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This Woman's Work: A comprehensive Analysis of the Domestic Workers who Swept the Shards of a Shattered Glass Ceiling

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**This Woman's Work: A Comprehensive Analysis of the Domestic Workers who Swept the
Shards of a Shattered Glass Ceiling**

An Honors Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors Studies in
Political Science

By:

Grier McClard

Fall 2023

Political Science

Fulbright College of the Arts and Sciences

The University of Arkansas

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I am eager to thank my mother; without whom the fire inside me may not have been ignited. I thank her for instilling and aiding my sense of curiosity through music; I truly believe that listening to System of a Down and Rage Against the Machine on car rides home from elementary school shaped my psyche just as much as formal education. My mother taught me that it is possible to step in and *do something* which positively impacts communities on a global scale, and since 2016, she has worked tirelessly to aid people struggling with food insecurity as the founder of the *Little Free Pantry* nonprofit.

I am also indebted to my thesis committee, comprised of three powerful women. My advisor, Dr. Shirin Saeidi, who has consistently inspired me as both an academic and a woman. Dr. Saeidi's persistent passion for her students as well as her area of study has heavily influenced my college career from my first semester with her three years ago. Dr. Kirstin Erickson, my non-departmental committee member, has been an inspiration to me for a long time. I grew up playing piano under the same instruction as Dr. Erickson's daughter, Ruby, who I adored as both a beautiful pianist and academic. I would not find out, until my college years, that her mother was just as inspiring. Dr. Erickson is a passionate, articulate anthropologist, who, at the date of the defense, is doing fieldwork in the Sonoran Desert. Her dedication to the study of the Mexican American Borderlands and the nations of people which reside within continually reminds me of my career goals to work in immigration, in service of those who sacrifice more than I, an Arkansas-born, white woman, could ever know. To my departmental representative, Dr. Angela Maxwell, whose literature on the feminist Second Wave helps spur the discussion of its impacts.

I also must thank all the authors from which I have gathered my research and the feminists throughout our history that laid my path to education through their compassion and anger.

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to all women stuck cleaning up messes they did not create.

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Introduction:

Like most children, I had no real conceptions of class other than that which I was exposed to on television and in books; in my family, the popular choice was Harry Potter. I knew that Ronald Weasley came from a family with little money, and despite the work his father did for the ministry of magic, his lack of wealth made his family a target for relentless bullying by the wealthy Malfoy family. I did not yet understand why wealth presented this power to discriminate, but I knew that old clothes and hand-me-downs would result in judgement. My father thought it was important that from a young age, I understood that I was not Ron Weasley, nor was he Arthur.¹

For some time when I was younger, my family employed a woman to clean our house. She was the wife of a man who my dad would connect with anytime he needed any contracted work done on the house. Both spoke English as their second language, though I rarely heard her speak. She would come to our house once a week to deep clean and do laundry, the least favorite chore in our household. She worked diligently and quietly.

Although I couldn't place my confusion at that age, I always wondered how a perceived privilege for my mom (the ability to work from home) was a job for someone else. Little to my knowledge, there were, and are, thousands of women, most of whom are Latina or Black, engaged in this ritualistic trade with affluent families. Now, as a woman graduating with her degrees in Spanish, Political Science, and Latin American studies, this arrangement my family partook in raises some questions. Was my mother wrong to provide a job to someone who solicited her services? If so, why should the responsibility always fall on the mother?

¹ Rowling, J.K. Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone. New York: Scholastic, 1999. Print.

I draw my inspiration for this thesis from Carol Hanisch's 1970 article titled *Personal is Political*; while I critique the popular feminism which resulted from second wave works like this one, Hanisch's primary goal of bridging the binaries between social issues and political problems forced me to question how, for many women, those binaries do not exist. Hanisch frames her argument by discussing how popular feminist issues (abortion, birth control, and the division of household labor) are personal problems which should be dealt with in the private confidence of the domicile though these issues can only be fixed with widespread political activism. Women do not need therapy to cope with an oppressive system, but instead should arm themselves with tools to tweak it. Although Hanisch has several profound points, her argument falls short in several areas.

For one, she draws a distinct separation between groups of people which commonly overlap. Hanisch states "women, like blacks, workers, must stop blaming ourselves for our 'failures'", almost with complete disregard for the hundreds of thousands of black, working, women (Hanisch 1970). Hanisch's framing of women who do not to participate in the second wave feminist movement as 'apolitical', or that their lack of participation is representative of a 'choice' they made. Hanisch wraps up her article in a manner that suggests that even she might doubt her words:

"We should figure out why many women don't want to do action. Maybe there is something wrong with the action or something wrong with why we are doing the action or maybe the analysis of why the action is necessary is not clear enough in our minds." (Hanisch 1970)

In 2006, Hanisch wrote a new introduction to be included with the original 1970 article, where she concedes certain failures of her original work, naming two phrases that had bothered

her for the past few decades: “Women are smart not to struggle alone” and “it is no worse to be in the home than in the rat race of the job world” (Hanisch 1970; 1-2).² While Hanisch’s critique of these phrases primarily include how the former doesn’t acknowledge the advances that can be made through individual struggle, and how the latter suggests women with jobs feel the same struggle as women whose work is their home and children. While her sentiments over these statements are true, Hanisch does not touch on the broader problem which I and other feminist critics (namely Teresa Man Ling Lee, Valli Rajah, and Kimberly Christensen) pose; Hanisch’s article, along with many other works written by white women in the 1960s and 70s, fail to reflect on the privilege of choice, and how the authors see no clear overlap between the power dynamics of race and gender.

The phrase “women are *smart* not to struggle alone” implies a strong element of choice in a woman’s belonging to a collective group, and that women who do not do so lack a certain level of intelligence (Hanisch 1970).³ This phrase completely disregards women whose language and geographical barriers preventing them from joining political movements, as well as extreme instances of domestic violence which to this day silence women. The most surprising observation which this phrase overlooks is how it had only been several decades since even privileged, white women had the ability to leave their children and homes under the care of domestic workers, to travel to forums and conferences politicize their activism.

I do not disagree with Hanisch’s title, the personal *is* political, but many women lack the clear *choice*-- participation. In 2017, following backlash towards Donald Trump’s election in 2016, feminists across the United States organized a national “Day Without Women” protest to

² Hanisch, C. (1970). The Personal Is Political. *Notes from the Second Year: Womens Liberation*.

³ Hanisch, C. (1970). The Personal Is Political. *Notes from the Second Year: Womens Liberation*.

coincide with International Women’s Day. The organizers urged women to take off from work and march in solidarity with the protest at the capitol, but it was quickly met with backlash from women who had a feeling the women’s strike was in poor taste. Meghan Daum, *Los Angeles Times* columnist, while discussing the “Day Without Women” protest, stated “make no mistake, March 8th will mostly be a day without women who can afford to skip work and shuffle childcare and household duties to someone else” (Daum 2017).⁴ Of course, the organizers of the protests were aware of this problem, and only urged those who ‘feel they can’ protest to take the day off, and to strike for “those who cannot”. Many twitter users took this literally, sharing why they strike:

“#IStrikeFor all the unrecognized ways women drive our economy. @domesticworkers & caregivers take care of us; who cares 4 them?” (Haley [@JMichaelUSA], 2017)⁵

This tweet raises the same concerns brought by Daum; responsibilities like childcare cannot simply be abandoned, someone *must* take care of the home and children, but for financially privileged women, this job can easily be passed off to someone else. Historically, this responsibility has mostly fallen to women of color.

Domestic labor is seemingly unlike any other labor sector. The U.S. department of labor provides a broad definition, grouping all jobs of a ‘household’ nature in a private home as

⁴Daum, Meghan. “Op-Ed: 'A Day without a Woman' Is a Strike for Privileged Protesters.” *Los Angeles Times*, Los Angeles Times, 5 Mar. 2017, <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-daum-a-day-without-a-woman-20170305-story.html>.

