Introduction

In 1889, a young teacher named Blanche Ellis read *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, attended church and a "gym," visited with friends and did housework. Among entries about an "exciting debate with Fred on 'Women's Rights'" and disciplining her students, Ellis made numerous comments in her diary about her sewing. She was one of millions of turn-of-the-century American women for whom sewing was a part of daily life.

Ellis appears to have been a typical white, middle-class woman of her time, and the effort and money she spent sewing is probably representative of others in a similar socioeconomic position. She had help from family members, occasionally went to a professional dressmaker, recorded the precise amounts she spent on fabric, made over hand-me-down dresses, and took pleasure in her accomplishments. It did not take her long to make a dress, provided she worked on it steadily. Eleven days after purchasing ten yards of fabric and a few entries of "been sewing on dress nearly all day," Ellis wrote "wore my black dress today first time."[1]

The material for that dress cost $7.64, but the effort, expertise, and pride represented by wearing it were far more valuable. Blanche Ellis' sewing is an intriguing way to understand her and, by extrapolation, other women and girls in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. How did Ellis feel about the items she made? How did sewing factor into her daily routine? What economic and cultural roles did home sewing play in her life? In the context of changing domestic roles and shifting power dynamics, developing economic patterns, and changing fashions, Blanche Ellis and her sewing offer insight into women's lives at the time.

Home sewing is laden with multiple meanings about femininity, labor, family, creativity, sexuality, identity, and economics. It blurred boundaries between work and leisure, and yet was different from many forms of wage work because women wielded

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a degree of control over the process and products. It satisfied traditional ideas about women's roles, engaging in ideas about thrift, housekeeping, maternal love, sexual attraction, and familial duty. However, these ideologies were themselves shifting in reaction to larger cultural changes and sewing moved with them, acting alternatively as a tool for adapting to or challenging new ideas.

This book will explore the cultural meanings of sewing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, examining the dynamics and persistence of home sewing as clothing became increasingly available for purchase and more women worked outside the home. Over several decades, home sewing was challenged by a growing ready-to-wear industry. As mass-produced clothing became more accessible and desirable and more women had money of their own to spend, the symbolic meanings of sewing became apparent. Depending on the circumstances, home dressmaking could be a chore or a pleasure, a survival skill or a means of personal expression. By studying home sewing and the tensions inherent in its different meanings, we can gain a broader comprehension and appreciation of changing gender roles, cultural dynamics, and women's household labor at a critical time in American history.

Historiography

In her introduction to *A Midwife's Tale*, Laurel Thatcher Ulrich describes how a diary of an eighteenth-century midwife was long dismissed as "trivial and unimportant" because it was "filled with trivia about domestic chores and pastimes." Ulrich argues instead that "It is in the very dailiness, the exhaustive, repetitious dailiness, that the real power of Martha Ballard's book lies."[2] The experiences of Ballard and Ellis are wildly different, but the records of their daily lives share a great deal for the historian interested in daily choices and routines.

Fortunately, the economic function of housework has received important scholarly attention in recent years. Jeanne Boydston and Christine Stansell have demonstrated that housework supported capitalism by providing vital support services for workers. Essentially, women's domestic labor supported men's

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wage labor in a culture that valued visible and paid labor rather than invisible and unpaid labor. Sewing was a key component of that domestic support, but unless it earned a wage, home sewing was housework, not legitimate employment.[3] This bias against unpaid labor persists, of course, discounting many money-saving labors done in the home, from cooking to maintenance to childcare. Glenna Matthews has argued that as domesticity has diminished in social importance since the mid-nineteenth century, women's household skills have lost cultural currency. Likewise, Susan Strasser describes a woman who considered the unpaid work she did for her family, including sewing, to be "junk."[4]

Of course, women have been paid for their sewing skills. There is a wealth of scholarship on the garment industry, professional dressmakers, and piecework done in the home.[5] The boundaries between paid and unpaid sewing blurred when dressmakers, garment factory operatives, and pieceworkers sewed their own clothing. Home sewing was certainly part of the gender-specific domestic upkeep that supported exploitative industrial homework.[6] While this study will touch upon women who used household sewing skills to supplement a family income, it will not focus on sewing as wage-earning work. Instead, I will look at how sewing functioned as part of everyday domestic labor and household dynamics.

