

Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the editors of *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*

Review

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Source: *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (Spring, 1995), pp. 746-747

Published by: The MIT Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/205844>

Accessed: 20-04-2016 01:32 UTC

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Workshop to Office: Two Generations of Italian Women in New York City, 1900–1950. By Miriam Cohen (Ithaca, N.Y., Cornell University Press, 1993) 237 pp. \$39.95 cloth \$14.95 paper

In *Workshop to Office*, Cohen reopens the history of immigrant Italian women in an attempt to trace their journey from household production in Europe, to piece work, factory labor, and eventually, skilled white-collar employment. Cohen challenges the notion that Italian men jealously guarded their wives and daughters, restricting educational opportunities to male children and limiting female employment to ill-paid, unskilled, labor. This model, she contends, ignores the continued importance of the family as an economic unit in Italian communities. Work, culture, and gender were a matrix that defined the choices available to Italian women, who gradually abandoned low-skilled wage labor for education and salaried employment in numbers comparable with those of other groups.

Articulating this journey as more than secondary to male class mobility, Cohen grounds her study in an anthropological literature that understands female family members as relational to the kin group as a whole. Like Yans-McGlaughlin, she argues that the welfare of the family superseded individualism in Italian-American communities. Cohen, however, moves beyond the family-survival model.¹ Italians were as class mobile as other groups. Women moved outside the home into schools, factories, and skilled employment when those options became viable.

Cohen uses contemporary social-science data to raise questions about mobility and how culturally displaced groups achieve it. One important theme that emerges from her sources is tension concerning the value of education. Reformers and school authorities believed this value to be absolute. They saw immigrant groups who were positioned to take advantage of schools, such as eastern European Jews, as “successful” and rational and Italians, who initially kept daughters home from school in large numbers, as backward and tradition-bound.

Cohen musters the statistics to show that, unlike male Italian immigrants, male Jewish workers entered the New York labor market as skilled, literate workers. Her comparison between Italian immigrant women and their Jewish counterparts is even more dramatic. In a suggestive focus on the garment trades, Cohen argues that geographic proximity and ethnic connection to male shop owners explain the high proportion of Jewish women working at skilled jobs; whereas Italian women, living far from Lower East Side manufacturing centers often worked as finishers and operators because they never entered the networks that ultimately conveyed skills and status. Moreover, low school attendance by Italian children, she argues, was a rational choice, given the number of workers needed to sustain a household and the general

1 Virginia Yans-McGlaughlin, *Family and Community: Italian Immigrants in Buffalo, 1880–1930* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1977).

lack of knowledge about the benefits that education might offer. Cohen shows, however, that by midcentury, as Italian families acculturated and gained more access to skilled work, this portrait changed. Italian and Jewish women graduated from high school, entered white collar labor, and left it in similar numbers.

Cohen joins scholars who seek to understand the role of gender in historical processes of group change. Like Susan Glenn in *Daughters of the Shtetl* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1990), Cohen argues that culture often frames the expectations of newcomers and their hosts, but rarely determines outcomes. Ideas about culture and family authority that were useful to Italian village life may have been restrictive to women initially in New York, but what actually conditioned female job mobility were women's rational perceptions about what the job market offered and how they could utilize or expand it. Through the lens of gender, Cohen reveals important questions about the meaning of mobility in migration processes and the transformation of immigrant cultures.

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The "True Professional Ideal" in America: A History. By Bruce A. Kimball (Cambridge, Mass., Blackwell Publishers, 1992) 429 pp. \$54.95

In the historiography of Western professions, liberal readings have centered on the transformation in the nineteenth century from traditional gentlemanly ministerial callings to modern occupational middle-class careers. In the sociological tradition Spencer, Veblen, Durkheim, Parsons on Weber, Larson on Marx, and recently, Abbott all assumed a dominant switch from the preceding genteel learned professions to specialized knowledge-based expert sciences that legitimized systems and boundaries of professional work.¹ An important revision is underway, claiming that modernist perspectives exaggerate the historical transformation. Vow, calling, office, rank, honor, character, public service, loyalty to a higher corporate good beyond ambition and self: these preindustrial, precommercial, nonadversarial civic values have persisted historically in the rhetoric and ideology of professional discourse.

Industrialism, urbanism, the middle-class "culture of professionalism" were less decisive than supposed. For instance, Ross on the United States has recently characterized the republican ideology of American exceptionalism as formative on the origins of the late nineteenth-century social science disciplines. Haber maintained that eighteenth-century

1 Herbert Spencer, *The Study of Sociology* (New York, 1893); Thorstein Veblen, *The Instinct of Workmanship, and the State of Industrial Arts* (New York, 1918); Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society* (Glencoe, Ill., 1947); Talcott Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action, III* (New York, 1947); Magali Larson, *The Rise of Professionalism: A Sociological Analysis* (Berkeley, 1977); Andrew Abbot, *The System of Professions: An Essay on the Division of Labor* (Chicago, 1988).