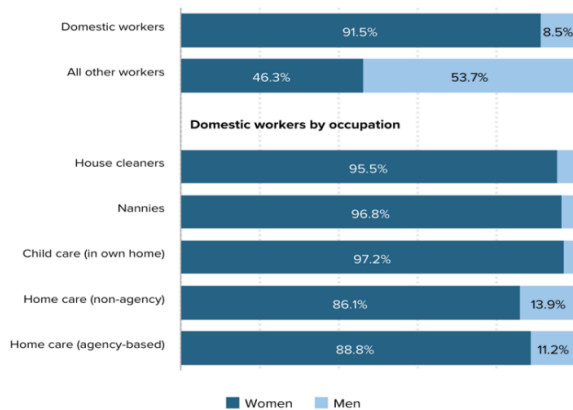
⁵The Washington Post. “‘A Day without a Woman’ Protest Faces Backlash.” *The Denver Post*, The Denver Post, 8 Mar. 2017, <https://www.denverpost.com/2017/03/07/a-day-without-a-woman-protest/>.

domestic labor. These jobs include everything from cooking and cleaning, to child rearing. It is not unusual for types of labor to be gendered. There are many fields where the percentage of male workers significantly outweigh the percentage of females, however, since the census data has existed in America, the sex disparity in domestic work has been extremely high, at over 90 percent in 1880 and today in 2022.⁶ In the *Domestic Workers Chartbook*, a 2020 statistical analysis of domestic worker demographics, data taken from censuses and surveys are compiled into graphs which show how domestic labor is disproportionately gendered.

Figure A.

The gender demographics of domestic labor and its subcategories.⁷

Share of workers who are women or men, for domestic workers, for all other workers, and by domestic worker occupation, 2019



Note: To ensure sufficient sample sizes, this figure draws from pooled 2017–2019 microdata. Source: Economic Policy Institute (EPI) analysis of Current Population Survey basic monthly microdata, EPI Current Population Survey Extracts, Version 1.0.2 (2020). <https://microdata.epi.org>

⁶Wolfe J. Kandra J. Engdahl L. & Shierholz H. (2020 May 14). Domestic Workers Chartbook Economic Policy Institute. <https://files.epi.org/pdf/194214.pdf>

⁷ *Domestic Workers Chartbook: A comprehensive look at the demographics, wages, benefits, and poverty rates of the professionals who care for our family members and clean our homes.* Economic Policy Institute. (2020, May 14), <https://www.epi.org/publication/domestic-workers-chartbook-a-comprehensive-look-at-the-demographics-wages-benefits-and-poverty-rates-of-the-professionals-who-care-for-our-family-members-and-clean-our-homes/#chart1>

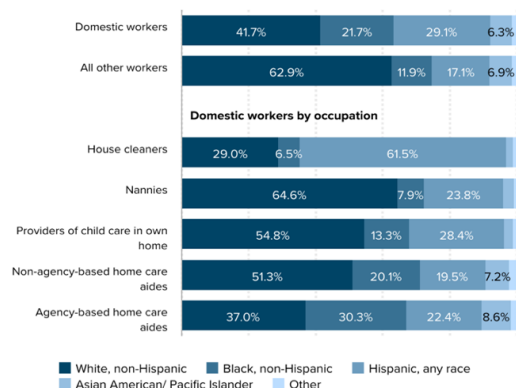
Domestic labor has always been gendered as woman's work, but along with the gendering of domestic service, it is highly racialized. In labor categories other than domestic work, white individuals represent over 62 percent of those employed, however, in the United States domestic labor industry, less than 42 percent of workers are white. While the latter statistic may seem high enough to posit that domestic service might not be a racialized industry, it is important to keep in mind that white people still make up over 75 percent of the United States population, while black and Latino individuals make up about 14 percent and 18 percent respectively. As a visual learner, I find graphs which show the demographic makeup of domestic labor extremely helpful in understanding just how skewed the racial makeup is in the various categories of domestic work.

Figure B.

The demographic makeup of domestic workers by race.⁸

⁸Wolfe J. Kandra J. Engdahl L. & Shierholz H. (2020 May 14). Domestic Workers Chartbook Economic Policy Institute. <https://files.epi.org/pdf/194214.pdf>

Share of workers who are of a given race or ethnicity, for domestic workers, for all other workers, and by domestic worker occupation, 2019



Note: To ensure sufficient sample sizes, this figure draws from pooled 2017–2019 microdata.
 Source: Economic Policy Institute (EPI) analysis of Current Population Survey basic monthly microdata, EPI Current Population Survey Extracts, Version 1.0.2 (2020).
<https://microdata.epi.org>

Visual representations of the statistics of Even today in a country many like to call a cultural melting pot, black and Latina women perform over half of all domestic work, with higher percentages in industries with more grunt work (cleaning). Though the historical responsibility of domestic work has fallen on various parties, as an industry, it is a task, a responsibility, that women of privilege have consistently placed on the shoulders of those lacking the political and economic power to resist it.

Now, the question begs, if protest organizers and participants knew that their protest methodology was unintentionally exclusive of a large percentage of women of color across the country, then how long has popular feminist activism relied on or expanded the domestic service industry? And if modern feminists truly want to be inclusive, *why do they not alter their methodology?*

Methodology:

Although at this point it feels like a well-adapted law in feminist science, I must concede that I use an intersectional theoretical approach in this thesis. Intersectionality, as manifested by its creator Kimberlé Crenshaw, is a tool used to examine peoples' relationships with power, by looking at the *intersection* between their race, gender, and class through personal narrative. Professor Crenshaw coined the term over two decades ago, as a framework through which the discrimination towards black women could be explained.⁹ While it may seem unnecessary to disclose that I support the well adopted third-wave feminist understanding that converging identities layer on top of one another, to either construct walls, or stairs, to one's advancement up the social hierarchy, I will examine and deconstruct literature by prominent feminists of the past who, very blatantly, attempted to postpone the advancement of this now accepted theory through silencing, or speaking over, women of color.

I feel I must acknowledge Intersectionality and credit its original founders in my methodology for two main reasons. The primary reason being that black and brown women have always known that their experiences were affected by both their race and gender. Crenshaw, who developed intersectional theory, has major doubts over the way it has recently been deployed by white feminists across America and Europe to describe their own discrimination and need for diversity in an ultimately depoliticized manner that does not resonate within the mind of Crenshaw, who describes that deployment as "unrecognizable".¹⁰ In a 2017 interview, Crenshaw

⁹ Crenshaw, Kimberlé () "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," University of Chicago Legal Forum: Vol. 1989: Iss. 1, Article 8.

¹⁰ *Kimberlé Crenshaw on Intersectionality, more than two decades later*. Columbia Law School. (2017, June 8). <https://www.law.columbia.edu/news/archive/kimberle-crenshaw-intersectionality-more-two-decades-later>

explained the phenomenon through which intersectionality and its goals changed as it reached a larger audience; she explains two common errors in contemporary interpretation of the term, stating that intersectionality is often thought to be a “grand theory of everything” or an excuse for inaction by reveling in the ‘complexity’ of the theory.¹¹ Both of these misconceptions largely remove women of color from the narrative of intersectionality through either focusing on converging identities other than race, or by solely examining the big theoretical picture, ignoring how the intersection of blackness and femininity effect and hold consequences for real individuals.

There are, admittedly, many published critiques of intersectionality, discussing everything on how it fails as a Marxist theory for its positioning of class, alongside, not above, race and gender. Other critiques focus heavily on intersectionality’s lack of ability to describe large complex social issues when its guiding focus is individual narrative. Many feminists of all races are quick to easily dismiss these critiques and broader theoretical applications as inherently racist or problematic. In his essay *Colorblind Intersectionality*, Devon Carbado responds to these claims, stating “many scholars frame intersectionality more narrowly than is theoretically necessary” (Carbado 2013, 35).¹² This narrow framework results in an ignorance of

¹¹Kimberlé Crenshaw on *Intersectionality, more than two decades later*. Columbia Law School. (2017, June 8). <https://www.law.columbia.edu/news/archive/kimberle-crenshaw-intersectionality-more-two-decades-later>

¹²Carbado, Devon W. “Colorblind Intersectionality.” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 38, no. 4, 2013, pp. 811–845., <https://doi.org/10.1086/669666>.

intersectionality's utility in explaining social phenomena (such as the importance of blackness in early homophobic rhetoric).¹³

Many pieces of important literature exist today which utilize the concept of intersectionality in populations other than black women; works like *Colorblind Intersectionality* show the necessity of theory which extends beyond Crenshaw's original manifestations. I draw back from the work of my predecessors and attempt to return intersectionality to its conceptive state-- a theory meant to pin and describe socioeconomic inequalities faced by women of color, here in the United States of America. While I find the original theoretical background of intersectionality according to Kimberlé Crenshaw most useful in this thesis, I do not wish to spur an essentialist view of intersectionality, locking black women and women of color within the confines of personal subjecthood. My research on domestic service, a gendered and racialized industry, requires examining the way in which the two intersect to primarily affect women of color.

