

Julie Guard, *Radical Housewives: Price Wars & Food Politics in Mid-Twentieth Century Canada* (Toronto: UTP 2019)

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under the auspices of the International Grenfell Association (IGA, originally the Grenfell Mission which started in 1892). War made it difficult for the IGA to retain or recruit staff and obtain supplies. As Coombs shows, the deaths and retirements of physicians transformed the roles of 52 nurses who had to assume the doctors' duties of diagnosing and treating all the patients, thus making the nurse "the backbone of this Mission." (214)

Sarah Hogenbirk's chapter looks at ordinary servicewomen's deaths and the need for a more inclusive remembrance. Defense officials appear to have been hesitant to recognize and report women's deaths; at least in this group of 91 who were mostly cooks and clerks. By choosing to eliminate professionals such as nurses and doctors, the author's conclusions remain limited.

One of the most interesting chapters in this volume digs into the messages and imagery aimed at women who worked in industry. Sarah Van Vugt dissects the iconic images of the woman war worker whose uniform, safety equipment and hair covering threatened to transform the female body and undermine her femininity. Using newsletters from three Southern Ontario war plants, the author demonstrates how management encouraged women workers to participate in beauty culture sessions and fashion shows. Tensions arose over hair coverings as women sought to exert some control over their appearance in spite of safety concerns. While managers wanted to attract women to factory work, they also regarded women as distracting to men thus creating 'gendered risks' on the factory floor. (252)

Shaw and Glassford's collection demonstrates the importance of listening to women's voices and asking new questions. This volume helps us move away from the old debate of whether (and how) women are liberated (or not) by the

exigencies of conflict and suggests that their experiences were multi-faceted. *Making the Best of It* is a welcome addition to "Studies in Canadian Military History."

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Julie Guard, *Radical Housewives: Price Wars & Food Politics in Mid-Twentieth Century Canada* (Toronto: UTP 2019)

IN *RADICAL HOUSEWIVES*, Julie Guard has written not just the definitive history of Housewives Consumer Association, but of mid-century Left consumer activism in Canada more broadly.

The Housewives, for those unfamiliar, started as a grassroots movement of mostly social democratic and communist women pushing for greater state control over the price and distribution of food and other necessities during the late 1930s. While their campaigns in Toronto, in particular, met with some success during these early years, they emerged as a truly national organization during the war and early postwar years as their message of greater state control over the economy found broader popular appeal across the political spectrum. At the peak of their influence in the early postwar years they claimed tens of thousands of members and dozens of branches across the country.

Guard's study focuses, particularly, on the rise and fall of maternalism as a viable political strategy for the Left during the 1930s and 1940s. It was a strategy, she argues, that shielded the Housewives from accusations of communist infiltration during its formative years but proved to be part of its undoing during the rabid anticommunism of the Cold War. It is also a strategy, she argues, that saw the Housewives go effectively ignored by generations of left and labour historians.

This book, Guard compellingly argues, helps to “illuminate how not only historians of the left, but also the left itself, have been largely blind to women’s political activism, especially when they acted, or claimed to act, in ways deemed socially appropriate to their gender.” (14)

There is much to praise about the book, more generally, but I’m most impressed by Guard’s significant efforts to recover the stories of scattered local Housewives branches and even more importantly, life histories of the women at the heart of the Housewives. This clearly involved impressive detective work—uncovering the scattered records of local organizations whose archives were more often than not destroyed—as well as the hugely important work of interviewing key players in the organization. And in doing so, Guard successfully challenges the accusations of the Housewives being a Communist Party of Canada front organization that have been consistently levelled at the organization, both by contemporary critics and by later historians.

It is wonderful that Guard included so many images, including photographs, advertisements and even primary source documents. One of the most impressive things about the Housewives was just how skilled they were at creating memorable campaign images and public theatre; whether it was the Children’s Chocolate Bar Boycott or the their multiple ‘On-to-Ottawa’ delegations brandishing props like rolling pins. It’s refreshing to see so many of these images in print, as they bring the movement to life in a way that’s not possible through text alone.

My critiques of Guard’s book are more quibbles than anything, with the main one being that—contrary to Guard’s contention in Chapter 2—that my own argument about the political impact of wartime price controls in *Food Will Win the War* are actually more similar than *Radical Housewives* might suggest.

Even then, my main feeling reading that particular chapter is that I wish she had published it before my book went to press because it answers so many questions that I wasn’t able to answer with my own research.

As I write this amidst a pandemic that has seen shortages, hoarding, rising prices and rents, the lessons of the Housewives struggle for ordinary consumers seems all the more relevant. Guard astutely places the Housewives in a long lineage of activists fighting for what we now call “food security” and, to that end, there is much that contemporary food activists could learn from their successes and failures during this moment of deep social and political crisis.

Overall, this is more than just the definitive history of the Housewives Consumer Association and mid-20th century consumer activism. It is essential reading for anyone studying the history of the Canadian Left, food politics, feminist activism and 20th century consumer culture.

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Scott P. Stephen, *Masters and Servants: The Hudson’s Bay Company and Its North American Workforce, 1668-1786* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press 2019)

IN *MASTERS AND SERVANTS*, Scott P. Stephen has probed the voluminous archival holdings of the Hudson’s Bay Company (correspondence, minute books, accounts, and post journals) to unpack the nitty-gritty details of labour relations within the Hudson’s Bay Company during the corporation’s long first century (1668-1786). Stephen’s central argument is that the Hudson’s Bay Company’s labour relations were underwritten by deep-rooted understandings