

*Dishing It Out: Waitresses and Their Unions
in the Twentieth Century*

Dorothy Sue Cobble

Back when SOS or Adam and Eve on a raft were things to order if you were hungry but a little short on time and money, nearly one-fourth of all waitresses belonged to unions. By the time their movement peaked in the 1940s and 1950s, the women had developed a distinctive form of working-class feminism, simultaneously pushing for equal rights and pay and affirming their need for special protections.

Dorothy Sue Cobble shows how sexual and racial segregation persisted in wait work, but she rejects the idea that this was caused by employers' actions or the exclusionary policies of male trade unionists. *Dishing It Out* contends that the success of waitress unionism was due to several factors: waitresses, for the most part, had nontraditional family backgrounds, and most were primary wage-earners. Their close-knit occupational community and sex-separate union encouraged female assertiveness and a decidedly unromantic view of men and marriage. Cobble skillfully combines oral interviews and extensive archival records to show how waitresses adopted the basic tenets of male-dominated craft unions but rejected other aspects of male union culture. The result is a book that will expand our understanding of feminism and unionism by including the gender conscious perspectives of working women.

"Rich in detail, studded with telling anecdotes, *Dishing It Out* is just as vivid and evocative as its title suggests.... This book speaks with clarity and good sense to the major debates in the history of work and gender and will become a landmark in our growing understanding of the relationships between the two." - Susan Porter Benson, author of *Counter Cultures: Sales-women, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890-1940*

DOROTHY SUE COBBLE, assistant professor in the labor education department at Rutgers University, has published articles in *Feminist Studies*, *International Labor and Working-Class History*, and elsewhere, and has also worked as a waitress and as a stevedore.

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*Class in American History and in the
series Women in American History*