In addition to a guiding, intersectional lens, this thesis utilizes a systematic analysis of a variety of texts revolving around a central topic, instead of an in-depth literary analysis of one or two sources. There is a large quantity of existing literature which examines the gendered and racialized relationship between white women and their domestic help, which throughout history have disproportionately been women of color. There is also substantial second wave feminist literature which situates women with financial privilege in the unique (at the time) position to hand off their domestic duties to paid workers and go get jobs. While both subjects are fascinating, in this thesis, I aim to intersect the two, and show how both the often-unconscious

¹³Carbado, Devon W. "Colorblind Intersectionality." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 38, no. 4, 2013, pp. 811–845., <https://doi.org/10.1086/669666>.

exclusion of women of color from second wave feminist activism and the choice of many women of color to align with the civil rights movement instead of concurrent feminist movements in the mid-to-late 20th century orbit the gendered and racialized field of domestic service.

The search for relevant literature involved navigating Mullins library's expansive physical and digital archives. I desired a mixed bag of primary sources, critical theory, and reflections on the treatment of black and Latino female domestic workers spanning over two centuries of American history. While I do utilize a few full-length books, I gathered the bulk of my content through perusing scholarly journal articles. While I found all my sources by searching for relevant keywords in the University of Arkansas libraries database, which had digital copies available on ProQuest, JStor, EBSCO, and Cambridge. I also utilize U.S census data to explore patterns of domestic employment synchronous to the feminist second wave along with information found on the official National Domestic Workers Alliance website.

I will utilize a piece of new theory outlined by theorist Moya Bailey, *Misogynoir*. As opposed to simply encompassing the racism and sexism experienced by black women, Bailey describes misogynoir as “co-constitutive”, explaining that the sexism and racism don't stack up on top of one another, but instead the “simultaneous and interlocking” discrimination which links at the intersection of race and gender.¹⁴ While intersectional feminism acknowledges the barrier presented by both race and gender, misogynoir focuses on the image of black women propelled by “white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal society”.¹⁵ The term Misogynoir, combining

¹⁴ Bailey M. (2022). *Misogynoir transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance*. New York University Press. https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv27ftv0s.4#metadata_info_tab_contents

¹⁵ Bailey M. (2022). *Misogynoir transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance*. New York University Press. https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv27ftv0s.4#metadata_info_tab_contents

misogyny and the French word for black, does not aim to describe the oppression directly faced by black women, but instead the false, insulting image of themselves created and perpetuated by American society and the media. Later in this thesis, I will be describing the harmful archetype of the mammy, utilizing Bailey's formation of Misogynoir in analyzing how a commercially sold, vile caricature of a black, female domestic worker helped spur a racialized societal perception of the domestic service industry.

Through the utilization of these theories, I attempt to show a pattern of treatment towards black women throughout history, particularly black domestics, at the hands of white women. Unlike most feminist literature focusing on the oppression of women at the hands of men, this thesis should pass the Bechdel test, or it should tackle the joint oppression faced by black women through their interactions with white women—men are not a subject I care to delve into, as the literature is already exhaustive.

Although I utilize over thirty sources examining women's' conscious and subconscious racism towards domestic workers of color, the amount of research previously done into this specific subject is limited. Domestic service is what some economists refer to as an “under the table” industry, resulting in a significant lack in specific data examining the number of domestic workers across the country, as many, regardless of reason, prefer to stay off the books. Authors Mary Romero in *Maid in the U.S.A.*, and Pierrette Hongdagneu-Sotelo in *Doméstica*, discuss stories of social inequities faced by domestic workers of color in the United States through both personal narrative and statistical analysis, while Cecelia Conrad, in Angie Maxwell and Todd Shields' book *The Legacy of Second-Wave Feminism in American Politics*, explains the strides toward equality made during the time of the second wave feminist movement which permitted

black women to climb the societal ladder of success.¹⁶ Little, if any, current literature exists which examines how the certain well known activists of the feminist Second-Wave created a *plan* for economic liberation which vocally relied on and broadened the necessity of paid domestic labor.

¹⁶ All authors and books mentioned discuss similar subject matter to various parts of this thesis, which synthesizes relevant literature from other sources.

History of Black domestics in the United States:

The history of domestic laborers in the United States dates far back before the conception of our nation-state. American chattel slavery and the enslavement of Africans was predicated on false science conceived by 17th and 18th century naturalists, who utilized a form of eugenics to ‘prove’ that those of African descent held less personhood than their European and colonial counterparts.¹⁷ This theory of a ‘natural’ racial hierarchy was supported by biological ‘evidence’ which profiled races based on the shapes and sizes of various bones, like the cranium and the pelvis. In addition to being deemed a less evolved species, Black men and women were also seen as being more apt at heavy, manual labor. 18th century naturalists described the bodies of black women as strong, fertile, and good for certain work, while simultaneously labeling them as inferior humans, if not dehumanizing them completely. Due to these widely held juxtaposing views, the combination of sex and strength soon became the archetypal image of the black woman for centuries to come.

In early American history, black women served as slaves to the land, the household, and their own bodies. At auctions, their bodies were laid bare as potential buyers were able to size them up based on their sexual and reproductive appeal, and their estimated ability to tend to tasks around the domicile.¹⁸ Unlike male slaves, who’s brutal labor was for the most part isolated to

¹⁷ Morgan J. L. (2004). *Laboring women: Reproduction and gender in the making of new world slavery*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/2953316.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Afa70ddbcd6c3371ce7f666a0877ed75b&ab_segments=&origin=&acceptTC=1

¹⁸ Bridgewater P. D. (2001). *UN/re/dis covering slave breeding in Thirteenth amendment jurisprudence*. Washington and Lee University School of Law Scholarly Commons. Retrieved February 22 2023 from <https://scholarlycommons.law.wlu.edu/crsj/vol7/iss1/4/>

the field, female slaves were scattered both on the plantation and within the house.¹⁹ Essentially, female slaves reaped no benefits that their white women counterparts did. Female slaves were still expected to perform rigorous manual labor alongside men, while also tending to all the needs of the slaveowner in their house. In this way, domestic labor in early United States history not only became gendered, but heavily racialized, with the two factors being impossible to separate.

The domestic labor of female slaves was not confined to the caring of the owner's house. Though the value of female slaves was not always inherently tied to their reproductive ability, the close of the slave trade in the mid 1700's resulted in a new, sinisterly violent method of keeping slavery alive—coerced and forced reproduction.²⁰ Slaves could no longer be purchased outright, resulting in slave owners 'breeding' their slaves to replenish their work force. Black women, from the foundation of this nation, were reduced to, and utilized for, their sex. In addition to forced conception, the practice of 'wet nursing' was pervasive in the antebellum south during the 18th and 19th century.²¹ Enslaved women working as 'wet nurses' had to have borne their own children, as their role required the women to be in a perpetual state of lactation. These wet nurses would be responsible for breast feeding the babies of the slave-owning white women. Both forced reproduction and wet nursing were elements of slavery intertwined with the gender of the slave.

