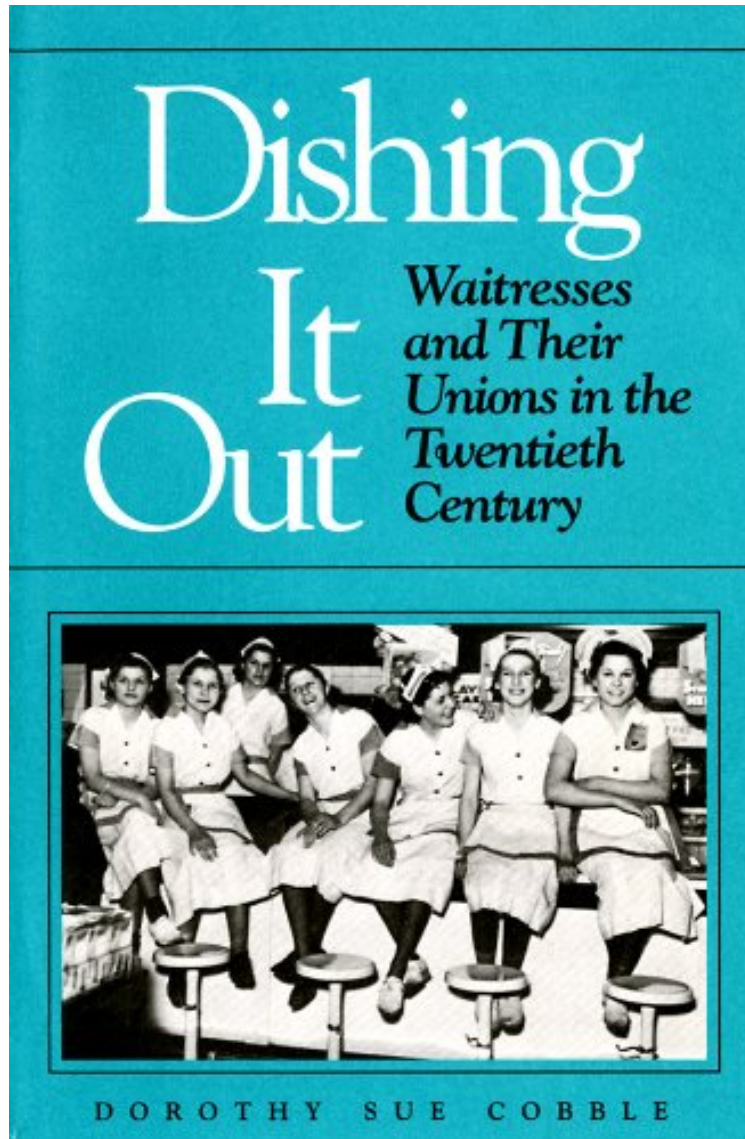


[Read ebook] Dishing It Out: Waitresses and Their Unions in the Twentieth Century (Working Class in American History)

Dishing It Out: Waitresses and Their Unions in the Twentieth Century (Working Class in American History)

Dorothy Cobble

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Dorothy Cobble : Dishing It Out: Waitresses and Their Unions in the Twentieth Century (Working Class in American History) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Dishing It Out: Waitresses and Their Unions in the Twentieth Century (Working Class in American History):

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. A highwayscribery "Book Report"By Stephen SicilianoCaution to flirts, cads, and ladies' men: "Dishing It Out," will change the way you look at waitresses for forever.And if you think

