Inventing Equal Opportunity

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goals, which had aimed to professionalize domestic work and to create new opportunities for women. In short, the movement had not succeeded in raising the status of domestic labor. As a result, university home economics departments, which increasingly included men in positions of authority, began to change their names to "family and consumer sciences" or "human ecology" to liberate "their field from automatic associations with women's lives and, by extension, with the trivial" (172).

Throughout the book, Elias foregrounds the conflicting ways in which home economics was viewed: as humorous or heroic, science or drudgery, academic or personal, radical or conservative, empowering or limiting. These binaries highlight the issues that have surrounded home economics throughout the twentieth century. In her epilogue, "Flip this Housewife," she suggests that these issues continue to inflect contemporary media visions of domestic work.

The book shines in its analysis of the connections between home economics and larger themes in twentieth-century American history. Each of the four chapters reveals the ways in which developments within home economics relate to larger cultural patterns, making it potentially helpful for courses that address twentieth-century history more broadly. However, the social and cultural impact that home economics may have had on twentieth-century American life is less clear. It is hard to determine the limits of Elias's definition of the movement, particularly as she details the ways in which it changed over time and what it meant in different contexts. Is all domestic work home economics? How did its legacy differ from that of other Progressive-era projects intended to make daily life more efficient? What are the economic and racial implications of the home economics movement?

Yet, perhaps the questions and concerns raised by early home economists are so tightly woven into the wrinkle-free, antiseptic fabric of modern life that is hard to see their impact. Elias's thought-provoking book begins to delineate a figure in that cloth, tracing the contours of changing ideas about home, work, family and gender in twentieth-century American culture through this history of the home economics movement. Indeed, *Stir It Up* proves that there has always been a lot more at stake than dirty dishcloths and burnt toast.

Harvard University Sarah Anne Carter

Inventing Equal Opportunity. By Frank Dobbin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009. x plus 310 pp.).

In the compositions of historical sociologists, one often hears the clunk of German nouns striking the English language, causing many historians who are fans of the genre to think along Mark Twain's lines that "Wagner's music is better than it sounds." The work of Frank Dobbin, by way of contrast, refutes the stereotype. He delivers straightforward reports on the survey data he has collected from corporations on such matters as work place diversity and sexual harassment without neglecting the theoretical consequences of his findings. He concludes that histo-

rians and others interested in the development of equal opportunity as an employment concept need to appreciate the crucial role of personnel officers and human relations specialists within the corporation. He explains that civil rights workers "fought for equal opportunity in employment," and that politicians "outlawed discrimination" through executive orders and legislation. "But it was personnel managers who defined what job discrimination was and was not" (p. 220).

Historians have told us a great deal about the grass roots activists and only a little less about the politicians who shaped our civil rights laws. Sociologists like John Skrentny and historians like the late great Hugh Graham have alerted us to the influence of government bureaucrats and the courts in expanding those laws. Historians writing about welfare capitalism such as Sanford Jacoby have reminded us of the survival of welfare capitalist practices, often emulated by the state, in the modern era. Frank Dobbin adds the personnel professionals to the list of influential players in America's powerful but fragmented state. Hence, in the matter of sexual harassment, Dobbin finds that the women's movement succeeded in making the case "that sexual harassment constituted sex discrimination" and that the courts "played a key role in defining harassment as sexual discrimination." "But neither decided how employers should fight harassment. Personnel experts made that decision" (p. 217).

Historians will find that Dobbin makes assertions along these lines without adding a lot of archival detail. His original data concentrate on corporate practice, and he leaves historical detail about the founding legislation, such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964, to the historians who have come before him. Even without the historian's x-ray historical vision, he manages to illuminate the corporations' complex response to federal regulatory initiatives.

Uncertainty in the law, a common product of a legislative process that achieves consensus through ambiguity, led to the emergence of equal opportunity experts within firms who were entrusted with the job of keeping their company out of expensive trouble in the civil rights realm. The set up was like something out a John Le Carré novel with one bureaucracy mirroring another. But these experts had their own agenda that did not always mesh with that of the larger organizations they served. They pushed to end discretion on the part of managers and fremen in favor of what might be called "institutionalizing procedural justice," somewhat along the lines of post 1935 labor relations. In so doing, they fell back on tools from what Dobbin calls their "bureaucratic arsenal" such as validated job tests, performance evaluations and eventually such things as maternity leave and diversity training. They did their work well enough that their programs survived even after President Reagan signaled a loosening in affirmative action initiatives. With punitive damages no longer such a threat, the personnel experts simply turned around and talked in the age-old language of cost efficiency—diversity, like hiring the handicapped in the 1940s, was good business. A company needed to reflect the ethnic and racial composition of its customers.

This impressive book makes a convincing case for human resources professionals as key players in the implementation of civil rights laws. It also points to the importance of industrial grievance procedures and other institutional artifacts of the National Labor Relations Act of 1935 as unstudied influences over recent American history. And, at least to me, it leaves open the question of whether the age that Dobbin describes is over. The big players in this book, such as General

Electric, Eastman Kodak, and General Motors no longer enjoy the financial stability and policy influence that they once had. Maybe the aftermath of this recession will bring forth new actors in shaping the American state. One can only hope that an honest reporter and gifted analyst like Dobbin comes along to describe those changes.

George Washington University Edward Berkowitz

Revenge of the Domestic: Women, the Family, and Communism in the German Democratic Republic. By Donna Harsch (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007. xviii plus 350 pp. $29.95).

In this ambitious study, Donna Harsch demonstrates why gender and family are absolutely central to understanding the history of the GDR (German Democratic Republic). The productivist vision of Communist leaders was challenged by women, whose "female consciousness" (p. 7) derived from their responsibilities with regard to family, childcare, eldercare, housekeeping and consumption. The overwhelmingly male SED (Communist-party) leadership was blissfully unaware of the problems that women working outside the home faced in dealing with the double burden and trying to attain equality. Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist ideology assumed that emancipation would naturally flow from the integration of women into the labor force. Domestic work was not considered to be of any importance, and little thought was given to the need for the increased participation of men in household duties. Harsch sees the push by women for state solutions to their problems as a force that remolded GDR society in a profound way. Her work thus contributes to a much more complex understanding of East German society than the old top-down model provided. Her study, which focuses mainly on the period 1945-1971, but briefly touches on the years up to 1989, is based on extensive archival research and interviews. It is filled with fascinating, vivid, first-hand accounts of women's experiences.

In the early years, women were at loggerheads with the Communist party. Communists saw women as politically unreliable. Women were profoundly upset by the mass rapes of German women by Soviet troops, and they pressed the SED to do something about mass hunger, POW's, deportees to the Soviet Union, and restrictions on abortion. In addition, the workplace remained highly gendered. Misogyny consigned women to poorer paying jobs. Women faced constant hostility, often in the form of sexual harassment. Precious little was done to relieve women of the domestic burden that impaired their job performance. Female workers were "overwhelmed by housework, child care, and long commutes" (p. 130), finding only a bit of relief in the "household day," a day off from work to attend to household duties, at first enjoyed only by married women.

Though paying lip-service to gender equality, the male-dominated SED put productivist, political and demographic goals first in the 1950's. The needs of women were overlooked because of biased attitudes and distrust of women, because women were seen as a secondary labor force, and because the regime wanted