¹⁹Morgan J. L. (2004). *Laboring women: Reproduction and gender in the making of new world slavery*. University of Pennsylvania Press. https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/2953316.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Afa70ddbcd6c3371ce7f666a0877ed75b&ab_segments=&origin=&acceptTC=1

²⁰ Bridgewater P. D. (2001). *UN/re/dis covering slave breeding in Thirteenth amendment jurisprudence*. Washington and Lee University School of Law Scholarly Commons. Retrieved February 22 2023 from <https://scholarlycommons.law.wlu.edu/crsj/vol7/iss1/4/>

²¹West E. & Knight R. J. (2017). *Mothers' milk: Slavery wet-nursing and black and white women in the Antebellum South*. *Journal of Southern History* 83(1) 37–68. <https://doi.org/10.1353/soh.2017.0001>

While male slaves were still subject to sexual manipulation and exploitation, the ownership and control over the female black body. In this analysis, I do not mean to suggest that female slaves ‘had it worse’ than their male counterparts, however, the perceived ability of female slaves to birth and rear children while simultaneously tending to tasks around the property made their scope of labor exponentially larger. Although contemporary United States does not recognize or condone either forced conception or coerced wet nursing as regular practices in our society, both were unfortunately common occurrences and were viewed by its practitioners as necessary domestic labor performed by the enslaved women.²² Though modern eyes might not see how these barbaric states were domestic labor, they involved the nursing and rearing of either the children of the house or children bred to care for it. While most nurses today work in hospitals, many still provide home aid, and the word nurse originated from the role of ‘wet-nurse’ as the nomenclature for the word *nurse* derives from a Latin word which means *suckle*.²³ Though nursing is no longer an inherently domestic field, it originated from the domestic help responsible for nursing white babies in their youth. Child-rearing is still an important role of many employed as domestic laborers (babysitters, nannies, au pairs, etc.), and originally these roles were all performed by the female slave, who was either the nurse or “mammy” to the white children in their care. There was a popular notion, though incongruent with reality, that these female slaves freely enjoyed their work caring for the children of the family and tending to the needs of the house. The ‘mammy’ stereotype and imaging were born as a result of this belief-- a form of propaganda explicitly depicting the happiness of black women

²² Bridgewater P. D. (2001). UN/re/dis covering slave breeding in Thirteenth amendment jurisprudence. Washington and Lee University School of Law Scholarly Commons. Retrieved February 22 2023 from <https://scholarlycommons.law.wlu.edu/crsj/vol7/iss1/4/>

²³ Bridgewater P. D. (2001). UN/re/dis covering slave breeding in Thirteenth amendment jurisprudence. Washington and Lee University School of Law Scholarly Commons. Retrieved February 22 2023 from <https://scholarlycommons.law.wlu.edu/crsj/vol7/iss1/4/>

in their servitude to white families.²⁴ In her essay “Mammy and Miss America—From Plantation to the Fashion Industry”, Alexandra Radu posits that these overexaggerated caricatures were the perfect subject for commercialization in the south, as they represented white womens’ search “for the black buxom southern woman to do their house chores and to take care of their children.”²⁵ The ‘mammy’ can be seen throughout centuries of visual content. The ‘inspiration’ for *Aunt Jemima* pancake mix advertisements in the late 19th century was the mammy stereotype, while other corporations, like Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, utilized the concept more overtly. In *MGM*’s household favorite show *Tom and Jerry* contains a character commonly referred to as “Mammy Two Shoes” though she remains unnamed; this character is portrayed as a large, black woman who is primarily seen in an apron and cleaning the house. While her character is unnamed, watchers dubbed the woman “mammy” due to her appearance and perceived role as a domestic worker.²⁶

Along with the racial characterizations of black women, white women also earned several features thought to be inherent to their race and gender. Many of these traits directly contrast that which defined black women throughout the 17th through 20th century. While the ‘ideal’ black women were strong, resilient, and sexually promiscuous, ‘ideal’ white women were weak, fragile, and virginal. Obviously, these traits do not accurately define or represent both races of women, yet as they were taken to be scientific fact during early American history, they created

²⁴ Bridgewater P. D. (2001). UN/re/dis covering slave breeding in Thirteenth amendment jurisprudence. Washington and Lee University School of Law Scholarly Commons. <https://scholarlycommons.law.wlu.edu/crsj/vol17/iss1/4/>

²⁵Radu, Alexandra. “Mammy and Miss America – from Plantation to the Fashion Industry.” *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, vol. 92, 2013, pp. 778–783., <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.08.754>.

²⁶Jim Crow Museum. (2013, January). *Mammy two shoes* . Ferris State University. Retrieved March 27, 2023, from <https://www.ferris.edu/HTMLS/news/jimcrow/question/2013/january.htm>

barriers for women that controlled and confined their actions. In her novel *They Were Her Property*, author Stephanie Jones-Rogers explores the chilling, often unknown narrative of violence inflicted on slaves and black domestics by the woman of the house; she provides many firsthand historical accounts of the violence inflicted by white slave-owning women, and their sentiments following abolition. Black women, the resulting turmoil was generations of sexual trauma, but for white women, their perceived identity acted as a writ of innocence from wrong. While white women did not represent most slave owners, there were many which accumulated vast power within their agricultural empires.

The patriarchal notion that white women were incapable of exerting power over others resulted in their heinous actions rendered invisible.²⁷ Even during this early period in American history, white women acted as agents in the mistreatment of female slaves. White, married, slave owning women might not have had the power to exercise control over their husbands, but they were able, and did, regularly exhaust their influence over both black men and black women. While black women were expected to perform manual labor outside of the domicile like their male counterparts, the historical connection between black women and domestic labor, though narrowly discussed, is evident and pervasive.

Though historians did not attempt to unwrite the support of slavery as voiced by white women, the misogynistic gaze held by onlookers resulted in a dangerous misinterpretation—the support of slavery by white women was attributed to their passivity and inability to think outside of the status quo.²⁸ Men from the north were perplexed by white women’s support of slavery,

²⁷Jones-Rogers S. E. (2020). *They were her property*. Yale University Press.
<https://yalebooks.yale.edu/book/9780300218664/they-were-her-property/>

²⁸Jones-Rogers S. E. (2020). *They were her property*. Yale University Press.
<https://yalebooks.yale.edu/book/9780300218664/they-were-her-property/>

suggesting that if they had known the truth, the inherently kind white women would denounce it. In the epilogue of her work, Jones-Rogers discusses the accounts of abolition written by these slave-owning white women, and their blatant ignorance of any violence or harm they inflicted on others. Freed slaves were advertised in wanted posters titled “Lost Friends” made by their female masters who thought of them ‘like family’. To slave owning women, the relationship between master and servant was reciprocal, where both provided care for the other, completely overlooking their role as oppressors. The crimes which some white women committed against their slaves went unnoticed by the historical eye for centuries, as historical scribes of the era had no interest in the movement or behavior of women.²⁹ The evidence confirming the true narrative of women slave owners does not come from the women, but instead lived experience from slaves. Financial and legal documents as well as personal letters uncovered many decades later were the only thing capable of proving that the patriarchal assumption that white women were incapable of brutality against those in subservient positions to them was wrong.

Moving forward past emancipation and the introduction of the 14th amendment, black Americans were rewarded with a reduced version of American citizenship, with far less economic and political mobility than their white counterparts. In her profound 1991 series of lectures, Judith Shklar reduces the concept of *American Citizenship* down to its two most fundamental rights, granting citizens the right to vote, and the right to *earn*. Shklar argues that American citizenship mirrors certain aspects of the highly exclusive Aristotelian notion of citizenship, where men with material and means were the only ones worthy of participating in civil society, while “women and slaves exist to serve them domestically.”³⁰ Shklar explores the

³⁰ Shklar, Judith N. *American Citizenship: The Quest for Inclusion*. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1991

de facto and *de jure* manners through which the white men holding power in the United States could simultaneously restrict the rights to both voting and earning for both women and recently freed slaves. These methods, include but are not limited to institutionalized literacy tests, segregated schools and workplaces, and physical violence against those who advocated for their rights. Although the union government ended slavery as *de jure* practice, black women, with little access to tools to increase their social standing, were still locked in the confines of service to the same white masters.³¹ The majority of black women had no literacy skills and were forced to either continue their work for their previous masters or move to the city in the search of a new job, in either scenario, many black women returned to domestic service. Not only was it something that many black women had immense experience in, but the benefits provided by their coercive contracts, including but not limited to food and shelter, made it hard to turn domestic jobs down.

Though the state of domestic labor remained similar after to collapse of the antebellum south as it was during the era, for the first time, black women possessed the ability to negotiate their circumstances with their employers without the threat of physical retaliation looming over their heads.³² While many employed black women still had to take care of the homestead, cleaning, cooking, and rearing the children for next to no money, they had the ability to choose their hours, the family who they worked for, and who they worked with. In many cases, the desire to work separately from their white employers was wholly mutual.³³ In many instances,

³¹Hunter T. W. (2005). To 'joy my freedom: Southern black women's lives and labors after the Civil War. ACLS History E-Book Project. https://www-fulcrum-org.eul.proxy.openathens.net/epubs_download_interval/4q77fr444?chapter_index=4&locale=en&title=CHAPTER+TWO+Reconstruction+and+the+Meanings+of+Freedom+%28page+21%29

³²Jones-Rogers S. E. (2020). They were her property. Yale University Press. <https://yalebooks.yale.edu/book/9780300218664/they-were-her-property/>

³³ Hunter T. W. (2005). To 'joy my freedom: Southern black women's lives and labors after the Civil War. ACLS History E-Book Project. <https://www-fulcrum->

the domestic workers required peace from their employers to do their jobs, and if any complaints arose with their performance, they were allowed to leave, and many did. In the late 1800s, homeowners had trouble retaining their help, and many would have to hire new service daily as they learned what newly-free black women would not tolerate as domestic laborers. Although quitting was no guarantee that new work would be better, newfound mobility allowed black women working in poor conditions to utilize their agency to change their circumstances.

