

EXPERTS AND SERVANTS: THE NATIONAL COUNCIL ON HOUSEHOLD EMPLOYMENT AND THE DECLINE OF DOMESTIC SERVICE IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Over the first half of the twentieth century, domestic service ceased to be an important element of women's work or private life in the United States. While in 1870 over half of all women workers were domestic servants and in 1900 servants still numbered about one-third of all employed women, by 1950 the ranks of domestic servants had shrunk to insignificance. The practice of employing servants declined accordingly, although the precise dimensions of both these changes have been obscured by the retreat of domestic service into the "underground," off-the-books economy after World War II.¹

Historians have pointed out a number of causes of the twentieth-century decline of domestic service, most notably immigration restriction and the growth of alternative employment opportunities for women in the clerical, sales, and light manufacturing sectors. They have also noted that blacks migrating out of the South tended to fill the ranks of domestic service, thereby suggesting that the numbers in service might have shrunk even faster were it not for the discrimination that until recently confined black women to this line of work.²

Historians have had little to say about the cultural and social effects of the decline of domestic service. Yet we have come to understand that in the nineteenth century domestic service was an institution of considerable cultural significance, a vital element of middle class domesticity.³ A moment's reflection suggests that the disappearance of live-in domestic service from the middle class home had ramifications for a number of aspects of home life, including parent-child relations, foodways, domestic architecture and concepts of privacy, not to mention the roles and responsibilities of adult women.⁴ And yet the decline of domestic service in the twentieth century does not seem to have been the subject of great public comment as it occurred.⁵

Why was the decline of domestic service "not exactly unnoticed, but unweighed and unmeasured," as a piece in the *New York Times Magazine* put it?⁶ The decline of domestic service surely suffered neglect because of its timing. Service actually increased in size during the 1920s and thirties, but shrunk drastically during the teens and the forties. Economic and political developments of enormous magnitude, including two world wars, overshadowed alterations in domestic arrangements.⁷ The manufacturers and advertisers of home appliances and convenience products also bear some responsibility for obscuring the decline of domestic service. They routinely pitched their products with ads claiming that household appliances made housework effortless and servants hence superfluous. We are now in a position to understand that this message was not really accurate: household appliances and convenience products did indeed lighten the sheer physical burdens of housework, but left it far from fully automated.⁸ Practical reasons to hire domestic servants diminished but did not

vanish.

The limited vision of the one group that was monitoring household service also explains why Americans failed to address the issues surrounding service's decline. The National Council on Household Employment was a group composed largely of social scientists and social workers who joined forces in the period between the wars to try to "solve the servant problem" through the application of rationality, organization and expertise. They hoped to make service a better job and thereby attract more and better workers to it. Their efforts failed, but their story helps explain how middle-class women thought about domestic service and why changes in service were not confronted or understood.⁹

The NCHE, which first convened in Washington in 1928, drew from the beginning upon existing female networks of social scientists, reformers, and social service professionals. Its executive members included Lucy Carner for the Young Women's Christian Association, Mary Anderson of the Women's Bureau, Louise Stanley for the Bureau of Home Economics of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, black educator Nannie Burroughs, efficiency expert Lillian Gilbreth, home economist Hazel Kyrk, and one bona fide domestic servant, a young woman named Berdena Underdahl. In the 1930s Eleanor Roosevelt, Frances Perkins, Ellen Woodward, and Rose Schneiderman lent their names to the committee's causes and its letterhead. By the late thirties, Eleanor Roosevelt, who accepted a position as honorary chair of the NCHE, had begun speaking and publishing on household service and was attending NCHE conferences.¹⁰ The NCHE also drew support from socially-prominent matrons such as Mrs. James Rowland Angell, wife of the president of Yale.

Always a loose, umbrella organization, the NCHE did not have extensive membership rolls, but its active members were usually educators, government officials, writers, social service workers, administrators, or club women. Most were college-educated professionals: Hazel Kyrk and Louise Stanley, for example, held Ph.D's. Others, like Mary Anderson, had carved out areas of recognized expertise in government or social welfare through their work.

The first director of the NCHE was Amey Watson, a resident of Haverford, Pa., and organizer of a study of domestic service in the Philadelphia area. Described as a "short, brisk" woman, Watson usually carried a "Ph.D." after her name. Watson's vita reveals that she was a classically marginalized academic woman: she and her husband Frank were both sociologists, but his doctorate won him a teaching position in sociology at Haverford College, while she raised four sons and did volunteer and part-time work.¹¹ Watson knew from personal experience the difficulties of finding and keeping good help on a limited budget. By reforming domestic service she could aid working women and also help middle-class housekeepers like herself.

In 1929, Amey Watson inaugurated the NCHE's efforts by publishing a piece on "employer-employee relationships in the home" in the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. There she framed the servant problem by reviewing a number of previous efforts to investigate or reform domestic service. The lineage of the NCHE led directly back into the Progressive Era, when, for example, the Household Aid Company of Boston, under the aegis of Wellesley president Alice Freeman Palmer and home economics pioneer Ellen

Swallow Richards, had attempted to supply household workers by the hour.¹² Other Progressive Era efforts had emphasized data-gathering and voluntary organization. Watson pointed to I.M. Rubinow's 1906 article, "The Problems of Domestic Service," where Rubinow exploded the nineteenth-century theory that "social stigma" was to blame for women's reluctance to work in service. Rubinow insisted that if stigma existed it must be attributed in the first instance to unfavorable wages, hours, and working conditions.¹³

Watson also devoted much attention to the YWCA, an organization that directly linked Progressive Era efforts with the NCHE. In the early twentieth century, the YWCA, through its industrial departments, provided recreation and social opportunities for urban working women. In 1915 the National Board of the Y commissioned a study on household employment, in which Y researchers compared the experiences of young women in domestic service with other women workers. The Y concluded that household employment must become "more business-like," which meant more regular hours of employment and better working conditions to draw in more skilled workers.¹⁴ The Y also suggested that the professionalization of nursing be used as a model for upgrading domestic service.¹⁵ One Y pamphlet enthused:

Now that we are used to "trained nurses" we would hardly like to go back to the "Sarah Gamp" variety. In a certain London hospital the nurses on leaving still have to swear not to drink gin. It was an old custom, now no longer necessary because of the newer type of woman doing that work. So the endless trying faults of servants will disappear, not entirely because of training, but because the newer type of worker will be above them, but, and here is where the shoe pinches, we will have to allow for time off, privileges, and certain duties just as at present we would not think of asking anything and everything of a trained nurse. Isn't it worthwhile?¹⁶

When the Y covered the first NCHE conference, they headlined, "Elevating Housework to Professional Standing." The Y tended to mix analogies to the professions and analogies to business: both meant upgrading the work and the workers.¹⁷

In the early 1920s, the Y had encouraged domestic servants in a number of cities to form clubs under its auspices. These clubs met for recreation and also held group discussions to talk about job problems. The YWCA tried to insure an even-handed stance by sponsoring employer discussion groups as well. Y leaders hoped to generate from these employer-employee discussions some uniform standards for domestic work.¹⁸

While praising these existing YWCA programs, NCHE director Amey Watson declared that in 1929 domestic service still "failed to measure up to the requirements of a good job" in a number of fundamental respects. Watson therefore put forward the proposals of the NCHE. The term "household employee" should replace "servant," "maid," or "domestic," and the Census Bureau should be requested to adopt this term. Contracts should govern the terms of service, and these should place limits on working hours, with extra pay guaranteed for overtime. "Time adjustments" should gradually establish a forty-eight hour week.¹⁹

What was left unstated, although implicitly suggested in the recommendation for a forty-eight hour week, was an eight hour day for six days a week. Such a work schedule would allow the worker to “live-out” – that is, live in her own home. Since there was no mention of a decrease in the work week being accompanied by wage cuts, it would amount to an increase in hourly rates. Watson’s NCHE was thus following Rubinow’s earlier prescription: make domestic service a better job by improving wages, hours, and working conditions and more and better workers would be attracted to it.

