

## EDITORIAL NOTE

Domestic service occupies an exceptional role in labour history for its historic and contemporary intersections with issues of gender, race, and class. As such, the study of paid domestic labourers—women (and to a lesser extent, men) hired to cook, clean, perform child care and other services in private homes and public spaces—has changed. Once seldom acknowledged as ‘real’ labour, its position on the boundary of home and work, and the often similarly unstable position of domestic workers in the labour market now make it an important site of study. Along with considerations of class, race, and gendered identities, domestic service studies have also provided valuable insights into the impact of government policies and immigration. The work of domestic servants—and, specifically, women and men of colour—is consequently both a project of labour historians seeking to capture the stories of these neglected workers *and* a site that feminist, Marxist, and poststructuralist historians and theorists have used to interrogate the concept of labour itself.

The editors of *Left History* are pleased to present four articles that we feel make important contributions to the field. Aside from demonstrating the wide variety of theoretical approaches that can be employed in terms of studying domestic service, the articles commonly use the relationship between servants and employers as a lens to study shifts in popular attitudes and to reveal underlying social tensions and fears. In “Assessing Men and Maids: The Female Servant Tax and Meanings of Productive Labour in Late-Eighteenth-Century Britain”, Susan Brown considers the intersections between economic policy and popular understandings of work and domestic service. For Brown, studying the public outcry over a 1785 maidservant tax offers valuable insights into the mindset of servants and their middle class employers and demonstrates the anxieties that accompanied shifting notions of domesticity and ‘appropriate’ gender roles. Jumping ahead more than a century, Lucy Delap finds similar evidence of social unease over the boundaries of class and gender in her study of Victorian and early-twentieth century domestic service class-crossing narratives. Examining folk tales, literary narratives, and social commentaries, Delap’s article investigates the fascination of middle class women with role reversal plots, which she argues allowed them imagined access into the occupational roles, psychic spaces, and distinct subjectivities of domestic servants.

Like Delap’s article, Mary Cathryn Cain’s contribution on the racialization of Irish and African American servants in Northern U.S. antebellum society analyses cultural texts as a means of understanding changing popular attitudes about the home as a workplace. Studying the transition from a system of non-paid ‘helps’ to employed servants, Cain discusses the social conditions that drove native-born white American women from service and considers the ways in which white middle-class women increasingly viewed their employees through the prism

of race in order to protect their own ideological interests and to preserve notions of republicanism.

Connections between femininity, domesticity, race, and domestic labour also play a key role in Michele Johnson's investigation of Jamaican domestic servants between 1920 and 1970. Examining relations between servants and employers, Johnson considers the ways in which both parties negotiated and drew upon popular discourses of 'proper' and 'problematic' bodies in their dealings with each other. Like the other contributors, Johnson is interested in the wider social implications of these interactions, and in particular, gaining insight into the perspective of the servants themselves through the use of oral histories.

Readers unfamiliar with the existing scholarship may want to start with Susana Miranda's review essay "Exploring Themes in the Scholarship on Twentieth Century Domestic Work in Canada and the United States". Through an examination of ten books written over the past twenty years, Miranda carefully outlines the various theoretical approaches and techniques employed by academics from numerous fields that have shaped the emerging field of domestic service studies.

Finally, we would also like to take this opportunity to recognize the contributions of the former editorial team members Mark Abraham, Christine Grandy, and Ben Lander to this issue and the others they helped produce over the past two years. As new editors, we endeavour to build on the great work that they and our other predecessors have established.

The Editors  
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