Though the benefits of wage-labor propelled the advancement of black women and their families, allowing them to save money and provide for themselves, white employers of black domestic workers sought to combat these advancements at every turn. While the privileged white men were concerned with their own work relations, they left their wives in charge of hiring and negotiating with the domestic workers.³⁴ Many white women abused their help just as they did during the height of slavery. When a hired domestic worker refused to do a redundant task or bend to the wishes of the woman of the house, they often became victims of violence at the hand of both the wife and husband. In a few cases, such disputes would cost women their lives.

In her book *To 'Joy my Freedom: Southern black women's lives after the Civil War*, Tera Hunter describes accounts of Eliza Jane Ellison worked as a domestic laborer in the Walton family house; in a dispute which arose when Mrs. Ellison asked Mrs. Walton for compensation in performing duties outside of the realm of her contract, a physical altercation broke out resulting in the death of Mrs. Ellison. Eventually, Mr. Walton became involved, and shot Mrs.

org.eul.proxy.openathens.net/epubs_download_interval/4q77fr444?chapter_index=4&locale=en&title=CHAPTER+TWO+Reconstruction+and+the+Meanings+of+Freedom+%28page+21%29

³⁴Jones-Rogers S. E. (2020). *They were her property*. Yale University Press.
<https://yalebooks.yale.edu/book/9780300218664/they-were-her-property/>

Ellison several times for “insulting” his wife, Mrs. Ellison’s employer.³⁵ Though the documentation for domestic disputes like these is limited to narrative accounts of the victims’ families, it is very clear that even though the threat of physical retaliation was not inherent in the careers of new domestics in the post-civil war era, it still existed as a method to deter the workers from speaking out against their white employers.

Although these historical examples of the treatment of domestic workers seems far from what we as American conceive as reality in the present, the work performed by domestics, along with the demographic of those in domestic positions, has hardly changed at all. Though much of what we consider employer malpractice in the present is illegal, barriers exist for many domestic workers to challenge their treatment. Though conscripted servitude ended over two hundred years ago, it is still extremely common for wealthy women to request the domestic services of women of color in exchange for nickels and dimes. While I have examined *why* black women are the ‘appropriate’ candidates for domestic labor, dating back to historical assumptions on the capability of black women to perform reproductive labor, I have not yet discussed why, following the abolition of slavery, white women continued to enlist their service.

³⁵ Hunter T. W. (2005). To 'joy my freedom: Southern black women's lives and labors after the Civil War. ACLS History E-Book Project. https://www-fulcrum-org.eu1.proxy.openathens.net/epubs_download_interval/4q77fr444?chapter_index=4&locale=en&title=CHAPTER+TWO+Reconstruction+and+the+Meanings+of+Freedom+%28page+21%29

The Second Wave:

Prior to discussing the changes in perspective of domestic work in the ‘second wave’ of feminism, I must first provide context on what is considered the first wave. Women organized and fought for their suffrage in the late 19th and early 20th century. Unlike the Second Wave, the first wave of feminism managed to triumph over the issues of race in the era. Both white women and black women alike, though organizing separately, fought for the right to vote.³⁶ Although issues of race continually plagued black women even after they gained *de jure* voting privileges, the single issue of voting accessibility was one from which women of all races could stand to gain.

Unlike the first wave which legitimately fought for the broaden of rights for all women, the Second-Wave was exclusionary towards many, not only on the basis of race, but on class as well.³⁷ Indeed, the goals of the second wave only benefited a select class of women, but it did so at the expense of women of color. The main goal of the Second Wave which I argue was not quite a widespread feminist movement at all, but instead, a movement towards the economic, political, and sexual advancement of a small class of women, was entry into the professional sphere. Many women were employed prior to the Second Wave, yet white women fought instead to not be employees, but bosses.

Both historically and in the recent past, white women desire someone to ‘take over’ the tasks that society views as the woman of the house’s responsibility. Since domestic labor is

³⁶ Yang, M. An intimate dialog between race and gender at Women’s Suffrage Centennial. *Humanit Soc Sci Commun* 7, 65 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-020-00554-3>

³⁷Taylor, Ula Y. “Making Waves: The Theory and Practice of Black Feminism.” *Black Scholar*, vol. 28, no. 2, Summer 1998, p. 18. *EBSCOhost*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00064246.1998.11430912>.

gendered as well as racialized, it has always been up to women to perform tasks in that realm; however, women with power (white women) had the unique ability to dictate their domestic chores to others, and for the most part, they acted as the sole employer and manager to their domestic help as men wanted no involvement in that field. Once the housework was assigned to someone else, then white women had the mobility to act in their interest, often pursuing charity, careers, and yes, protest. Prior to the second-wave feminist movement of the 1960's and 1970s, white women obtained the domestic help of women of color by taking advantage of and manipulating their socioeconomic circumstance; once the women had the freedom to escape their nuclear families, they then could attend to their charities, have careers outside the home, and protest.

The feminist movement of the 1960's and 1970's pioneered by famous figures like Betty Friedan, is popularly portrayed as homogeneous and race-blind, as its leaders claim to be, however, the movement only focused on issues which plagued upper-class white women. The main motivations of the historical movement which later went on to become the Second Wave of feminist thought were economic and sexual liberation.

In chapter one of Friedan's manifesto, titled The Problem that has No Name, she explains that the problem which 'tortures' women—to "want something more than my husband and my children and my home."³⁸ Throughout the rest of *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan focuses solely on the swift exit from domestic work into a career, stating "the only way for a woman, as for a man, to find herself, to know herself as a person, is by creative work of her own". Friedan provides further specificity that not any job fills the creative niche, and jobs which involve domestic work only increase internal turmoil for women, while simultaneously advocating for

³⁸ Friedan, B., 1963. *The Feminine Mystique*. 1st ed. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, INC. (pp. 27)

“professional nurseries” and “household help”.³⁹ If both notions are simultaneously true, then is Friedan’s “new life plan for women” to systematically ingrain the necessity of a career which damages women?

White women desired to alter the perceived association between themselves, homemaking, and weakness—all characteristics of bad laborers. Through grass-roots organization, political lobbying, and protest, these women propelled themselves into the workforce and out of their homes. However, the children conceived prior to this movement still needed care and housework still needed to be done—the responsibility, as always, fell to women of color.

There was little room for black women to participate in the political movement conceived in the minds of wealthy white women. After all, for all American history, black women were inherently tied to labor. The lack of socioeconomic mobility for black Americans prevented many from achieving the level of wealth and comfort required to have a single-income, nuclear family. Though women of color have always had families to tend to, they also have always had to work. While white women formed an international ‘feminist’ movement to prove that they were capable workers, black women fought in black liberation movements across the United States to foster their independence and destroy the association between themselves and the labor they had been conscripted and coerced into for generations.

Betty Friedan was a fierce liberator of women, but only those who experienced reality in the way she did. Throughout her popular novel, *The Feminine Mystique*, spurred the organization of women in the United States in Europe, Betty Friedan’s call to liberation could only be

³⁹ Friedan, B., 1963. *The Feminine Mystique*. 1st ed. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, INC. (pp.361)

understood by those living with enough wealth to view work as a choice.⁴⁰ Many of these white women were highly educated and suffocated within the confines of post-WWII patriarchal society. As opposed to working in low paying careers in service (jobs already occupied by poor white women and black women) white women sought positions in the corporate sector citing their intellect as warranting their ability to perform at an equal, or heightened, level to their male counterparts.

Though this thesis focuses on on the second wave movement's exclusion of black and brown women working in the domestic sphere, the primary issues of the movement excluded all but the educated, married, white woman. Friedan spoke of the desire to leave the suffocating house in search of a career as the "problem" which plagued women in general. Her popular literature has no regard to women of all races with no children, husband, or comfortable wealth—never once in *The Feminine Mystique* does Friedan give heart to the many women with no home to feel trapped in.