a book about waitressing falls into the hum-drum category, "Dishing It Out" demonstrates how a well-researched idea, presented with passion, can bring seemingly less-enticing topics to colorful life. Sometimes, subjects can appear devoid of interest because of their very neglect and let us note how Microsoft Works Word Processor spell-check doesn't recognize the expression "waitressing." But Dorothy Sue Cobble's book suggests that, to a certain degree, the rise and fall of waitress unionism traces our evolution (devolution?) as a country. highwayscribery first came across Cobble through "Lost Ways of Unionism: Historical Perspective on Reinventing the Labor Movement," one in a larger collection of essays entitled "Rekindling the Movement: Labor's Quest for Relevance in the Twenty-First Century," wherein she challenged the widely held view that skilled craft unions of the American Federation of Labor were less progressive than the Congress of Industrial Organizations' mass unions. In her, "The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America," Cobble posits that dominant feminist analysis passes over a generation of mid-century "labor women." Picking up on a theme developed in that book, Cobble writes that, in contrast to the later wave of feminists, waitresses did not want to be treated the same as the boys, rather, "They wanted equality and special treatment and did not see the two as incompatible." "Dishing it Out," kicks the can a little further down the path, by focusing on the specific craft. "The craft of waitressing has always been, she writes, "one of the principal jobs for women, it was distinguished by certain characteristics that enabled female servers to formulate and sustain a culture of solidarity at the workplace. Most female food servers shared a similar racial and ethnic background. The relative ethnic and racial homogeneity of waitresses fostered group cohesion as it has for other groups of workers, men and women. In addition, more than women in other occupations, waitresses lived outside a traditional family setting and hence turned quite readily to their workplace community for friendship and support. If young and single, they often chose to live apart from their families, frequently residing with other waitresses in small apartments or rented rooms. The high proportion who were divorced, separated, or widowed lived alone, with friends, or with dependent relatives or children. Unable to rely financially on their family of origin or on a husband, waitresses were often primarily self-supporting and attached to the work force in a permanent fashion." Cobble fleshes out how these attributes lent themselves to a sorority-like adhesion that fostered unionization. The heyday of waitresses syndicates took root around the same time the larger movement took wings, back in the 1930s and '40s and the better part of this story takes place then. She notes that, "The separation of workers by trade provided women with a space apart from male hostility and allowed the development of female perspectives and leadership." "The self-conducting nature of craft union locals allowed for "female autonomy" and were, generally speaking, "superior in sustaining female participation and leadership." Rather than focus primarily on moving individual women into higher-paying jobs held by men, this generation of lady unionists opted for improvements in the jobs they traditionally called their own. "Dishing It Out," details the restaurant industry's growth and is worthy of one's precious attention. It comes as something of a revelation that the nation was not always strewn with "public" eateries and that a long march toward the "feminization of food service" brought us the hospitality model we're familiar with today. Less surprisingly, early 20th century mores held waitressing to be an "improper trade," running counter to the reigning Victorian sensibilities as it did. The ladies, after all, interacted with male customers and labored where alcohol was served. (!) Discussion of the job's sexual component and its double-edged nature make for great reading and should deepen a reader's understanding of the person catering to their needs at "Hooters." Not coincidentally, the craft was widely held to be rife with loose women and attitudes intimated a kinship with prostitution. The ladies, with few options, rolled with it: "[Waitresses] acceptance of the sexual character of their work was rooted in their distinctive mores, but it also derived from their situation as service workers in an occupation in which their livelihood depended upon attractiveness and allure." There was a kind of self-generating, autonomous effort to fight such perceptions by raising professional standards and forming unions were a way of gaining legitimacy. "They spoke of their work as a skilled craft," says Cobble, "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." As combative unionists, "waitresses could hurt business by suggesting the least expensive menu item, ignore the poor tippers, offer food and drink on the house, or simply provide lackluster, un-inspired service, even though it jeopardized their own tip income. Waitresses could also go out of their way to add that special attentive, anticipatory touch that would cement the customers' patronage." Which makes perfect (economic) sense. The book dissects the unique and bygone arrangement whereby unions increased their members' value by cornering the labor market and parceling the work via hiring halls. It turns out to not have been all bad for restaurateurs, "because culinary employers relied on the hiring hall for 'good and reliable' full-time workers as well as for the extras needed in emergencies." The gals liked the hiring hall because "it gave them, rather than the employer, control over when and how much they worked. As long as they maintained their union standing, waitresses could quit a job and 'lay off' for however long they chose." Lamentably, Cobble is obligated to tell her tale in the past-tense, waitressing unionism being more a study of history than a dissection of current events. The unions examined here were done-in by the same forces that have reduced organized labor's power globally. But as either history or prescription for sound industrial relations, "Dishing It Out," sets the table beautifully. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Absolutely Worth It! By Lauren Dishing It Out captures the organizing achievements of waitresses throughout the twentieth

century. It traces how their union work mirrored the larger labor movement in the nation over time. Cobble's book addresses the commercial food service and its transformation into a female occupation. The book describes the strategies waitresses in San Francisco and Chicago used for collective action and what equality and advancement meant to them. It also explores how waitress unionism changed over time and how this unique story reshaped the historical narrative of labor movements. Cobble argues that craft-style organizations were fundamental to the survival of waitress unions. Waitress's achievements and high level of confidence within their "skill" helped them gain a level of respectability unmatched in the 1930's. The feminist principles at the heart of waitress unionism were so strong they were capable of sustaining unions for over seventy years. By 1941 San Francisco waitresses achieved almost complete organization of all locals within their trade and its union. Local fifty-eight was the largest waitress group in the country. San Francisco unionists represented the heightened power and creativity of labor unionists from the late 1930's into the 1950's. Cobble's work proved that during the war waitresses witnessed progressive changes in the labor force. Advancements included the six-day, eight-hour work week in the 1940's. Aside from economic reforms, waitresses gained respect and elevated the status of servers. Though smaller cities and local towns often collaborated with larger city locals and unions out of necessity, they also made improvements and achieved success. Waitress unions remained intact for nearly seventy years. Though the book celebrates their significant achievements, it could have rushed less through the decline of waitress unionism and further explained why it broke down during the late 1970's in more detail. Still, the book's concise yet sophisticated language makes it an interesting read both for scholars and general readers intrigued by labor movements. Through tables, figures, and a wide array of scholarly material, this book becomes an important read for historians examining the impact of labor unions within the twentieth century and demonstrates the exceptional nature of waitresses and their unions. Cobble began her exploration of the lives of working woman during the labor movement in her dissertation at Stanford University. This is where she furthered her study and heavily researched waitresses over time. There was no book-length study of waitresses up until her time, making Cobble's work the first to examine the history of waitresses as a specified group during the labor movement. *Dishing It Out* is an exceptional scholarly achievement that will not only be reviewed as an important source of information for waitresses, but a source necessary for understanding the power of the labor movements during the mid-twentieth century. 4 of 5 people found the following review helpful. excellent! well researched and written. By A Customer Cobble has written an invaluable history book about a large segment of the twentieth century workforce that would have otherwise been overlooked and forgotten. Waitresses have been ubiquitous and invisible at the same time. This book speaks to gender, class, ethnic, and work issues. It is written in a style that is informative AND interesting throughout. The historical research and organization of the book is superb. If you didn't know you were interested in this topic, the minute you start reading Cobble's book you will find out otherwise.

"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 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* ; "In this imaginative study of waitresses, work, and unionism, Cobble challenges us all to rethink the conventional wisdom about the relationship between craft unionism and the possibilities for women workers' collective action. Women's labor history will never be the same."-- Ruth Milkman, author of *Gender at Work: The Dynamics of Job Segregation by Sex during World War II* ;

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