Watson went on to urge that agencies be established in every community not only to place domestic servants but also to “educate both employers and employees to understand their relationship.” Job placement would include a “job analysis” of the individual home, and “personality studies” of potential employees *and* employers. Such proposals revealed an awareness that employers might be likely to engage in foot-dragging, since both job analysis and personality testing would provide opportunities for the experts who staffed the centers to reprove employers who were overbearing or unreasonable. More than this, the centers would assume the task of supervising the workers, since the employer was supposed to lack “the necessary psychological insight or skills in handling social relationships.”²⁰ Supervision of domestics, an important claim to social authority for nineteenth-century middle class women in the home, would thus be transferred into the hands of the experts.²¹

The NCHE’s proposals were ambitious and expensive, and they had little appeal among employers. The NCHE was proposing higher wages and shorter hours for workers customarily regarded as unskilled menials, the dregs of the labor force. At the same time employers stood to lose the authority to hire and fire and even to supervise. The NCHE program pointedly ignored a favorite idea among employers: training programs to prepare youngsters for domestic service. The experts realized that, while repeatedly touted as a solution to servant problems, training programs had always failed. Young women resisted being channeled into what they considered an undesirable job, and workers already resigned to service could find work without training.²² Like the Y before them, the experts of the NCHE had to tread very softly in order to create a constituency of enlightened or compliant employers.

An NCHE call for further study gained immediate results, since it was in effect addressed by the experts to themselves.²³

In 1930 the national YWCA committed itself to studying the problems of household employment nationwide. Its household employment surveys made the Y the most important element by far in the network of experts linked by the NCHE. Y “industrial secretaries” in different cities provided information based on actual contact with servants and employers, and the NCHE files are heavily weighted with their letters.²⁴

The Depression soon disrupted the plans laid by the experts of the NCHE. They had defined the solution to the servant problem, however politely and tentatively, as involving better wages, hours, and working conditions. By 1930 they faced mounting evidence that conditions were actually growing much worse. According to the YWCA and other surveyors, domestic workers suffered extensive layoffs and wage cuts. At street-corner “slave markets” workers lined

up hoping to be hired for a few hours of cleaning or other housework. Hardships fell particularly upon blacks, about half of all domestic workers in 1930, as downwardly mobile white women took jobs in domestic service which they previously spurned.²⁵

The experts saw that employers who continued to hire domestic workers during the Depression believed that they did a worker a favor by offering her a job at all. The employment secretary of the Y in Rockford, Illinois, expressed disgust at hearing employers repeat the same line: "With so many out of work I should think they would be glad of a place to stay where it would at least mean three meals a day."²⁶ A 1931 NCHE conference heard reports on the increased incidence of "opportunity homes," where the worker received room and board only. Conference participants also discussed reports of wage cuts ranging from twenty to fifty percent, often accompanied by increases in hours and workloads.²⁷ The experts examined data that showed that black workers, who were underpaid to begin with, received desperately low wages after pay cuts; scattered evidence suggested that Hispanic workers faced similar wage hardships. Consuelo Rios of El Paso, Texas wrote to the NCHE about workers who toiled in homes for \$2 or \$3 a week, and asked for help to bring back the time "when they used to pay \$6 and \$10 a week."²⁸

"Depression Ends Servant Problem," the *New York Times* headlined in November 1932, but it was not the end to the servant problem that the experts hoped to effect.²⁹ Members of the NCHE apparently differed over the proper stance for the organization in hard times. "Will it be politic," a matron from Greenwich, Connecticut, wondered in 1931, "to issue a call to the women of the nation to maintain the standards which good times produced, now that the economic status of most people has changed?"³⁰ Some NCHE members did indeed begin playing down their already low-key advocacy of standards for wages and hours. A survey of domestic service in Westchester County in 1934, for example, featured the assurance of its organizer, NCHE stalwart Mrs. Paul Revere Reynolds, that "we are not attempting to even suggest a minimum wage." The Westchester group in fact collected no wage data.³¹

The national NCHE persisted but trimmed its sails in the wake of economic decline. When the National Recovery Administration ruled that domestic service did not fall within the definition of interstate commerce and therefore could not be covered by a code, the NCHE came up with its own voluntary code. The proposed code called for a sixty-hour week, a minimum wage of \$6-\$8 a week for full-time live-in service, and two half days a week off. The NCHE code also mandated overtime pay, private bedrooms for servants, and a week's vacation with pay after a year's work.³² The code was purely voluntary, and as such no more than a statement of an ideal, but even so it was not an especially successful compromise between the experts' intentions and the realities of a depressed labor market. Employers were hostile towards what they considered the overly-generous provisions of the code, while some NCHE members hated to endorse a work week as long as sixty hours.³³

As the economy lurched to a near-standstill, jobs remained available in domestic service.³⁴ The experts regarded the discrepancy between high unemployment and unfilled domestic service jobs as a case of social

maladjustment to which they might apply the remedies of private voluntarism. For the first time they developed a training program they could describe as successful. The Philadelphia Institute on Household Occupations was begun in 1937 with the backing of the local Y, the city board of education, and a private grant. According to the director, the key to the Institute's success was its careful selection procedure designed to weed out women who were "incompetent and undesirable."³⁵

The director explained that she aimed for "bright girls who could 'make the grade' in other fields, but who liked to do housework." She insisted that housework took skill. Indeed, the Institute found that women who were capable of holding jobs in industry often could not qualify for housework: they were rejected as tardy, foul-mouthed, in need of "physical reconditioning," or lacking in intelligence and organizing ability. The Institute was able not only to enroll trainees but also to pick and choose among them – always the downfall of other training programs – because the depressed job market acted as a powerful ally. Out of 400 applicants in three years of operation, the Institute admitted only 200. Of these over half were dropped at the end of the trial period or else eliminated themselves. Ninety young women completed the three month course and were placed in jobs.³⁶

Another method of upgrading household service was developed by Benjamin Andrews, professor of home economics at Columbia, who directed a graduate student in developing a series of standardized tests to establish the competence of prospective domestic workers. Verbal and pictorial sections were scored for an intelligence rating which was combined with ratings on traits like neatness and table service, to yield an overall score on a "domestigraph."³⁷ Y leaders found it useful to mention the "domesticability test" to groups of employers in order to reassure them that they were not the only ones being subjected to expert scrutiny and scientific standards.³⁸

Throughout the Depression years, the Y continued its voluntary efforts, seeking to bring together employers and servants in discussion groups. The Chicago Y produced a discussion group handbook, *The Women in the House* (1938). It detailed actual situations involving household servants and raised questions about what was proper and fair.³⁹ But the situations featured exploitation by employers much more often than malfeasance by workers, and there was no indication of how the insensitive employers featured in the stories might ever be induced to participate in the discussion groups. The Y was discovering the limits of voluntarism, as some of its branches ran employment bureaus during the Depression. Apparently they were unable to insure that domestic service workers received decent pay or working conditions, for in at least one city the housework jobs obtained through the Y had the reputation of being "the hardest in town." Employers knew that the women who registered at the Y could not afford the fees charged by profitmaking employment bureaus and so could be imposed upon.⁴⁰