This highly exclusionary piece of media, read and consumed by educated women, acted as the catalyst for the Second Wave of feminism. This wave was race-blind, according to self-claiming 'anti-racist' women who were a part of it, and honestly, it was. While it was 'race-blind', this blindness came from ignoring issues of race which effect many women; however, the single narrative which propelled its supporters into action created a movement which spoke over true anti-racist movements.

Many black activists both then and now have vocalized their displeasure with the initiatives of the Second-Wave, most namely, popular intersectional feminist Bell Hooks, who in her book, *In Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, which criticizes Friedan's feminism,

⁴⁰ Friedan, B., 1963. *The Feminine Mystique*. 1st ed. [ebook] New York: W. W. Norton & Company, INC.

states “there will be no mass-based feminist movement as long as feminist ideas are only understood by a well-educated few” describing how the pedagogical language utilized in feminist movements serves to further exclude working class women without higher education (Hooks 2000).⁴¹

Though their intention was not directly rooted in hatred or racism, the ignorance and privilege of the women in the second wave rendered them incapable of understanding issues which primarily effected women of color. Though many of the feminists of the second wave did truly wish a utopian anti-racist society would come about, their tunnel-vision acted as a barrier to the realization of this reality. The primary problem of the second wave was that it made feminism its single issue, though bringing about the liberated society they desired required fighting racism as well. Second wave scholars and activists focused solely on the oppression felt by all women (misogyny) while not recognizing that black women had an additional barrier to equality standing in their way.

Prior to the second wave, throughout the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, white feminists critiqued the misogyny of black coalitions due to their lack of female leadership, not understanding that the brutality of racism made it a more precedented issue in the lives of many black women. What is ironic about white women’s disapproval of the misogyny of the civil rights movement is that the movement, though founded to increase the standing and ability of people of color, also fought for the elimination of sex-based discrimination for all races.⁴² The

⁴¹ Hooks, B. (1984). *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press.

⁴² King, Mary. Hayden, Casey. 1965. *Sex and Caste: A Kind of Memo*.

famous Civil Rights act of 1964 ended legal employment discrimination based on sex, benefitting women of all races.

Though white women did not fight for the inclusion or advancement of black women, black women fought for the opportunity of all women. While black women and white women regularly criticized one another's political movements during the mid-to-late 20th century, white women did so out of misguided privilege that the issues they faced took precedent to the issues black women faced, while black women criticized the Second-Wave of female liberation because of its exclusionary nature. There were many issues which mainly effected women of color, that the second wave of feminists largely ignored; including but not limited to welfare, social security, and of course, domestic service.

While their motivations might have been selfish, the white women who fought for their own social upward mobility did so gracefully, and effectively. The National Organization of Women (NOW), whose mission statement was written by Friedan as well, thought of themselves as radical opponents of inequality, yet by shifting national focus away from the black liberation movements of the 60's, the 'radical' approach merely cemented their elevated status.⁴³ Though NOW and the general 'second wave' did pave the way for some women to usurp power in lucrative careers, its liberation was focused on getting unemployed women into these careers. Millions of women never had the luxury, or freedom, to sacrifice their wages in search of something better.

The pass off of housework onto (under)paid domestic workers was sanctioned by both the National Organization of Women, as well as Betty Friedan in her famous manifesto. While

⁴³ Wilson T. U. (2021 September 2). Domestic Workers and the Civil Rights Movement. AAIHS.
<https://www.aaihs.org/domestic-workers-and-the-civil-rights-movement/>

affluent women were entering careers which necessitated paid domestic work, there was little, if not any, thought given to the possibility that domestic workers might want better careers too. The white feminists who rode this wave thought housework to be isolating and suffocating to perform every day for the rest of their lives; however, the dissonance of this ideology is ever present as many women simply conscripted other women without the political or economic leverage to leave the domestic sphere to do their work for them.

Impact of the Second Wave on domestic service:

Black domestic workers overcame the difficulty of mobilization presented by sporadic location by organizing as a result of the civil rights movement. While the mass movement of domestic workers rights and protections was not the main goal of the civil rights movement, it was one of them, as it aimed at dismantling oppressive views inherently tied between black individuals and their labor. The notion of the ‘ideal black domestic’ was just as, if not more, racialized than it was gendered. Inspired by the work of Rosa Parks with the bus boycott, black maids and other domestic workers began to organize through transportation.⁴⁴

This was logistical genius; the domestic workers were isolated in their workplaces, but as many utilized public transportation to commute to their domiciles, the bus became the perfect venue for organization. Prior to the late 1960’s movements advocating for the protection of domestic workers fizzled and died due to the United States government’s refusal to listen to the demands of women of color; however, the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960’s gave domestic workers viable organization strategies along with legal precedent of equality presented by the passage of the Civil Rights Act.

Despite the efforts and organization of black domestic workers to increase their rights and pay, the increased need of white women for domestic workers in their homes trumped their efforts. Though wages for domestic workers were protected due to the collective action in the

⁴⁴The New York Times. (2019 February 20). Overlooked no more: Dorothy Bolden who started a movement for domestic workers. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/20/obituaries/dorothy-bolden-overlooked.html>

1970s, the growing population of working women resulted in longer, unregulated hours for their domestic help.⁴⁵

At this point in the thesis, the focus has been on black domestics, as they had been the ‘ideal’ houseworker for centuries, but in the present, as many are aware, the public picture of a modern domestic worker is completely different. Prior to the mobilization of women into the work force, many immigrants in the United States were men. Yet in the late 20th century, as white women reaped the rewards of their feminist movement, and black women fought for social mobility through movements which focused on race, the ever-increasing need for domestic workers still had to be filled.⁴⁶ The increased need for domestic service workers in the 1970’s came at an unprecedented time when the benefits of black liberation movements led to black women entering the corporate sector in higher numbers. As a result, another class of disadvantaged workers emerged-- the Latina immigrant.

In her book *Doméstica*, Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo describes the trend of income polarization in the 1980’s and 1990’s, where college educated women began working in the corporate sector, and women in both service and manufacturing industries witnessed the condition of their jobs decrease. Hondagneu-Sotelo explains that this polarization “set the stage for further expansion of domestic work” (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2007; 25-26). As technology grew and new industries (with higher salaries) were developed for college educated individuals, and as

⁴⁵ Hondagneu-Sotelo, Pierrette. *Doméstica : Immigrant Workers Cleaning and Caring in the Shadows of Affluence, with a New Preface*, University of California Press, 2007. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uark-ebooks/detail.action?docID=844026>.

⁴⁶ Hondagneu-Sotelo, Pierrette. *Doméstica : Immigrant Workers Cleaning and Caring in the Shadows of Affluence, with a New Preface*, University of California Press, 2007. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uark-ebooks/detail.action?docID=844026>.

a result “relying on Latino immigrant workers has become almost a social obligation” (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2007; 25-26).⁴⁷

Doméstica focuses heavily on the growth of the domestic service industry; despite never discussing the Second-Wave movement directly, the first aspect which she attributes growth to new employment status of some women—those plagued with Friedans “Problem with no Name”. She describes how “the increased employment of women, especially married women with children,” is one of the most widely accepted theories for the growth of the industry; she describes how, even though some families have access to day care centers, many Americans view them as “cold, institutional, second-class childcare” and prefer the “convenience, flexibility, and privilege” of hiring private nannies and housekeepers (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2007; 25).⁴⁸ Prior to the increased employment of married women, only families where the husband made good money could afford paid domestic work, and in most cases, domestic duties still fell to the wife. Once married women started working, and previously single income families now had an extra paycheck which they could put towards hiring someone else to perform the duty.⁴⁹

The responsibility of housework fell to those with no citizenship, language barriers, and a desperate need for a steady (even if low paying) job. In the decades following the social movements discussed in this thesis, white women conscripted the services of women from Mexico and Central America. The near collapse of the Mexican economy in the 1980’s forced many Mexican women to migrate in search for work, while the political instability drove Central

⁴⁷ Hondagneu-Sotelo, Pierrette. *Doméstica : Immigrant Workers Cleaning and Caring in the Shadows of Affluence, with a New Preface*, University of California Press, 2007. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uark-ebooks/detail.action?docID=844026>.

⁴⁸ Hondagneu-Sotelo, Pierrette. *Doméstica : Immigrant Workers Cleaning and Caring in the Shadows of Affluence, with a New Preface*, University of California Press, 2007. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uark-ebooks/detail.action?docID=844026>.