While historians have examined industrial sewing and related work, *home* sewing has received relatively little scholarly attention. One exception is a collection edited by Barbara Burman that reveals various dimensions of home sewing, from the professionalization of home economics to what Army officers' wives made in the American West.[7] Another study by Nicole Pellegrin of needlework in pre-Revolutionary France concludes that sewing and related needle work can be seen both as an area of expertise and influence and as a means of marginalization.[8] These studies demonstrate the exciting range of topics that are revealed by an examination of home sewing. Most scholars, however, have focused on the business end of sewing, looking, for example, at the development of the sewing machine or pattern industry.[9] While these studies are important and many inform this book, I take a larger view of home sewing, seeing it as

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animportant and often fascinating way to understand a variety of historical issues, from domestic work and material culture to class and race dynamics.

While there may not be much focus on home sewing in the historical literature, there is a wide variety of work exploring the cultural and social dimensions of dress. Scholars from a variety of disciplines, including history but also sociology, art history, and anthropology, have studied the relationship between clothing, gender, and culture. [10] One consistent theme concerns the power of dress to embody the values of a particular culture. In *A Perfect Fit: Clothes, Character and the Promise of America*, Jenna Weissman Joselit describes how early twentieth-century reformers were concerned about dress because "what one wore was a public construct, bound up with an enduring moral order."[11] Like most scholars who look at the role of clothing, Joselit focuses on ready-made clothing, but clothing made at home, and the labor that went into it, offers a particularly interesting way to examine how women sought to satisfy and challenge that very "moral order."

The changing economic structures that facilitated the simultaneous growth of the ready-to-wear industry and a growing female workforce are embedded throughout this book. In a sense, this book considers what James Livingston has called a "political economy of gender" as it relates to an entire body of literature that examines the relationship between gender, culture, and material goods.[12] It is important, however, not to become too focused on sewing solely as a form of "consumption" since home dressmakers were simultaneously producing and consuming. One scholar, in fact, sees no "straightforward shift from one cultural system to another nor a neat dichotomy between 'producer' and 'consumer' culture."[13] While sewing is certainly a consumer behavior – after all, home dressmakers were major purchasers of fabric, machines, patterns, and advice – they were buying those goods in order to subsequently produce a product. It was often the element of creation that elicited pride and pleasure in the work of sewing. Meanwhile, many women sewed because they were, to a degree, excluded from a growing consumer culture. The farm women who made children's clothing out of chicken

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feed sacks or remodeled donated dresses were still consumers but were hardly the middle-class shoppers sought out by the mass-market magazines.

While this book addresses large-scale concepts of culture, consumption, production, and gender, it also engages with ideas of identity, among them age, region, ethnicity, race, and class. While most women used the same techniques, their reasons for and experience of sewing might vary dramatically. A teenaged Jewish immigrant garment worker, a middle-aged African American mother, a ten-year-old farm girl, and Blanche Ellis all sewed, but their particular understandings of the task varied. For example, African American and immigrant women both used sewing as an economic strategy, but a student at Spelman College countered the notion that she was promiscuous by wearing especially proper clothing while young Jewish workers chose bright colors as a way to feel glamorous.

When addressing socioeconomic class, it is important to consider rural women who, because they rarely earned wages, might not be seen as members of the "working class." Whether they earned cash or not, their agricultural and domestic labor was central to maintaining their families. In fact, their relative isolation, compared to women in urban areas with more access to affordable clothing, made rural women's sewing essential to their household economies. Sewing was an important part of rural women's identities and was supported by institutions such as agricultural extension services and state fairs. I hope that this book will help to expand conceptions of class to include rural homemakers and agricultural workers as well as urban wage earners.[14]

In the end, however, this is not solely a study of domestic labor, sewing and clothing, or consumer culture. It is also an exploration of how those issues interconnect to help us to understand how gender functioned at a particular time and place. The period of the late nineteenth century through the early to mid-twentieth century saw such drastic changes in the experiences of many American women that it is a crucial period of study. In this sense,

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this work builds upon scholarship that examines all sorts of experiences, from women's political activism to girls' education, by looking at a very rich period in American history.[15]