Frustration and ineffectiveness led the NCHE in the thirties to turn toward the government in lieu of private voluntary efforts. NCHE members applauded and sometimes took part as bureaucrats when New Deal programs embraced job training in domestic service. In 1936 the Women's Division of the WPA

initiated a training program in domestic service; by 1940 the WPA graduated 22,000 women from these programs and placed 17,000 of them in jobs in household service.⁴¹ The National Youth Administration maintained residential training centers where young women could live while learning to do household work.⁴² The Vocational Division of the U.S. Office of Education urged that domestic service be added to high school vocational programs for girls because the job market was glutted in other fields. Many state and local departments or boards of education concurred, especially when designing programs for black students. By 1936, 172 different vocational programs to train domestic servants were under way around the country, primarily in high schools.⁴³

But Depression-era measures also presented the NCHE with challenges. Crucial New Deal legislation, including the Social Security Act of 1935 and the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, excluded domestic servants from coverage. By the late thirties, women in most other jobs worked under regulated hours, minimum wage provisions, and the protection of workmen's compensation if injured on the job. These women could look forward to a pension in old age, and, if they lost their jobs, rely upon unemployment compensation. But a domestic servant enjoyed none of these basic protections. The experts of the NCHE understood that domestic service, never the most attractive work, had become much less desirable in comparison to other jobs.⁴⁴

Responding to the challenge, the NCHE began to lobby for the inclusion of domestic service in state and national labor legislation.⁴⁵ A YWCA conference composed a fight song for the social security issue, "sung lustily and feelingly upon many occasions:"

Social Security we need!
 Social Security indeed!
 March we forth two million strong
 Workers all but stand alone
 While all legislative measures pass us by!⁴⁶

Most NCHE lobbying efforts were apparently limited to letter-writing campaigns or assembling expert testimony. Lacking a mass constituency among either workers or employers, the experts of the NCHE chalked up few immediate legislative victories. By 1941 one state extended workmen's compensation to domestics, one limited hours and one included domestics in minimum wage standards. Some legislation was gutted by stipulations that it applied only to households employing more than four workers.⁴⁷

Lobbying efforts barely had a chance to take effect before the impact of war in Europe began to be evident. The experts tried to tell themselves that household service was somehow related to national defense, since the efficiency of the American home would make it a "bulwark of national strength."⁴⁸ It seemed that war work might help to upgrade domestic service. One of Watson's associates at the Pennsylvania School of Social Work wrote optimistically that it was "a little startling to see how demand for war workers is bringing about some of the changes in the status of domestic workers which in other days required so much effort and work."⁴⁹ Wages in domestic service, which began to edge up again in some areas after 1934, did rise sharply as a consequence of the war.⁵⁰

It appeared that wives and mothers who went to work in defense plants would wish to hire servants, thus creating new demand. Amey Watson clipped a picture spread from the *Detroit Free Press* in April 1942 which suggested that WPA training centers would churn out graduates trained in household service "to help run workers' homes." But why wouldn't the household servants themselves go into the defense plants? The *Detroit Free Press* did not say, but the WPA trainee who was featured and all the other trainees pictured were black.⁵¹ Apparently it was briefly possible to assume that Rosie the Riveter would be white and would be able to turn over her household duties to a black maid.

Soon it became obvious that, despite persistent discrimination against blacks, defense plants would draw a great many workers of all races out of domestic service altogether. Where had "The Vanishing Domestic" gone? "The answer of course is defense. The girls are making \$22, \$25 and \$30 a week in factory jobs. They like it."⁵² The early 1940s thus saw the convergence of the experts' beat efforts to upgrade and modernize service with a heightened temptation to leave service altogether for war work.

The ironies of the early forties are captured in an issue of the "*Household Employee News*," a mimeo newsletter produced by the Household Employees Association of the San Francisco Y in February 1942. A workers' club such as this represented a very considerable achievement by the Y. It exemplified the experts' hope to reform service by introducing organized, informed, self-conscious behavior. It also embodied the ostentatiously uplifting tone so often adopted by the experts, who never wished to offend and hoped to please everyone. Readers were invited to join a gym class to achieve "Vim, Vigor and Vitality for Victory," and reminded of a card party, "Whist, Whoopee, and Whacaroni" with proceeds to "the boys in uniform." But the most important news was about a group discussion held in January on "the place of household employees in the all-out war effort."

Miss Brownie Lee Jones, discussion leader, pointed out the contributions household workers could make in "maintenance of morale" by providing a home atmosphere of calm and security for children, and by planning inexpensive but well-balanced meals to conserve resources. This was a fine time, said Miss Jones, to educate the public to the social importance of household employees by publicizing these contributions to the war effort. On the other hand, admitted Miss Jones "If you've never really liked household employment and are dissatisfied, this is the time to leave."⁵³ All the experts' efforts had only served to provide a setting in which to drop this bombshell announcement.

After the Depression led to deteriorating conditions in household employment and New Deal legislation enhanced the comparative attractions of other lines of work, the war proved the coup de grace. Most household workers took Brownie Lee Jones's advice, and the percentage of women workers in private household employment fell decisively, from 20% in 1940 to 8% in 1950. The strong postwar economy left few workers available for domestic service. The place of some full-time domestic servants was taken by casual day workers — cleaning women and baby sitters — but the dimensions of their work were hidden in the underground economy, since income taxes levied on the working poor and means-tested transfer payments provided many household workers with motives to conceal

their employment.⁵⁴ The experts had favored live-out day work, yet household service otherwise retained the characteristics they deplored. As in the nineteenth century, it remained a casual, unregulated, unskilled, unrespected job, undesirable from the worker's perspective and unreliable from the employer's point of view. The NCHE was defunct by 1945, having failed in their effort to reform domestic service.⁵⁵

The NCHE never developed a significant following among either employers or workers. NCHE proposals for upgrading service drew employers' ire, and in fact would have tended to price some – perhaps even most – employers out of the market, although the NCHE usually denied such implications.⁵⁶ Nor could the NCHE serve as a mouthpiece for the interests of the workers. Although half of all domestic workers in the thirties were black, the experts of the NCHE persistently tried to ignore issues of race and were sometimes themselves guilty of bias. Moreover, they rejected unionization, the only strategy that would have given power to the workers themselves.⁵⁷ Nevertheless their expertise gave them access to publicity and they thereby affected the terms and tone of public discussion on service. They dictated the language employed to describe service and injected their assumptions into the definition of issues.

The NCHE spoke in social scientific language, making proposals in abstract terms. One of the experts' first aims was to control vocabulary, to substitute the more neutral, vague "household employee" for "domestic servant," which was all too laden with specific negative connotations. They sought to do this even before they had been able to change anything about the job itself. A preference for abstraction and obfuscation marked NCHE internal documents, many of which are stupefyingly dull. When the NCHE experts communicated with the public, they often lapsed into the passive voice. They described future changes in domestic service with a disembodied "should" or "will," evading sticky questions about who would change and why.⁵⁸ Eager to avoid controversy and unpleasantness, the experts cultivated a tone of disinterested professionalism.

At the same time, the experts consistently projected the implication that social problems could be solved through their intervention. They tended to define employers and servants alike as clients who were in need of advice whether they knew it or not. Their own expertise took on priestly connotations. A 1938 internal Y memo, "A Few Suggestions for Starting a Movement to Interest a Community in Household Employment," began with "Find a few prominent lay women. . . ." The memo added that a psychologist, a sociologist, an economist, and a home economist should join the "lay women" in forming a committee.⁵⁹

In the nineteenth century, the popular press brimmed with articles on the servant problem written by freelancing employers who drew upon their own experience. Such articles gave practical advice on household routines, and they also justified the sometimes troubling inequality of the service relationship by portraying it as benevolent, uplifting, or Americanizing.⁶⁰ In the twentieth century, professional journalists took the place of freelancers, and they turned quite naturally to the experts for press releases.⁶¹ The Y network of household workers clubs provided the experts with authentic workers' stories. Colorful anecdote and juicy detail, such as lent credence to employers' tales of woe in the nineteenth century, could now reflect the workers' side of the story too.