⁴⁹ Hondagneu-Sotelo, Pierrette. *Doméstica : Immigrant Workers Cleaning and Caring in the Shadows of Affluence, with a New Preface*, University of California Press, 2007. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uark-ebooks/detail.action?docID=844026>.

American women to the United States for the same reason. The exodus of black women from the industry was realized through the black power movement, where, after centuries of racially conscripted servitude, young black women purposely stayed away from the domestic service industry to avoid racial stereotypes. Between the 1970's and 1990's, the percentage of black women in domestic work decreased from a high 35 percent to a low 4 percent, while the percentage of Latina women increased from below 10 percent to a whopping 68 percent.⁵⁰

Very rapidly, one went from rarely seeing Latina women working in cleaning jobs, to seeing the image of a Latina women when thinking about cleaning jobs. Just as the racialized perception of black women led to the racialization of domestic work, the Latina's filled the gap created by Black liberation. Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo describes this pattern, explaining how the entry of Immigrants into domestic service "came on the heels of local black women's exodus" which led to a decrease in wages in the industry as more and more women from Mexico and Central America came seeking employment which did not require working visas or extensive training in the English language (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2007; 27).⁵¹

Like black women, Latinas have consistently been both gendered and racialized in white individuals' minds, yet unlike black women, Latinas are thought to be docile and submissive, traits which black women never were ascribed due to their persistent vocal outrage towards their mistreatment. Several factors led to the presumption that Latina houseworkers were submissive and quiet; one being that many have little, if any knowledge of the English language.⁵²

⁵⁰ Byrd N. Z. (2010). The Dirty Side of Domestic Work: An Underground Economy and the Exploitation of Underground Workers. *DePaul Journal for Social Science* 3(2) 245–276.

<https://via.library.depaul.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1058&context=jsj>

⁵¹ Hondagneu-Sotelo, Pierrette. *Domestica : Immigrant Workers Cleaning and Caring in the Shadows of Affluence, with a New Preface*, University of California Press, 2007. *ProQuest Ebook Central*,

<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uark-ebooks/detail.action?docID=844026>.

⁵² Byrd N. Z. (2010). The Dirty Side of Domestic Work: An Underground Economy and the Exploitation of Underground Workers. *DePaul Journal for Social Science* 3(2) 245–276.

<https://via.library.depaul.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1058&context=jsj>

In addition to language barriers creating obstacles, the lack of documented immigrant status also loomed over their heads. Even in the presence of abuse, undocumented houseworkers, and undocumented laborers in general, are hesitant to report it with the constant danger of deportation existing in the front of their minds. The employers of undocumented immigrants are usually aware of their status, but instead of providing pathways to benefit their employee, many take advantage of it in order to get away with paying lower wages for longer workdays.⁵³

There were many factors in the lives of Latina immigrants which turned them towards an industry desired by few. One such factor was the legal status of the workers. Many immigrants without legal documentation sought out domestic work because of its association with under the counter, or cash pay. Most women did not have to show the women who hired them on as domestic workers official documentation that they are citizens. While most jobs require a social security number from its applicants, the women hiring domestic workers did not object to hiring people who did not immigrate through legal means.⁵⁴ Another factor which led new Latina migrants to domestic work was the prospect of being a ‘live-in’ worker.

Most established domestic workers shunned ‘live-in’ work as it was considered one of the lowest and most degrading forms with little freedom, but for new migrants with no money for rent, live-in work provided an opportunity to work rigorous hours and save money with the hope of getting out of the contracts with their bosses. Unfortunately, a result of the massive influx of Latina workers in the domestic service industry led to a sharp decline in wages, as even though many women would not work for mere dollars an hour, there would always be women

⁵³ Byrd N. Z. (2010). The Dirty Side of Domestic Work: An Underground Economy and the Exploitation of Underground Workers. *DePaul Journal for Social Science* 3(2) 245–276.

<https://via.library.depaul.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1058&context=jsj>

⁵⁴ Byrd N. Z. (2010). The Dirty Side of Domestic Work: An Underground Economy and the Exploitation of Underground Workers. *DePaul Journal for Social Science* 3(2) 245–276.

<https://via.library.depaul.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1058&context=jsj>

who would.⁵⁵ Established domestic service workers turned against new immigrants for this reason, spouting the same narrative frequently heard in America, that the immigrants themselves were the ones responsible for the decrease in wages, as opposed to the responsibility falling on employers who take advantage of their dire economic situations.

⁵⁵ *National Domestic Workers bill of rights*. National Domestic Workers Alliance. (2023, February 6). Retrieved March 10, 2023, from https://www.domesticworkers.org/programs-and-campaigns/developing-policy-solutions/bill-of-rights/current-campaigns/national-domestic-workers-bill-of-rights/?gclid=Cj0KCQiAx6ugBhCcARIsAGNmMbhHxEmq5LZnAYoQu81nxjTSbav3w8kd8li85T8fguFZPVt24341hMQaAjG2EALw_wcB

The New Normal:

After the grassroots movements led by black domestic workers in the 1960s and 70s, what seemed like a never ending supply of potential housecleaners from Central America and Mexico kept employment standards, benefits, and wages low. As described by Hondagneu-Sotelo, the economic growth of the 1980's and 1990's proved wrong many old hypotheses which predicted the death of the domestic service industry (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2007; 24).⁵⁶ Instead of Although no national protections for domestic workers exist, ten states, including California and New York, passed domestic workers Bill of Rights between 2013 and 2020, which legally regulates the hour and age of workers.⁵⁷ These significant political achievements, as seen throughout American history, were pioneered by no one other than those who they exist for— domestic workers.

The ideologies surrounding paid domestic work did not hardly budge in the latter half of the 20th century, yet as the mobilization of women into the work force rapidly expanded globalization, and black women demanded to be seen, heard, and respected, a new class of disadvantaged workers rose to meet the need created by the exit of citizens from one of the least respected industries in America. Today, over half of domestic service workers are women of

⁵⁶ Hondagneu-Sotelo, Pierrette. *Domestica : Immigrant Workers Cleaning and Caring in the Shadows of Affluence, with a New Preface*, University of California Press, 2007. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uark-ebooks/detail.action?docID=844026>.

⁵⁷ *National Domestic Workers bill of rights*. National Domestic Workers Alliance. (2023, February 6). Retrieved March 10, 2023, from https://www.domesticworkers.org/programs-and-campaigns/developing-policy-solutions/bill-of-rights/current-campaigns/national-domestic-workers-bill-of-rights/?gclid=Cj0KCQiAx6ugBhCcARIsAGNmMbhHxEmq5LZnAYoQu81nxjTSbav3w8kd8li85T8fguFZPVt2434lhMQaAjG2EALw_wcB

color, and the largest percentage are Latina. In addition to average hourly wages just over twelve dollars an hour, less than one in five domestic workers have access to health insurance.⁵⁸

Though domestic workers have existed as long as domestic work, for most of American history, they were reserved only for the wealthy sub-class of women who could afford them. After dual-income households became common after the mobilization of women into higher-paying careers, more women had necessity for, and the ability to afford, domestic help. What is the solution here? Though I consider myself a proponent of the theory that everyone should be responsible in the cleaning of messes they make, it is unrealistic to assume that in the future, the gendered association of domestic work will likely change. Then, the question must be asked; who does the work?

The status quo and history of domestic work is riddled with inequities and legacies of racist exchanges between white women and their servants. Are these inequalities inherent to the trade or just the way things have been done? Although domestic workers, both black and Latina, have consistently fought to have their voices heard, the lack of support by those with power in our country continue to make this fight an uphill battle. Instead of ignoring and shying away from the mistakes and exclusivity of past feminist movements, white women must speak up and change their behavior.

It is unlikely that the state of domestic work will ever revert that women will shun careers in favor of returning to scrubbing their kitchens; however, that does not mean that things must continue the way they are, with women of color bearing the brunt of affluent women's decision to stay silent on issues where they are shed in a bad light. Instead of being 'grateful' for

⁵⁸ Wolfe J. Kandra J. Engdahl L. & Shierholz H. (2020 May 14). Domestic Workers Chartbook - Economic Policy Institute. <https://files.epi.org/pdf/194214.pdf>

the large sacrifice domestic workers make, as white women have done for decades, it is time to start minimizing the sacrifice by increasing the standard of the workplace.