Sources

This book will speak to a variety of schools of thought relating to gender, domestic work, consumption and production, material culture, education, and business practices. To that end, I have built on a range of scholarly work in those and other fields. While the secondary literature is critical, at the heart of any historical study are the primary sources that breathe life into what would otherwise be abstract ideas. Many of the sources used in this study are familiar to historians. Newspaper and magazine articles, fiction, advertisements, business archives, organizational records, and letters and diaries all come with their own peculiar caveats but are generally understood as "normal" sources for historical research. Others, such as oral histories, need to be approached with caution, but they also provide valuable, and in my view irreplaceable, insights. Obtained and used responsibly, oral histories offer some of the most evocative material.[16] In addition to these sources, I also use more unusual forms of evidence such as dresses, sewing patterns, workbooks, and toys. Following are some notes on a few of these sources.

One familiar type of source used in this study is prescriptive literature such as popular magazines and advice columns. All are tools for understanding what a particular group of people thought another group should do. Two less familiar forms of prescriptive literature also play a role in this study. I use school textbooks and lesson plans aimed at teaching schoolgirls how, what, and *why* to sew, teaching basic skills alongside cultural values. However, perhaps the most entertaining of the sources aimed at a young audience are the toys – namely dolls, doll clothes, and paper dolls. These toys, clearly aimed at teaching children adult skills and values, can be used to demonstrate the cultural power of sewing and clothing among young girls.

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There is no guarantee that people paid much attention to what the "experts" thought they should do. One way to discover what people actually *did* sew or wear is to look at photographs. While photographs can be staged (the posed photograph of Hampton Institute students in Chapter Three is an example of how images can be used to promote particular ideas), they can also show how women did or did not listen to the advice they were given concerning what was appropriate, attractive, and feminine clothing. Photographs can serve as evidence of what women chose to purchase and what they were capable of producing.

Historians are accustomed to using letters and diaries to get close to an individual and understand her perspective, but if a letter can tell us a great deal about a real person, her dress can also connect us to the role of sewing in her life. I use garments from museum collections throughout this study. Like a diary, I found these garments to be a compelling link to actual individuals and crucial to supporting my argument. In this work, I was aided by museum curators who answered my questions concerning construction details, context, and background information.[17] Garments must be studied with certain constraints in mind. For example, middle- and upper-class people wore much of the clothing that makes its way into a museum collection.[18] Used judiciously, however, garments demonstrate the particular choices of an individual as well as denote similarities and differences between what was suggested and what was made and worn.

Another unorthodox type of source used in this study is the tissue paper dress pattern. I wanted to investigate first what kinds of garments the commercial pattern industry expected women to want and to be able to sew; second, how patterns were developed with ample room for personal interpretations; and third, how women interpreted those options when they sewed their own clothing. Again, I was helped by experts who know how to read a pattern, many of which were manufactured in a way no longer used today. Most of the information I used came from the pattern envelope, which typically explained the contents and usage of the proposed garment to the consumer as well as providing directions. However, the delicate, crumpled tissue

pieces themselves evoked the process – choosing a pattern, laying out and carefully cutting into the fabric on the floor or table – that is the real work of sewing.

Workbooks created by little girls more than a century ago are also an unusual and evocative source. These workbooks, filled with childish handwriting, rusted pins, and meticulous samples, hit a nerve. Sitting in an archive looking at strips of flannel demonstrating different stitches and doll-sized petticoats, I felt a connection to the girls who, whether they intended to or not, created miniature pieces of art.[19] I hope that others will find these less-than-standard forms of evidence as compelling as I do.

Most immediately, artifacts such as dresses, patterns, and workbooks offer a way to understand what women and girls made and wore. Sewing is a tangible activity and it serves us to get as close to that hands-on work as possible, but these objects also operate as windows into a variety of expectations and experience. Why did a young woman choose to alter patterns? How did an adolescent girl feel about making a graduation dress? This idea of moving from a physical object to the context of its creation and the social relationships associated with it is in keeping with what folklorist Michael Owen Jones has called "material behavior." Jones expands the notion of material culture to include the actions and ideas that surround objects:

> [Material behavior] includes not only objects that people construct but also the processes by which their artificers conceptualize them, fashion them, and use them or make them available for others to utilize. It consists of the motivations for creating things,...sensations and bodily movements involved in their fabrication, and reactions to the objects and their manufacture....It also comprises ideas that people associate with objects, the meaning they attribute to them, and the way in which they use them symbolically and instrumentally.[20]

The artifacts discussed in this book provide concrete links to the values that are at the center of this study. How did sewing function as a social process? How did that process change over a particular span of American history? How did those changes resonate for American women of a variety of social and cultural

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backgrounds? I hope that the objects examined here go beyond illustrations and become an important base for our understanding of the cultural meanings of home sewing.

