

The Common Ground of Womanhood: Class, Gender, and Working Girls' Clubs, 1884-1928, by Priscilla Murolo. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997. xiv, 227 pp. Illustrations, appendixes, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95 cloth, \$14.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY LYNN Y. WEINER, ROOSEVELT UNIVERSITY

The intersections between labor history and women's history have engaged scholarly attention for the past two decades. In *The Common Ground of Womanhood*, Priscilla Murolo adds to this literature on working women by rendering a close look at working girls' clubs during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Working girls' clubs originated in the 1880s in the larger cities of the country, primarily in the Northeast but occasionally also in such "outposts in the midwest" as Cincinnati and Chicago. New York City silk workers, with the help of philanthropist Grace Hoadley Dodge, first organized a working girls' society in 1884. By 1890 such groups had popped up throughout the nation and were plentiful enough to hold a national convention. Privileged women such as Dodge facilitated efforts to create what some historians call "cross-class alliances" between working women and their wealthier patrons. Murolo's purpose is to determine how working women used the clubs to achieve both sociability and self-improvement, and how the clubs fared until they disbanded during the 1920s. Her sources include a broad secondary literature as well as minutes, newsletters, convention proceedings, schedules, and other writings of working women themselves.

The book includes seven chapters and several appendixes. The first two chapters present an overview of club development from the mid-1880s through the early 1890s. The author examines the backgrounds and activities of both working-class club members and their wealthier sponsors. She suggests that the clubs provided a way for working women to achieve "respectability" both by bourgeois standards and on their own terms, because their social status was endangered by their identity as workers. Next, Murolo explores the "cross-class sisterhood" created by women's efforts to join in cooperative enterprise despite conflicting "codes of etiquette" and other differences, such as conflicting attitudes toward domestic labor, the desire of working women for "mixed heterosexual social events," and different opinions about marriage. By the mid-1890s, too, club members had a more active voice in the governance of their organizations. Murolo then turns to the question of labor, looking at shifting attitudes of women workers and club sponsors during the economically tumultuous 1890s. A labor reform movement failed to unite the two classes of

women, as the sponsors turned more and more toward promoting vocational education, scientific approaches to social problems, and welfare capitalism. Still, club membership peaked at about thirty thousand in 1920, reflecting the popularity of a turn toward leisure activities and recreation. Increased membership was accompanied, Murolo suggests, by an expanded national bureaucracy that minimized the autonomy of local units, and by an improvement in the social status of women workers. But this same success, combined with financial cutbacks, led to decline. By 1928, when the National League of Girls' Clubs dissolved, the organization had become anachronistic.

The narrow focus of this book is both its strength and weakness. Voices of working women and their sponsors resonate clearly, and the inner workings of the organizations are nicely presented. However, it might be useful to see greater comparative discussion of other cross-class organizations for young working women, such as boarding homes, travelers' aid societies, Young Women's Christian Associations, and settlement houses. The notion of a united womanhood, while ably discussed in the context of the changing national discourse on race and labor, also might have profited from being set more firmly in the context of other reform activities of the times. Finally, the author's attention is captured mostly by the clubs in the large cities on the East Coast. Interesting questions remain about the nature of working girls' clubs and activities in such "outposts" as Iowa and other areas of the Midwest.

Still, this book contributes to the understanding of this period of women's labor history, work culture, and cross-class interactions. In the end, working women used the club movement for three reasons: to achieve respectability, to assist each other on their own terms, and—not least—to have fun.

Houses of God: Region, Religion, and Architecture in the United States, by Peter W. Williams. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997. xv, 321 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliographies, index. \$34.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY PATRICIA ECKHARDT, IOWA CITY

Houses of God is Peter W. Williams's attempt, inspired by a photographic exhibition on the theme of regionalism and American religion, to address the relationship between region, religion and architecture. To manage this vast topic, Williams combines two methods. First, he divides the United States into seven regions (placing Iowa in the "Great Plains and the Mountains" region). Religious architecture

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