An article by Ruth Frankel in the *Forecast* in 1934, for example, included a number of vivid anecdotes told by workers, but no quotes at all from employers.⁶²

The experts provided a combination of dispassionate statistics, first-person material from the worker's point of view, and their own proposals for change. When journalists substituted livelier language for the experts' deliberate blandness, the result was unprecedented criticism of employers in the popular press. In 1939, for example, *Good Housekeeping* ran an article, "Mrs. Spencer's Maid," written by a journalist named Selma Robinson who did her homework on the subject by consulting the NCHE.⁶³ In this piece Robinson dismissed most employers' expectations about hours as "decadent," and described working conditions in many homes as "unbelievable." She discussed the programs of the NCHE and the Y, and mentioned the training programs offered by the WPA and the public schools. The article concluded on a note of challenge: "Whether you employ five assistants or none at all, the problem of household employment is one that you . . . can help solve," by getting involved in training programs and Y efforts to develop answers to this social problem.⁶⁴ Thus the experts tended to undermine or preempt the presentation of employers' interests. Although they harbored an undeniable measure of sympathy for the workers, their proposals would have had the most direct effect of confirming their own authority as experts.

The way in which the experts' data combined with the dynamics of professional journalism to yield anti-employer judgments in public discussions about service was never more striking than when *Fortune* magazine tackled "The Servant Problem" in 1938. If ever a reactionary, blame-it-on-the-servant point of view could expect to find expression, surely it was in *Fortune*, which polled its readers to find that over 90% of them employed servants. The readers felt they were indeed experiencing servant problems, and they had a simple explanation: Franklin Roosevelt was to blame when underlings got uppity. But *Fortune* disagreed and briskly explained that the real cause of servant problems was the understandable reluctance of women to enter the work. Much could be done to remedy things through "community action," including employer education, worker training, and legislation on workmen's compensation. Even *Fortune* rejected the perceptions of its readers and insisted on the merits of NCHE-type measures.⁶⁵

Did it make a difference that the experts dominated the limited public discussion of service with vague ideas that promised to enhance their own influence but offered little real solution to servants or employers? Servants themselves seldom heeded expert advice, preferring to base their actions, especially their tendency to avoid this line of work whenever possible, on personal experience or word-of-mouth. Employers, on the other hand, were accustomed since the nineteenth century to a steady drumbeat of published advice, almost all of which told them that service, although troublesome, was both appropriate and legitimate. By the mid-twentieth century such reassurances vanished, and employers began to hear repeatedly that they must reform.

Yet employers or would-be employers heard little realistic discussion about the prospects of a servantless home. In 1937 *Emily Post* first wrote of a matron

without servants, "Mrs. Three-in-One," who had to be cook, waitress and hostess at her dinner parties, but she remained isolated in a special chapter of Post's text until 1960.⁶⁶ In the 1940s and fifties, the theory and practice of middle-class domesticity were increasingly divorced, as the menial nature of daily life without servants remained unacknowledged. Postwar headlines advised that the new "servants" would be machines and husbands.⁶⁷ Until the 1960s the shortcomings of their assistance remained unexplored, except perhaps by humorists like Betty McDonald, Jean Kerr, and Phyllis McGinley. Their domestic humor was filled with "spilled milk, dripping faucets, measles, empty refrigerators – and with women who cannot cope with it all. . . Nor are husbands much help."⁶⁸

The experts' proposals diverted attention from important cultural changes that were calling into question the legitimacy of household service itself. As the rules of personal interaction shifted in the twentieth century from an emphasis on formal manners to a reliance on sincerity and authenticity, and as the content of middle-class domesticity shifted from the management of woman's sphere to a combination of heterosexual and parent-child intimacy, a "stranger" in the household apparently became increasingly problematic or intolerable.⁶⁹ Did employers still really want servants? If not, how was the housework to be done? Expert advice on domestic service obscured basic cultural transitions and family changes by confining public discussion to narrow, problem-oriented proposals.⁷⁰

Over the first half of the twentieth century, trends in the labor market, social welfare, race relations, and immigration made service shrink drastically. New Deal legislation and World War II in particular transformed the labor market so rapidly that experts and employers alike scarcely knew what hit them. Realism would have meant recognizing not only the shrinkage implied by these rapid social and economic changes, but also the emergence of new possibilities for the performance of housework. By the early twentieth century it had been shown that much housework, especially laundry and food preparation, could be performed satisfactorily outside the home. Improved household technology, while falling short of the exaggerated claims of its promoters, did make it possible for individual adults to be respectably fed, clothed, and housed without either assistance or full time effort. A core of family housework, centering around the irreducible need to care for young children and to operate and maintain the household equipment, remained. If housework were not to be delegated to hired labor, would middle-class families reassess their housekeeping standards? Undue fussiness and irrationally high standards of cleanliness were encouraged by the availability of domestic servants, and might be called into question when servants were gone.⁷¹ If servants were unavailable or unacceptable, would wives clash with husbands over the distribution of household chores? New possibilities might imply a home that was servantless, simplified, and more equitable, but such a transformation involved hard questions and real choices. It was not widely understood that choices were possible, in part because domestic service experts focussed attention on schemes to retain domestic servants rather than to do without them.

It seems clear in retrospect that there was no way to "solve the servant problem." Upgrading service to a well-paid semi-profession, even if it could overcome what

appear to be inherently menial qualities in the work, was too expensive for all but a very few employers.⁷² Yet the experts confined themselves to narrow goals because at some level they shared a devotion to the status quo in middle class housekeeping. Many of them apparently shared the racist assumption that blacks would always remain an underclass available for service work. They did not question housekeeping standards that exceeded the dictates of common sense. And they were not prepared to challenge traditional gender roles that exempted adult males with spouses from having to clean up after themselves or take care of their children. They were in fact women of their day. Not until the 1960s would the full implications of the servantless home be confronted, when Betty Friedan finally spoke of “the problem that has no name.” The experts simply sought to supply more and better servants rather than to question implicit assumptions or explore larger possibilities. Groping toward greater equity between employer and employee, the NCHE was not really prepared to suppose that it might require the abolition of the service relationship altogether, still less dispensing with the reign of experts like themselves. The NCHE presided unwillingly over the decline of domestic service, failing to grasp the critical cultural implications of the servantless home. With the departure of most non-family workers from the middle-class American home, housework would eventually be reduced to a hotly-contested skirmishing ground in the war between the sexes.

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FOOTNOTES:

1. In 1979 “private household workers” accounted for less than 3% of all employed women. Statistics on the numbers of domestic servants through 1940 are found in Alba Edwards, “Comparative Occupational Statistics for the United States, 1870 to 1940,” in the Sixteenth U.S. Census, 1940, *Population* (Washington, D.C., 1943); and George Stigler, *Domestic Servants in the United States, 1900-1940*, National Bureau of Economic Research Occasional Paper 24 (New York, 1946). Overall figures for the twentieth century are available in Allyson S. Grossman, “Women in Domestic Work: Yesterday and Today,” *Monthly Labor Review* 103 (August 1980): 17-21. (Some are reproduced below, n.5) One estimate suggests that current annual expenditures for child care and domestic service in the underground economy total 8.8 billion dollars. See “Informal Suppliers in the Underground Economy,” *Statistics of Income Bulletin* of the Internal Revenue Service, vol. 4 (Fall 1984): 27-33.