Chapter Overview

Chapter One, "'Sewed Considerable': Home Sewing and the Meanings of Women's Domestic Work," explores the range of reasons why women sewed. It shows how sewing was one of many tools women from a variety of backgrounds used to fulfill their domestic roles. Middle-class, working-class, and affluent women often had different motivations for sewing at home. For example, an African American sharecropper's wife had few options other than to sew for her children, whereas a wealthy white woman's choice to sew her children's clothing signaled to others her motherly devotion. Home dressmaking came with a set of values that applied to women of different classes, ethnicities, races, and regions. The two women contrasted above may have sewn for different reasons, but both participated in a set of ideas about women's work, family, and domesticity. The first chapter therefore considers some of the ways sewing upheld traditional ideas about women and domesticity.

In contrast, Chapter Two, "Boundless Possibilities," looks at how home dressmaking challenged accepted views of women's behavior and appearances and provided a space for pleasure and individual taste. Sewing skills provided a way for a poor woman to defy preconceived notions about how someone in her circumstances "should" look: African American women stressed propriety and Jewish garment workers dressed "above their station." Commercial paper patterns encouraged consumers to make individual decisions about their dress by offering multiple options, and women with sufficient skills could copy designs they saw in department stores and adapt them to their own budget and style. In a culture that equated long skirts with good character, one could shorten a hemline as a challenge to established mores or counter racist stereotypes with starched propriety. Sewing became a way to test the boundaries of modesty, confront race and class bias, and invite creativity and pleasure.

Chapter Three, "When Mother Lets Us Sew: Girls, Sewing, and Femininity," examines how and why girls were taught to sew at a time when sewing was gradually waning in popularity. Girls of different backgrounds – Native American, middle class, African American, rural – were all taught to sew, but while they were taught the same skills, it was rarely for the same reasons. For example, minority girls were often taught skills with the goal of training a servant class and middle-class girls sewed in clubs reminiscent of their mothers' charitable societies. However, while many of those mothers admitted that they sewed less and less, they also wanted their daughters to learn the skills they themselves used infrequently. How, then, did an increasingly symbolic domestic education mesh with a rapidly changing social structure?

Another theme of this book is how a "private-sphere" practice functions as part of the larger economy. Chapter Four, "Commodifying Domestic Virtues: Business and Home Sewing," examines this question from the perspective of business practices. The extent of business investment in home sewing drew attention when women began to buy more ready-made clothing. It was one thing to sell tissue paper patterns, sewing machines, or fabric when home sewing was considered a regular part of domestic work, but what about when it declined in popularity? This chapter looks at the variety of ways in which businesses sought to encourage women to purchase their products, whether it was to reinforce traditional ideas associated with sewing or suggest that making clothing at home was a way to express modern individuality. Ultimately, the chapter argues that while many businesses supported a traditional mindset about women's work, it was in the businesses' interest to keep up with larger social changes.

One way to see how a number of these themes interact is to look at a specialized type of clothing that, because it was relatively new and marginal, was subject to significant personal interpretation. Chapter Five, "Clothing for Sport: Home Sewing as a Laboratory for New Standards," serves as a case study for the idea that sewing was both a way to conform to social norms *and* to challenge mainstream views. It demonstrates how, by making

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their own clothing for newly popular physical activities, women helped renegotiate standards of femininity. As a niche market in proportion to other clothing styles yet worn by a wide range of women, sport clothing was a "safe" place in which to experiment with clothing design. By making decisions about how they would dress, women challenged dominant ideas about their bodies and behavior.

