaurant industry, leaving only a few fundamentals intact—waitresses continued to serve up daily their coffee, good humor, and sassy repartee. What were the implications of these changes for unionism in the industry? And what, if anything, can the history of waitress unionism reveal about the prospects for organizing waitresses today?