2. The best sources on twentieth-century domestic service are David Katzman, *Seven Days a Week: Women and Domestic Service in Industrializing America* (New York, 1978); and Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present* (New York, 1985). See also Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work* (New York, 1982), pp. 113, 224; Susan Ware, *Holding Their Own: American Women in the Thirties* (Boston, 1982), chap. 2; Julia Kirk Blackwelder, *Women of the Depression: Caste and Culture in San Antonio, 1929-1939* (College Station, 1984); Lois Scharf, *To Work and to Wed: Female Employment, Feminism and the Great Depression* (Westport, CT, 1980), chap. 6; Maurine Weiner Greenwald, *Women, War and Work: The Impact of World War I on Women Workers in the United States*

(Westport, CT, 1980), pp. 11-12 21,23-24; Susan Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond: American Women in the 1940s* (Boston, 1982), pp. 83, 86, 89-90, 94.

Descriptive studies include: Evelyn Nakano Glenn, "The Dialectics of Wage Work: Japanese-American Women and Domestic Service, 1905-1940," *Feminist Studies* 6 (1980): 432-471; Bonnie Thornton Dill, "The Means to Put My Children Through: Child-Rearing Goals and Strategies Among Black Female Domestic Servants," in *The Black Woman*, ed. by LaFrances Rodgers-Rose (Beverly Hills & London, 1980), pp. 107-123; Elizabeth Clark-Lewis, "Black Household Workers in the District of Columbia, 1900-1940: History Through Women's Voices," (Paper delivered at the Sixth Berkshire Conference on the History of Women, Smith College, 1 June 1984).

Phyllis Palmer has done notable work, including: "Racial Dimensions in Housework, 1900-1945," (Paper delivered at the Fortieth Anniversary of the Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 10 March 1984); "Housework and Service Work: The Racial Division of Women's Work and Women Workers," (Paper delivered at the Sixth Berkshire Conference on the History of Women, Smith College, 1 June 1984); "Housework and Domestic Labor: Racial and Technological Change," in Karen Brodtkin Sacks and Dorothy Remy, eds., *My Troubles Are Going to Have Trouble With Me: Everyday Trials and Triumphs of Women Workers* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1984), pp. 80-91.

See also a series of recent dissertations: Bonnie Thornton Dill, "Across the Boundaries of Race and Class: An Exploration of the Relationship Between Work and Family Among Black Female Domestic Servants," (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1979); Donna L. VanRaaphorst, "The Unionization Movement among Domestic Workers in the United States, 1870 to 1940," (Ph.D. diss., Kent State University, 1983); Lois Rita Helmbold, "Making Choices, Making Do: Black and White Working Class Women's Lives and Work During the Great Depression," (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1982); Brenda Faye Clegg, "Black Female Domestic Workers During the Great Depression in New York City, 1930-40," (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1983).

3. This is argued in my *Serving Women: Household Service in Nineteenth-Century America* (Middletown, CT, 1983). It is also implied in Katzman's *Seven Days a Week*, and Carol Lasser, "Mistress, Maid and Market: The Transformation of Domestic Service in New England, 1790-1870," (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1981).

4. One historian has addressed the impact of the decline of domestic service on middle class wives: Ruth Schwartz Cowan discusses their "proletarianization." See her *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (New York, 1983), pp. 173-181. For discussion of the influence of the presence or absence of servants on child development, see James H. Brossard, *The Sociology of Child Development* (New York, 1948), chap. 12; Heinz Kohut, *The Restoration of the Self* (New York, 1977), pp. 276-277.

Naturally the decline of domestic service also had significant implications for working-class women. One might suggest that working women would be unlikely to develop much susceptibility to militance or mass organization until live-in domestic service had ceased to be their typical work experience. But exploring such implications is beyond the scope of this article.

5. The number of articles on servants that appeared in major national magazines declined along lines that roughly paralleled the declining percentage of women workers in service. The average number of articles per year listed in the *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature* under the subject headings "servants" or "household employees" during each decade are shown below.

Domestic Servants and Articles on Domestic Service

Date	Number (1000's)	% of Women Workers	Articles/Year During Previous Decade
1890	1433	36.6%	
1900	1526	28.7%	
1910	1784	22.1%	13.5
1920	1360	15.9%	12.2
1930	1909	17.8%	4.8
1940	2277	20.4%	11.5
1950	1459	8.4%	7.9
1960	1943	8.9%	3.5

source for numbers in domestic service: Grossman, "Women in Domestic Work," table 1.

6. Mary Roche, "The New 'Servants:' Machines and Husbands," *New York Times Magazine*, 5 June 1955, p. 19.

7. See the figures in n. 5, and see esp. treatments of the impact of the wars by Greenwald and Hartmann.

8. Studies from the 1920s found that household appliances eliminated some of the drudgery that caused families to hire domestic servants. One study of middle-class families found that one-fourth of these families employed less domestic service in 1929 than they had in 1919 and attributed the drop wholly or partly to the acquisition of new electrical appliances. See Amy Hewes, "Electrical Appliances in the Home," *Social Forces* 2 (Dec. 1930): 235-242. But the labor-saving merits of convenience products and appliances were routinely exaggerated. As Hewes observed, "Only Fairyland can vie with the bright prospects pictured by the heralds of the Age of Electricity, especially by those who sell the instruments which make its power available." (p. 235) A consummate faith in the transforming power of technology led observers to exaggerate the effects of automation on housework. For example, in 1955 a writer declared that "a home cook can turn out an elaborate meal with little more effort than it takes to unwrap the packages." See Roche, "The New 'Servants,'" p. 19.

Revisionist interpretations of housework and technology began when Joann Vanek observed that, despite technological change, time spent on housework had remained virtually constant in the twentieth century. See Vanek, "Time Spent in Housework," *Scientific American*, November 1974, pp. 116-120. The revisionist perspective is carried furthest by Ruth Schwartz Cowen, who argues that housework actually increased. See her *More Work For Mother*. Susan Strasser's, *Never Done: A History of American Housework* (New York, 1982) also emphasizes the continuing burdens of household labor. See also Christine E. Bose, Philip L. Bereano, and Mary Mallory, "Household Technology and the Social Construction of Housework," *Technology and Culture* 25 (January 1984): 53-82.

Economists have also tended to direct attention away from the continuing burdens of housework. Defining the good life as the acquisition of material goods, they have usually ignored the burdens of consumption or the value of unpaid work. For an exception, see Staffan Burenstam Linder, *The Harried Leisure Class* (New York, 1970). Linder sees a "harried" leisure class buying more and more but having to perform all the service and maintenance work required by their possessions or properties themselves.

9. My interpretation of this group of experts is based on the papers accumulated by one of them, Amey Watson, and on the records of the National Board of the Young Women's Christian Association. The YWCA was the NCHE's most important sub-group, and organizational cooperation and overlaps in membership were both extensive. The Amey Watson papers are located in the Labor-Management Documentation Center of the Martin P. Catherwood Library, New York State College of Industrial and Labor Relations, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York. The Y records are housed in the Sophia Smith Collection at Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts. The NCHE was at first called the National Committee on Employer-Employee Relationships in the Home. Later it was variously termed the National Committee on Household Employment or the National Council on Household Employment. I have adopted Council and NCHE as standard usage.

Committee on Employer-Employee Relationships in the Home. Later it was variously termed the National Committee on Household Employment or the National Council on Household Employment. I have adopted Council and NCHE as standard usage.

This organization should not be confused with a National Committee on Household Employment organized in 1964 by several national women's organizations, especially the National Council of Negro Women. Although this later organization shared the goal of upgrading service work, the organizations appear to have been distinct. See Phyllis Palmer, "Housework and Domestic Labor: Racial and Technological Change."

