

newspapers, published and unpublished government documents, and manuscript collections—she shows readers the imprint left by these female federal employees on Washington, D.C., and in the process makes *This Grand Experiment* a good and informative read.

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Politics of the Pantry: Housewives, Food, and Consumer Protest in Twentieth-Century America. *By Emily E. LB. Twarog.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. xiv + 189 pp. Figures, bibliography, notes, index. Cloth, \$35.00. ISBN: 978-0-19-068559-1.

doi:10.1017/S0007680518000879

Reviewed by Jan Wilson

The history of women's political activism during the twentieth century tends to emphasize reform organizations, electoral politics, and the shop floor as key locations from which women were able to effect social change. But in *Politics of the Pantry*, Emily E. LB. Twarog shifts the focus to women who crafted their role as housewives into a political identity and used their positions in the home to fight for economic justice for their families and communities. Examining three periods of consumer activism, including the meat boycott of 1935, the consumer coalitions of the New Deal and early Cold War years, and the consumer protests of the 1960s and 1970s, Twarog effectively demonstrates that these women engaged in a form of domestic politics that uniquely linked the home to the community and to the workplace and gave them a new sense of themselves as important political actors.

Twarog's narrative begins in the 1930s and ends with the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980, when political agendas rooted in domestic politics and the long-held belief in the public responsibility for human welfare fell out of favor. By framing her story around the lives and organizations of prominent female consumer activists in different time periods and different geographical locations, she is able to demonstrate that domestic politics had an influence beyond local communities and in fact contributed to national debates about the high cost of living and economic inequality. Working-class housewives, she argues persuasively, used their gender identities to fight for larger class goals and to expand the responsibility of the state for the welfare of its citizens.

By Twarog's own admission, the activism of white women "dominates" the narrative (p. 4). Because whiteness constituted the ideal public image of the American housewife and home—an ideal that by definition excluded women of color—white women, she explains, were able to manipulate more successfully their roles as housewives to forge political identities and movements for social and economic change. Working-class housewives in Detroit organized an ultimately successful boycott of meat during the summer of 1935 to protest the high cost of living. The boycott implemented the strategies of traditional labor organizing, created a grassroots network of support from labor unions, farmers, African American leaders, and ethnic organizations, and demonstrated the power of domestic politics. During World War II, working-class housewives drew on their expertise as consumers and trade unionists to protect U.S. workers' standard of living. Working from within the women's auxiliaries of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) and forming important partnerships with members of the Office of Price Administration and the Consumer Clearinghouse, they pressured the federal government to maintain price controls on food and consumer goods and to create fair wages for working women.

With the rise of conservative, anticommunism politics during the postwar years, CIO-affiliated unions attempted to disassociate themselves from their radical, grassroots origins and thus began to cut the funding and autonomy of the women's auxiliaries; consequently, women's domestic politics, radical working-class activism, and consumer organizing suffered a significant decline. Still, U.S. housewives gained important access to national politics in 1963 when President Johnson appointed Esther Peterson the first Special Assistant to the President for Consumer Affairs. Encouraged by Peterson's call for women's organizations to protest the high price of consumer goods, housewives in Denver and other major cities across the nation began to boycott supermarkets in 1966, a movement that ushered in a new generation of consumer activism and, as Twarog argues convincingly, challenges the widespread belief that U.S. housewives either embraced or felt trapped within the traditional family model during the Cold War years.

Inspired by the tactics of the civil rights movement and the activism of the United Farm Workers, housewives continued to engage in political and community organizing and, in many cases, to use this organizing as a stepping stone to higher education and elective office. But within the context of the women's movement of the 1970s, the American housewife was "reframed" as a symbol of conservatism and traditional family values both by second-wave feminists who criticized this symbol and antifeminist activists who praised it (p. 111). Because they understood the home and the housewife role as key sources of women's oppression,

feminists failed to connect with the domestic politics of these consumer activists, which “helped pave the way” for the growing appeal of the conservative women’s movement symbolized by Phyllis Schlafly’s Eagle Forum and STOP ERA campaign of the 1970s and 1980s (p. 2). And so the domestic politics of the New Deal defined by state interventions designed to empower working-class communities became by the 1980s a conservative social agenda of discontented white housewives who felt that their lives and experiences were dismissed and disavowed by feminist and liberal elites.

This is an important story that makes a significant contribution to the history of women, labor, and social movements in the twentieth century. While many previous historians have demonstrated the ways in which women drew on their authority as mothers, homemakers, and consumers to demand rights of citizenship and social justice, they have tended to highlight the activism of (primarily) middle-class women within reform organizations or electoral politics. Instead, Twarog shifts attention to the home as a site of struggle from which working-class and middle-class housewives were able to create a distinctive form of grassroots politics that connected the public and private spheres, critiqued existing economic imbalances, and argued for a greater public role in human welfare. Twarog’s book uncovers a previously “hidden history” of housewives who influenced national conversations about food justice, the rights of wage-earning women, and economic equality. And it provides important historical lessons—particularly in the context of today’s troubled political environment—for how women can find sources of power within their current cultural and economic locations and reach across differences to form productive coalitions in the ongoing fight for gender, racial, and class equality.

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Wires That Bind: Nation, Region, and Technology in the Southwestern United States, 1854–1920. By *Torsten Kathke*. Bielefeld, Germany: Transcript Verlag, 2017. 289 pp. Figures, bibliography, notes. Paperback, \$50.00. ISBN: 978-3-8376-3790-8.

doi:10.1017/S0007680518000880

Reviewed by Jeremy Vetter

From the title *Wires That Bind*, one might get the impression that American studies scholar Torsten Kathke’s book—based on his 2012 doctoral