Though significant strides have been made over the last fifty years in the fight for domestic workers' rights, many home care workers still do not have the security of insurance, salaried positions, or paid sick leave. Groups like the National Domestic Workers Alliance work tirelessly across the country to increase the standing of domestic workers through lobbying, grass roots activism, and legislation. On their website, the NDWA includes a section for independent domestic workers who are looking to join one of their 70+ local chapters, as well as special groups for black and Latina domestic workers. The Facebook group “We Dream in Black” is dedicated to black domestic workers “organizing for rights, respect, and dignity”.⁵⁹ In addition to the NDWA’s organization of black workers, they programmed a chatbot known as *La Alianza*, or *The Alliance*, which offers news and resources to Latina domestic workers. While *La Alianza* provides data on organization, citizenship, and workers' rights, it collects data as well. The NDWA consistently publishes reports on information gathered through the bot, including but not limited to, recent unemployment rates, Covid-19 cases and vaccinations, and housing and food security. The NDWA publishes its bot’s findings once a week, showing that as of November 2022, unemployment of domestic workers stands at a rough 18 percent, with almost one out of every five domestic workers struggling to find jobs. In addition to its publications on joblessness, *La Alianza* also discovered that 7 in 10 domestic workers make less than 15 dollars an hour

⁵⁹ Current campaigns. National Domestic Workers Alliance. (2022 November 29). <https://www.domesticworkers.org/programs-and-campaigns/developing-policy-solutions/bill-of-rights/current-campaigns/>

without benefits like insurance, resulting in an average wage which is unlivable in most metropolitan areas.⁶⁰

Despite the good work done in recent history by the National Domestic Workers Alliance, it has been met with significant backlash by right-wing oriented policy and judicial actions.⁶¹ The National Right to Work Foundation lobbies as a union-busting institution, and in 2014, they supported domestic worker Pamela Harris in her case against compulsory union fees for nonmembers to the Supreme Court. The Court found in favor of Harris in a 5-4 decision, and although, on the surface, Harris' case may seem valid, the manner through which the state decided to define domestic care workers resulted in many more problems. In justice Alito's majority opinion summary, he defines home domestic workers as "personal assistants", or caregivers, who are not protected by labor law. Alito writes that "state law explicitly excludes personal assistants from statutory retirement and health insurance benefits" which effectively bars future domestic workers from suing their employers for failure to offer these benefits.⁶² Although this case was only eight years ago, it is reminiscent of past attitudes towards the validity of domestic workers as employees.

In addition to judicial prejudice against domestic workers, the National Domestic Workers Alliance fights against the human trafficking of domestic workers and for safe, legal immigration pathways for workers already in the country. Among all reported recent labor trafficking cases, over 23 percent of the eight thousand individuals trafficked were conscripted in

⁶⁰ *Programs & Campaigns*. National Domestic Workers Alliance. (2021, June 9). Retrieved March 12, 2023, from <https://www.domesticworkers.org/programs-and-campaigns/>

⁶¹ Dwherstories.com. A History of Domestic Work and Worker Organizing. (n.d.). <https://www.dwherstories.com/timeline/recent-attempts-to-crush-home-care-unionism>

⁶² Harris v. Quinn. Oyez. <https://www.oyez.org/cases/2013/11-681>

domestic work.⁶³ There are many reasons why trafficked individuals are forced into domestic work; it is a grueling task, but as it occurs within the confines of the domicile, it is frighteningly easy for the trafficking victims to go unnoticed. Many victims of labor trafficking have limited access to the outside world and reaching law enforcement, so while the percentage of *reported* labor trafficking victims working in domestic service is greater than one in five, the exact number is unreportable and most likely much higher.

The fight for legal, attainable access to legal immigration pathways is extremely important to the National Domestic Workers Alliance, as documentation status is consistently used as a tool against undocumented domestic workers. Through supporting protests like “A Day without Immigrants” and lobbying for legislation like President Biden’s *Build Back Better* bill which includes immigration reform as one of its many measures.⁶⁴ Although the majority of domestic workers today are not all from out of this country, it is the profession with the highest percentage of immigrants in service. Immigration reform, including cheaper pathways to legal immigration, would give domestic workers the ability to advocate for their rights in the public sphere- a right to “choose not to struggle alone” which, as mentioned in the introduction, Second Wave feminist author Carol Hanisch posits as a requirement for female social mobility and liberation.

⁶³ *Human trafficking at home: Labor Trafficking of Domestic Workers*. National Domestic Workers Alliance. (2023, February 7). <https://www.domesticworkers.org/reports-and-publications/human-trafficking-at-home-labor-trafficking-of-domestic-workers/>

⁶⁴ *Programs & Campaigns*. National Domestic Workers Alliance. (2021, June 9). Retrieved March 12, 2023, from <https://www.domesticworkers.org/programs-and-campaigns/>

Conclusion:

The history of domestic service in the United States, from the antebellum south to current day, reeks of exploitation and racism. First, black women were defined and categorized as being inherently suited for domestic work, then once they achieved partial liberation, the hole they created was filled by Latina women. Although men have created an environment for centuries unsafe to all women, the case of domestic workers is special, as even before women could vote in this country, the responsibility of hiring domestic help, and maintaining the house in general, was passed off to them. Men are not blameless in their mistreatment of domestic workers, as rates of sexual assault and harassment by men against female domestic help cannot be ignored, but should the exclusion and treatment of women of color by white, affluent women be permissible?

Possibly the most famous Second-Wave writer, Betty Friedan, who I discussed earlier in this thesis, clearly sanctioned the decision for married women to hire out individuals to take care of their domestic tasks in order to obtain the ‘creative’ careers which women *need* to fulfill their desires, which resulted in a ‘boom’ in an industry which many thought would be phased out, not expanded through globalization. Had the Second-Wave feminists given more thought to the implications of their decision to hire women to do work which they knew was unfulfilling, would we find ourselves in a different society today? The failure of unification between white feminists and feminists of color led to further institutionalize the legacy that domestic duties belong to women, but instead of all women, now the duty falls on the poor.

After examining the legacy of slavery in modern domestic work, and the sanctioning of external childcare and household care by Second-Wave feminists, like Betty Friedan to

encourage the mobility of women outside of the home suggesting they hire another woman to fill their place, I now return to the 2017 “Day Without Women” protest. Many teachers and nannies did participate in the protest, leaving dual job families scrambling to find childcare. In Virginia, Alexandria City Public School’s closed for the protest on Wednesday, March 8, and on their Facebook page, many parents expressed their displeasure. One user Stephanie Lynch wrote:

“I have two kids at ACPS and have been a long and very vocal supporter of the public school and its teachers. Unfortunately closing the schools today is not going to have the intended effect. It will only serve to further hurt working women and working mothers. Nearly all the working moms I know had to take the day off or scramble to find child care. The reality is the burden of last minute child care for cancelled school falls most heavily on the working mothers” (Stephanie Lynch 2017 [Facebook]).⁶⁵

Why, in a protest which aims for women to be both seen and heard, are other women criticizing the participation of people working in childcare? If our current system of familial care can be disrupted or dismantled by the temporary absence of those in the work force, is it a good system? Many comments similar to the one Lynch posted detail how it is “elitist” to assume that working women can take a day off work or find someone to watch their child, but is it not also elitist to assume that the burden of last-minute childcare falls harder on the mothers than the women working as nannies and babysitters? Before many married women entered the corporate sector, there was no expectation that there would always be someone else to take care of the children, and now, parents tend to view childcare and domestic service as provided utilities instead of individuals. Working class activism puts those who rely on workers in a bind, positioning privileged women against feminist movements which disrupt their daily lives. The comments on this public Facebook page make it abundantly clear that while women’s activism in

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the mid-to-late 20th century did liberate some women, but this economic and social freedom came at the expense of the women conscripted to perform the tasks which Second-Wave activists abandoned. Throughout this thesis, I have shown how white women have historically been complicit in, and not unaware of, the poor treatment of domestic workers, which went on to show in their Second-Wave feminist activism. The failure of the Second-Wave political agendas to include women of color and domestic workers was not based out of ignorance, but out of confirmed necessity— pushing hundreds of thousands of women down on their knees and handing them a wash rag.

For the working women reading this who utilize, or have utilized private housecleaners and nannies,

I understand; I do not wish to suggest questioning the thought of paying for someone to help you carry all the weight which we women are told is ours. We now can make the conscious choice to question our interactions, even if we are not responsible for the problem itself. How much do you know about the woman who cleans your house? Does she have the same benefits you have at your job? How often do you converse? Offer gratitude or increased raises?

How much do you know about the woman who bears your weight?

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