10. For Roosevelt's participation, see "Report of the Symposium on Household Employment," New York City, 28 Nov. 1939, p. 26, Watson Papers; Roosevelt's article, "Servants," *Forum* 83 (Jan. 1930):24-28; her speech, "Human Relations as a Social Problem," delivered at the Household Employment Mass Meeting, Seattle, Washington, 23 March 1938, in the Y papers. Letters from Roosevelt indicating her support and willingness to participate are found in the correspondence file of the Watson papers.

11. Vita, Watson papers.

12. See Amey Watson, "Employer-Employee Relationships in the Home," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 143 (May 1929): 49-60.

13. See I.M. Rubinow, "The Problem of Domestic Service," *Journal of Political Economy* 14 (1906): 502-519.

14. To appreciate how common this prescription was in the Progressive Era, see Susan Strasser, "Mistress and Maid, Employer and Employee: Domestic Service Reform in the United States, 1897-1920," *Marxist Perspectives* 1 (Winter 1978): 52-67.

The best retrospective summary of YWCA activities relating to household service is Jean Collier Brown, *Concerns of Household Workers: Progress with Household Workers in the YWCA* (New York, 1941). See also First Report of the Committee on Household Employment to the Fifth National Conference, 5-11 May 1915, Los Angeles; Henrietta Roetofs, "The Trained Servant in the Household," YWCA Committee on Household Employment Bulletin No. 2, 1915; Ida Tarbell, "What a Factory Can Teach a Housewife," YWCA Committee on Household Employment Bulletin No. 3, 1916; Isabel Kimball Whiting, "The Beam in Our Own Eyes," YWCA Committee on Household Employment Bulletin No. 4, 1917. All these are contained in the papers of the National Board of the YWCA.

15. On the history of nursing see Barbara Melosh, *The Physician's Hand: Work Culture and Conflict in American Nursing* (Philadelphia, 1982); or Susan Reverby, "Neither for the Drawing Room nor for the Kitchen: Private Duty Nursing in Boston, 1873-1920," in *Women and Health in America*, ed. Judith Walzer Leavitt (Madison, WI, 1984), pp. 454-466. The best general introduction to the history of women in the professions, including the feminized service or semi-professions of nursing, teaching, social work and home economics is Joan Jacobs Brumberg and Nancy Tomes, "Women in the Professions: A Research Agenda for Women Historians," *Reviews in American History* 10 (June 1982): 275-296.

16. Alice Stryker Root, "A Word to Employers," pamphlet issued by the Committee on Household Employment of the National Board of the YWCA, 1917, n.p., in Y papers.

17. Nancy Woods Walburn, "Elevating Housework to Professional Standing," *The Women's Press* 22 (Dec. 1928): 856-857.

Judging from the frequency of its mention, the analogy to the professions was most appealing to the experts, many of whom were themselves members of the female semi-professions of social work and home economics. The business analogy is best developed in Ida Tarbell's "What a Factory Can Teach a Housewife." Here a widow who inherits her husband's business learns she must pay good wages and provide good working conditions to attract and hold efficient workers. She then applies the same methods in her own kitchen, with splendid results.

her husband's business learns she must pay good wages and provide good working conditions to attract and hold efficient workers. She then applies the same methods in her own kitchen, with splendid results.

18. On the activities of clubs in Evansville, St. Paul, Chicago, Indianapolis, Flint, and Peoria, see Newsletter to Household Employees of the Camp Gray Region, 17 Nov. 1930, in the Y papers, and Berdena Underdahl, "A Club for Household Employees," *Journal of HomeEconomics* 21 (Feb. 1929): 108-109. For general comments on the purposes of the clubs, see Jean Collier Brown, *Concerns of Household Workers*, p. 10.

19. Watson, "Employer-Employee Relationships," pp. 56, 49.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

21. On the significance of supervision for nineteenth-century servant employers, see my *Serving Women*, chapter 5.

22. Alice Stryker Root explained, "Almost everyone's thoughts is 'a training school,' but every experiment, and we have carefully looked up all the records, has failed because, as someone has cleverly said, "If they won't work for you, they won't train for you!" But if we change conditions so that they will work for us they may also train for us and that is what we are working toward." See her "A Word to Employers" pamphlet, in the Y papers. Here as in many other respects, the NCHE was following the lead of the YWCA. See also Jean Collier Brown, *Concerns of Household Workers*, pp. 65-65.

23. Watson, for example, continued to work on a survey of household employment in Philadelphia. See Amey E. Watson, "Household Employment in Philadelphia," *U.S. Women's Bureau Bulletin* No. 93 (Washington, D.C., 1932); or a summary of findings in "Domestic Service in Philadelphia Homes," *Monthly Labor Review* 35 (July 1932): 33-35.

24. The statistical sophistication and hence the value of the Y surveys varies greatly. Many of them are available in the Watson papers, but the most comprehensive source is the records of the National Board of the YWCA, where they are filed under "Household Employment – Local."

25. The effects of the Depression on servant employment are not altogether clear. Certainly some employers were obliged to dismiss domestics, and ads featured appeals to middle-class housewives who were "doing it themselves these days." See Cowan, *More Work For Mother*, p. 176. But the total number of domestics increased between 1930 and 1940, and some employers were able to hire domestics for the first time due to the drop in wages. On new employers, see "Placement Problems of the Household Employee," 22 March 1934, p. 2, in the Y papers.

Data on unemployment among domestics in the thirties are scattered throughout the Watson papers, but most usefully summarized in Erna Magnus, "Coverage of Domestic Workers by Social Insurance," *ts*, Washington, D.C., 1939, in Watson papers; and "Employment Conditions and Unemployment Relief: Unemployment Among Women in the Early Years of the Depression," *Monthly Labor Review* 38 (Apr. 1934): 790-795. On the exploitation and displacement of black domestics, see Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*, pp. 197, 205-208. Material on slave markets in the Watson papers includes: New York Women's Trade Union League *Annual Report, 1939-1940* (March 1940), p. 3, and "Minutes of the Subcommittee on Street Corner Markets." The Watson papers also include abundant indications that downwardly mobile white workers displaced blacks from domestic service. See for example Benjamin R. Andrews, "Household Employment: Its Background and Prospects," *The Woman's Press* 25 (July 1931): 424-427; Brochure of the YWCA Trade School at the West 137th Street Branch, New York City, 1934-1935, p. 19, in Watson papers. See also Emily L. Warrick to Association Workers, 21 Nov. 1933, in Y papers.

