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Rebecca Sharpless. *Cooking in Other Women's Kitchens: Domestic Workers in the South, 1860-1960.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010. xxix + 273 pp. $35.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-4696-0686-6.

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Research on female domestic workers, past and present, is an important and growing field of scholarship. The stories of these workers, many of whom are women of color and/or immigrants, have been documented by historians, sociologists, and feminist or ethnic studies scholars alike.[1] Rebecca Sharpless's book, *Cooking in Other Women's Kitchens: Domestic Workers in the South, 1865-1960*, contributes to this body of research by providing an engaging glimpse into the work and family lives of African American female cooks in the post-Emancipation South.

As enumerated by Sharpless, the book has three main purposes: 1) to investigate how African American women transitioned from slavery to employment through domestic work; 2) to examine how these cooks managed to survive despite discrimination and difficult working conditions; and 3) to counter popular stereotypical images of African American cooks. Using sources including letters to New Deal agencies, interviews from the Federal Writers' Project and the "Living Atlanta" oral history project, autobiographies, and cookbooks, Sharpless follows through on her goals.

Countering stereotypes, this book adds to the scholarly literature interrogating popular images of African American female cooks.[2] For the women who were defined as workers rather than members of families and communities, Sharpless reveals their allegiance to their own people. Likewise, for the women who have been caricatured, exoticized, mammified, or masculinized, Sharpless provides a glimpse into the multifaceted lives of the diverse population of women who worked as cooks. While detailing the many struggles that the workers faced, this book equally emphasizes their resourcefulness and creativity in gaining control over their employment and their lives.

This book is an important contribution to the existing historical research on African American women domestic workers and their employers in the United States.[3] In contrast to previous work that did not differentiate between types of workers, Sharpless focuses specifically on paid domes-

tic cooks. Her choice to focus on cooks is a significant one, for food preparation, unlike other domestic tasks, produces tangible results. Consequently, memories of meals and written recipes provide documentation of their work. Moreover, food is a powerful symbol of a people's culture. As Sharpless notes, African American female cooks "profoundly shaped the foodways of the South, and hence, its overall culture" (p. xii). Finally, although Sharpless does not address it directly, her focus on paid domestic cooks is noteworthy due to the fact that this once common category of work has so dramatically decreased in prevalence. While today's housekeepers and nannies may surely occasionally prepare meals, it is rare to find domestic workers in the United States today who work exclusively as cooks. Rather, households who employ outside help to do cooking are more likely employing personal or private chefs--a distinctly ***professional*** class of workers.

After briefly describing the social and economic context within which African American women were compelled to seek employment as domestic workers, Sharpless opens the body of the book in chapter 1 by describing the process whereby these women became cooks in private households. The hiring process itself illustrates the personalized relationships between employers and domestics, as personal qualities often outweighed job skills. The type and amount of training that cooks had when starting a job varied widely, but one way or another they amassed the skills needed to please their employers.

Often getting little direct instruction regarding what to cook or how to prepare and serve the food, African American cooks used their best judgment in order to accomplish work tasks. Chapter 2 describes the sometimes contentious decision-making processes behind their work. Every aspect of the cook's job, from the selection, acquisition, preparation, and service of food, to the workspace itself, had potential for power struggles. Nevertheless, the food produced was ultimately the product of African American women cooks' hands.

Unfortunately, African American female cooks were not well paid for their labor. Chapter 3 describes how workers received financial and social support from their family and peers to compensate for their underemployment. Formal organizing, however, was difficult, so cooks remained exploited until the 1930s and 1940s. Until then, cooks were expected to work extremely long hours, and rather than get higher wages, they were simply given other types of "in-kind" payment or "gifts." With the little payment they received, African American cooks most often struggled to pay for transportation to work, housing, food, and clothing. However, as chapter 4 describes, the freedom provided by "living out" was generally worth the extra costs, and the women proved resourceful by dressing family in hand-me-downs and feeding them leftovers from work.

Maintaining a family was not easy given their long hours and low pay, but as chapter 5 illustrates, African American female cooks defined themselves by their family roles rather than by their role as workers. Despite employers' preference for single cooks, family and community were an important source of strength for these women, and most continued to work after marriage and childbearing.

In contrast to their family bonds, the relationships of cooks with their employers were inherently unequal, as described in chapter 6. African American women struggled to gain some control over their work and to lessen the affective aspects of the labor. While employers had no obligation to respect limits in their dealings with cooks, cooks were segregated both physically and figuratively from their employers. In response, cooks employed a variety of resistant tactics, ranging from stealing to quitting, in efforts to demonstrate their agency.

Sharpless concludes the book by discussing the decline in paid domestic work in chapter 7.

Due to technological changes, cooking in particular was one task that white women increasingly preferred to do themselves. In turn, African American women sought employment elsewhere, and hoped for better futures for their younger kin.

In light of the author's intention to illustrate forms of women's agency and resistance in spite of difficult circumstances, one area that could have been elaborated on is the discussion in chapter 4 of cooks' role in feeding their families and communities. The fact that these women often had little time and few resources to adequately feed their families must be acknowledged (as Sharpless does); however, feeding the family is an important method of cultural transmission, something that probably still happened despite the lack of food. Furthermore, considering the significance that church attendance held for these African American women, it would have been worthwhile for Sharpless to expand upon the meanings that the women gave to the cooking they did in that setting.

This book will prove most useful for scholars in history, sociology, and interdisciplinary fields such as women's/feminist studies, Black studies, or food studies. It provides insight into the rise and fall of a once widespread occupation and will strengthen the historical framing of research on contemporary domestic work. Moreover, given the recent surge of interest in food and professional cooking, Sharpless's book reminds readers of a much less glamorized side of cooking.

Notes

[1]. Nicole Constable, ***Maid to Order in Hong Kong: Stories of Migrant Workers*** (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007); Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild, eds., ***Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy*** (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002); Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, ***Doméstica: Immigrant Workers Cleaning and Caring in the Shadows of Affluence*** (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Judith Rollins, ***Between Women: Domestics and Their Employer s***(Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985); Mary Romero, ***Maid in the U.S.A.*** (New York: Routledge Chapman Hall, 1992); and Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, ***The Force of Domesticity: Filipina Migrants and Globalization***(New York: New York University Press, 2008).

[2]. Alice A. Deck, "'Now Then--Who Said Biscuits?' The Black Woman Cook as Fetish in American Advertising, 1905-1953," in ***Kitchen Culture in America: Popular Representations of Food, Gender, and Race***, ed. Sherrie A. Inness (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 69-93; M. M. Manring, ***Slave in a Box: The Strange Career of Aunt Jemima*** (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998); Psyche A. Williams-Forson, ***Building Houses Out of Chicken Legs: Black Women, Food, and Power*** (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); and Doris Witt, ***Black Hunger: Food and the Politics of U.S. Identity*** (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[3]. Elizabeth Clark-Lewis, ***Living In, Living Out: African American Domestics in Washington, D.C., 1910-1940*** (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994); Bonnie Thorton Dill, ***Across the Boundaries of Race and Class: An Exploration of Work and Family Among Black Female Domestic Servants*** (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1994); Phyllis Palmer, ***Domesticity and Dirt: Housewives and Domestic Servants in the United States, 1920-1945*** (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989); and Susan Tucker, ***Telling Memories Among Southern Women: Domestic Workers and Their Employers in the Segregated South*** (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988).

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