26. Flora Winquist to Dorothy Wells, 12 Aug. 1933, in Watson papers. See also Margaret T. Applegarth, "Is the Lady-of-the-House at Home?" in the Y papers, containing reports from Y's around the country.
27. Note that these wage cuts range in excess of the 25% drop in the Consumer Price Index. See "Summary of the Second Conference," NCHE, New York City, 13-14 Apr. 1931, p. 5 in Watson papers; "Placement Problems of the Household Employee," 23 Mar. 1934, pp. 2-3, in Y papers. For further evidence of wage cuts, see Elsabelle Goss to Alice Dickson, 10 Apr. 1931, in Watson papers; Virginia McGregor, "Wages of Household Employees in the YWCA's of Thirteen Illinois Communities," 1936, p. 10, Table 5, in Watson papers; "Household Employment Problems: A Handbook for Round-Table Discussions among Household Employers," U.S. Department of the Interior Office of Education, Vocational Division, Sep. 1937, in Watson papers; and Eleanor M. Snyder, "Job Histories of Women Workers at the Summer Schools, 1931-1934 and 1938," U.S. Women's Bureau *Bulletin* No. 174 (Washington, D.C., 1939), p. 17.
28. Wages among blacks are indicated by an NRA survey of 33 counties in northern Mississippi that found wages averaging under \$2 per week. Cited in Jean Collier Brown, "The Negro Woman Worker," U.S. Women's Bureau *Bulletin* no. 165 (Washington, D.C., 1938), p. 3. Quoted line is from Consuelo Chavez Rios to Benjamin R. Andrews, 23 September 1936, in Watson papers. Rios was referred to Andrews as a representative of the NCHE; she explained in her letter that she had first written to President Roosevelt. On low wages among black workers, see "Negro Household Employees During Current Unemployment Crisis," in Y papers: Jean Collier Brown, "The Negro Woman Worker," p. 3.
29. *New York Times*, 25 Nov. 1932, 20:2.
30. Eva vonB. Hansl to Lillian Gilbreth, 22 Jan. 1931, Watson papers.
31. "Westchester Woman Seeking Basis for a Voluntary Code for Maids," *New York Sun*, 19 Mar. 1934.
32. See summaries of the code in Ruth L. Frankel, "A New Deal for Household Workers," *The Forecast* 47 (June 1934): 251-253, 280; Eunice Fuller Barnard, "Calls for a Kitchen Code Now Resound," *New York Times Magazine*, 14 Oct. 1934, p. 18.
33. See Hazel Kyrk to Dr. B.R. Andrews, 27 Nov. 1933, in Y papers; Frankel, "A New Deal for Household Workers," p. 252; Adelaide Noble to Miss Gifford, 20 Dec. 1934 and Ruth L. Packard to Mrs. Allan K. Chalmers, 18 Jan. 1935, in the Y papers.
34. For example, a study by the Pennsylvania state employment bureau in Philadelphia revealed that during the month of January 1933, one half of all the positions available at the bureau were in domestic service. See "Household Employment in Philadelphia, January 1933. Certain Facts Gathered at the State Employment Bureau and the Junior Employment Service," p. 3, in Watson papers.
35. Maria N. Bransford, "Final Report of the Philadelphia Institute on Household Occupations," Aug. 1939, pp. 2-3, in Watson papers.
36. *Ibid.*, pp. 48, 5. The experts could congratulate themselves that even in the Depression the Institute upheld job standards. They placed their graduates with employers who agreed to limit working hours to fifty-four when the servant lived in and to forty-eight when she lived out. See also Helen C. Goodspeed, "Training for Household Employees in Philadelphia," *Journal of Home Economics* 33 (May 1941): 329-330.
37. See the "Domesticability Test," designed ca. 1934 by Lorraine S. Wallerstein, graduate student in tests and measurements at Teacher's College, Columbia, for Professor Benjamin

Andrews of the Department of Home Economics, in the Watson papers. Professor Andrews was one of the few men associated with the NCHE.

38. "Report for Evanston, Illinois," p. 2, in Y papers.

39. Ruth Sergel, ed., *The Women in the House* (New York, 1938).

40. Information on the Cleveland YWCA employment bureau cited in Helmbold, "Making Choices, Making Do," p. 242.

41. "Home Economics in the WPA," in Watson papers; and Florence Kerr, "Training for Household Employment: the WPA Program," *Journal of Home Economics* 32 (Sept. 1940): 437-440.

42. See Pennsylvania State Employment Service, "Report of the Conference on Household Employment," Pittsburgh, 19 Apr. 1940, pp. 9-11, and the flyer from the Darlington Resident Center of the NYA in West Chester, Pa, both in the Watson papers. Phyllis Palmer has shown that while the NYA tended to train young white women to do their own housekeeping, they trained young black women to become domestic servants. See her "Training for Race and Gender in the NYA," (Paper delivered at the annual meeting of the Organization of American Historians, Minneapolis, MN, 19 April. 1985).

43. Brown, *Concerns*, p. 65.

44. See Virginia Heim, "The Employee Looks at Household Employment," in "Report of the Conference on Household Employment," Pittsburgh, 19 April 1940, pp. 6-7, in the Watson papers. See also Louise Stitt, "Household Employment: The Problem Nationally," speech delivered at the Symposium on Household Employment, New York City, 28 Nov. 1939, pp. 12-14, in Watson papers; and "Domestic Workers and Legislation" summaries of the lack of coverage of household employment by social legislation prepared by the Women's Bureau, Apr. 1940 and revised version Feb. 1941, in Watson papers.

45. This shift in tactics was not adopted without some controversy. See Lilian C. McGrew to Mrs. Leisa Bronson, 30 Nov. 1938, in the Y papers, noting a division of opinion even among the experts over whether pushing for legislation was an appropriate policy. At one point the Women's City Club of New York sponsored a debate on the regulation of household service. See Adele B. Greeff, "The Case Against Compulsory Regulation of Household Employment," 30 Jan. 1940, in Y papers.

46. "Domestic Workers and Legislation," Apr. 1940, p. 1, in Watson papers.

47. See the brief summary of legislation in Catherine Mackenzie, "Katie Is Leaving – Again," *New York Times Magazine*, 31 Aug. 1941, p. 21. Re. lobbying efforts see the NCHE *Bulletin* for 1940 and 1941, in the Watson papers. The Watson files suggest that the NCHE played its accustomed role as an umbrella organization, preferring to generate expert advice rather than apply direct political pressure. In New York State, for example, an organization called the Committee on Workmen's Compensation for Household Employees was formed for lobbying purposes. See the circular from Cara Cook to "the sponsors and contributors of this committee" detailing lobbying efforts in the Watson papers.

48. For this line of reasoning see Amey Watson. "Household Employment and National Defense," *The Woman's Press* 34 (Nov. 1940): 476-477, 481; Harriet Elliott, "The Home-Line Front of National Defense," NCHE *Bulletin* Series II, no. 2 (Apr. 1941): 1.

49. Isabel G. Carter to Amey Watson, 28 Oct 1942, Watson papers.

50. For evidence of the wage rebound, see "Report of the Conference on Household Employment," Pittsburgh, 19 Apr. 1940, pp. 20-21; National Youth Administration of Illinois,

"Research Report on Domestic Occupations;" and "Earnings in Household Employment," *The Woman Worker* (Sept. 1940): 6, in Y papers. See also "Maid Famine Threatens U.S. Housewives," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 28 Sept. 1941, p. A3, ref. to wages having increased 25 to 40%.

51. "Household Employees Are Trained by WPA to Help Run Workers' Homes," *Detroit Free Press Sunday Graphic*, 26 Apr. 1942, p. 4.

52. Ishbel Ross, "The Vanishing Domestic," *Coronet*, Jan. 1942, p. 113. See also Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*, pp. 237-238; MacKenzie, "Katie Is Leaving - Again," pp. 10 ff.

53. San Francisco YWCA "Household Employee News," vol. 1, no. 6 (Feb 1942): 1, mimeo in Watson papers.

54. See David Chaplin, "Domestic Service and Industrialization," *Comparative Studies in Sociology* 1 (1978): 105-108, 113, for some comments on casualization and underreporting.

There may be some relationship between the decline of domestic service and the availability of public welfare payments, but it remains unclear. In the thirties, conservatives charged that relief payments led women to refuse domestic service work. See for example Eleanor Roosevelt's comment in her speech delivered at the Symposium on Household Employment, New York City, 28 Nov. 1939, p. 26. Yet more recent research suggests that relief payments were often systematically withheld, especially in the South, precisely to assure that black workers would remain available for low-wage work in agriculture and domestic service. In any case, the great expansion of the AFDC rolls dates from the 1960s, well past the decisive decline of domestic service. See Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare* (New York, 1971). It seems likely that welfare payments encouraged the postwar shift to off-the-books day work. Underground day work "fits" a situation in which transfer payments are available yet inadequate, since low levels of support encourage efforts to add to one's income off the books, while the fact of support itself eases the worst aspect of day work, the unpredictability of employment and earnings.

55. The NCHE was reported defunct in 1945 in a "Report on Household Employment" presented at a meeting of the National Board of the Y on 5 Dec 1945, in Y papers. In the immediate postwar period the Women's Bureau made a brief effort to carry on the NCHE's work. They tried to organize household employment committees to educate the general public about the need to upgrade domestic service and thereby attract workers back into the field. See Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*, pp. 258-259.

56. The NCHE presented itself publicly as having "embarked on a gigantic adult education project," attempting to show a million housewives that it was "to their personal advantage" to upgrade domestic service. See Barnard, "Calls for a Kitchen code Now Resound," p. 18. But some NCHE experts apparently admitted to themselves that employers would be hurt. One unusually frank internal Y memo of 1941 referred to four different groups of employers: 1. women of means; 2. "most of us, with a single employee;" 3. women who really "could not afford" assistance yet desired to escape household "routine;" and 4. low-paid women workers who were obliged to hire child care at even lower wages. The memo argued that if service were upgraded the third and fourth groups were certainly not going to be able to afford domestic service. This straightforward analysis of employers' means and interests stands virtually alone. See Mrs. Thomas D. Hewitt, National Board Member, to Frances Perry and Frances K. Chalmer, 25 Feb. 1941, in Y papers.

57. Despite the presence of Nannie Burroughs on the NCHE board, neither individual blacks nor black organizations played active roles in the NCHE. The YWCA was usually segregated, and the experts of the NCHE failed to confront the abundant evidence of discrimination that their own studies revealed. They preferred to believe that, as one Y study put it, "Differences between the needs of Negro and white household employees lie not in kind but in degree." (Jean Collier Brown, *Concerns of Household Workers*, p. 48.) In 1937 the Urban League, in calling for the unionization of household workers, criticized the failure of the

NCHE's "employer approach," which they said could prevail only among the few "intelligent and public-spirited" employers. See "The Need of Organization Among Household Employees," National Urban League Workers' Council *Bulletin* No. 16, 28 May 1937, pp. 4-6. and public-spirited" employers. See "The Need of Organization Among Household Employees," National Urban League Workers' Council *Bulletin* No. 16, 28 May 1937, pp. 4-6.

Labor militance in the thirties made the idea of unionization a much-mooted alternative. The files of Watson and the Y contain much evidence of organizing efforts, and although the NCHE always held aloof as an organization, individuals sometimes made a different choice. Jean Collier Brown, who studied domestic service for the U.S. Women's Bureau and wrote a "Brief on Household Employment in Relation to Trade Union Organization," for the YWCA in 1938, ultimately despaired of the NCHE approach and became an organizer for the United Domestic Workers Union of the CIO. See "Maid's Lorgnette is on the Boss Now," *New York Times*, 4 July 1943; Jean Collier Brown, "Household Employees Join the CIO," *Journal of Home Economics* 35 (May 1943): 265-268; Jean Collier Brown, "Domestic Workers and Unions," *American Federationist* 45 (May 1938): 447. See also Van Raaphorst, "The Unionization Movement Among Domestic Workers."

58. A good example of NCHE language is the proposed code for household employees: "Local Councils on Household Employment in working out fair minimum wage rates should take into account prevailing wage rates in household employment, changes in the cost of living, and advancement in business recovery in the community concerned. No full-time worker should receive a wage less than the minimum. Wages above the minimum should not be decreased, and a rising scale should accompany increasing skill and experience. Such local wage rates will contribute toward needed national wage standards in household employment." This was published in Ruth L. Frankel, "A New Deal for Household Workers," *The Forecast* (June 1934): 252-253.

59. "A Few Suggestions," 29 Dec. 1938, in Y papers.

60. Comparisons with the nineteenth century are based on my *Serving Women*.

61. The correspondence file of the Watson papers and the Y papers include a number of letters exchanged with journalists about projected stories. See for example Marguerite Taylor to Dr. Benjamin Andrews, 11 July 1931; Nancy Walburn to Lucy Carner, 2 June 1931, Mary H. Tolman to Henry G. Leach, 1 May 1934, all in the Watson papers.

62. Frankel, "A New Deal for Household Workers."

63. See Dorothy P. Blackmer to Miss Selma Robinson, 5 Oct 1938, in the Y papers. The letter reveals that Robinson had corresponded with a number of other experts. The article appeared in the March 1939 issue.

64. Other examples of articles that took a stance critical of employers and/or recommended NCHE solutions include: Lucy Randolph Mason, "The Perfect Treasure," *American Junior League Magazine*, Feb. 1934, pp. 36-37, 85; Dorothy Dunbar Bromley, "Are Servants People?" *Scribner's* 94 (Dec. 1933): 377-379; Mildred Harington, "I'd Rather Work for Their Husbands," *American Magazine* 115 (Jan. 1933): 35, 108-110.

65. "The Servant Problem," *Fortune* 17 (March 1938): 81-85, and 114 ff. *Fortune* went on, however, to diverge slightly from the NCHE line, expressing some doubt whether domestic service could ever really be upgraded because of the menial nature of the work. In that case, *Fortune* perceived a solution in "the choice of colored servants" who were already subject to social stigma.

66. Cf. Emily Post, *Etiquette: The Blue Book of Social Usage*, 5th ed., rev. (New York, 1937), p. 823, and 10th ed., published in 1960. Even in 1960, several chapters assumed the presence of servants in "the well-appointed house," gave advice on servant management, and featured among their illustrations several photos of a housemaid in uniform. But Post had to concede, "Even the one servant household is a thing of the past to most of us." (10th ed., p. 297)

67. Roche, "The New 'Servants.'"

68. See Nancy Walker, "Humor and Gender Roles: The 'Funny' Feminism of the Post World War II Suburbs." *American Quarterly* 37 (Spring 1985): 111.

69. These remarks are suggested by Norbert Elias, *The History of Manners* (New York, 1978), esp. pp. 190, 207-210; Abram deSwaan, "The Politics of Agoraphobia: On Changes in Emotional and Relational Management," *Theory and Society* 10 (1981): 359-385; Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA, 1971).

70. Domestic service experts thus fit Christopher Lasch's description of the "helping" professions: social science experts who propose to help a clientele but actually tend to spread confusion and powerlessness. See *Haven in a Heartless World* (New York, 1977).

71. Irrationally high standards of household care and cleanliness were undoubtedly encouraged by cheap and plentiful domestic service. Servants in the thirties spoke of having to wash all the windows once a week, or dust and vacuum every room every day. See for example, Margaret T. Applegarth, "Is the Lady of the House at Home?" in the Y papers. Y training classes featured instruction on how to iron Madeira napkins, the difference between English and Russian table service, and advice on why one should never use a vacuum on oriental rugs. See "The How and Why of Home Etiquette," publicizing classes at the Wichita, Kansas Y, ca. 1936, in the Y papers. It seems fair to say that when a family does its own work this level of fussiness is seldom considered worth the effort.

72. The work may be inherently menial. As *Fortune* speculated, perhaps "the nature of the work, which involves a number of extremely unpleasant tasks together with a number of extremely personal ones, is destructive of the concept of equality." ("The Servant Problem," p. 118.) Watson, Rubinow and others may have been too quick to dismiss the idea of stigma.

Nevertheless the proposal to upgrade domestic service is not quite dead, and may even be revived to cater to the market among high-income two career couples. While working on this article I was contacted by the head of an educational consulting firm soliciting my assistance in an effort to convert household service to professional status through a college degree-granting program based in the disciplines of management and human ecology. Letter from Dr. Wilma Heckler of the Learning Advisory Center of Katonah, New York, 9 Aug. 1984.