I myself am a mediocre sewer, so I took a class at a small fabric and crafts store in Brooklyn. We learned to make a shirt with a yoke, collar, and cuffs from a commercial pattern. Over the four sessions, I learned not only how to sew buttonholes and attach a collar but also experienced the back pain and pricked fingers that can accompany time bent over a garment. I experienced a frustration experienced by many seamstresses – my shirt turned out much too big. I also felt the satisfaction that many of my long-gone subjects expressed. I added fruit-shaped buttons and wear my shirt at the beach with pride. I am sure it is the only beach cover-up on the East Coast with French seams.

This experience was gratifying not only because of its tangible, if imperfect, result. It also showed me both how much work goes into a garment and how satisfying it can be to create something from a bolt of cloth. I was reminded of sewing lessons by my mother and home economics teachers and of the doll clothes I made as a child. Moreover, the shop that offered the lessons has since gone the way of so many home sewing-oriented businesses – it is closed. Perhaps the most appealing dimension of the class was that it connected me to generations of women who learned the same skills and used them for a fascinating variety of reasons. These women, their sewing talents, and their reasons for making clothing at home are explored in the following chapter.

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Notes

Note 1: Blanche M. Ellis, Diary, 1889-1890, entries of 29 June, 28 January, 29 August and 7 September. Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera, Winterthur Museum, Garden and Library. Ellis was eighteen and originally from Cleveland; she was probably teaching in Ohio. back

Note 2: Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 9. back

Note 3: Jeanne Boydston, *Home & Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), and Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York 1789-1860* (New York: Knopf, 1982). back

Note 4: Glenna Matthews, "Just a Housewife": *The Rise and Fall of Domesticity in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987) and Susan Strasser, *Never Done: A History of American Housework* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 4. See also Sarah A. Leavitt, *From Catherine Beecher to Martha Stewart: A Cultural History of Domestic Advice* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), and Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (New York: Basic books, 1983). More specific topics such as cooking have also come under study; see for example Sherrie A. Inness, ed., *Kitchen Culture in America: Popular Representations of Food, Gender and Race* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2001) and Laura Shapiro, *Perfection Salad: Women and Cooking at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1986. back

Note 5: See for example the work of Alice Kessler-Harris, including *In Pursuit of Equity: Women, Men, and the Quest for Economic Citizenship in 20th-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), Eileen Boris, *Home To Work: Motherhood and the Politics of Industrial Homework in the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994) and Carole Turbin, *Working Women of Collar City: Gender, Class, and Community in Troy, New York, 1864-1886* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992). back

Note 6: Boris, *Home To Work,* 2. back

Note 7: Barbara Burman, ed., *The Culture of Sewing: Gender, Consumption and Home Dressmaking* (Oxford: Berg, 1999). Other studies include Joan L. Sullivan, "In Pursuit of Legitimacy: Home Economists and the Hoover Apron in World War I," *Dress* 26 (1999) 31-46 and Amy Boyce Osaki, "A 'Truly Feminine Employment': Sewing and the Early Nineteenth-Century Woman," *Winterthur Portfolio* 23 (1988): 225-241. back

Note 8: Nicole Pellegrin, "Les Vertues de 'l'Ouvrage' - Recherches sur la Feminization des Travaux d'Aiguille (XVI-XVIII Siecles) (The Virtues of 'Work' – Research on the Feminization of Needlework (16th-18th centuries) ," *Revue D'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine*, 46-4 (Octobre-Decembre 1999): 747-769. back

Note 9: Two important studies of the sewing machine are Marguerite Connolly, "The Transformation of Home Sewing and the Sewing Machine in America, 1850-1929," Ph.D. diss., University of Delaware, 1994 and Ruth Brandon, *A Capitalist Romance: Singer and the Sewing Machine* (Philadelphia & New York: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1977). The pattern industry has received substantial attention; see for example Joy Spanabel Emery, "Dreams on Paper," in Burman, *The Culture of Sewing,* 235-253; Carole Anne Dickson, "Patterns for Garments: A History of the Paper Garment Pattern Industry in America to 1976," Ph.D. Dissertation, Ohio State University, 1979; Claudia Kidwell, *Cutting a Fashionable Fit: Dressmakers' Drafting Systems in the United States* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution press, 1979) and Margaret Walsh, "The Democratization of Fashion: The Emergence of the Women's Dress Pattern Industry," *Journal of American History* 66 (1979): 299-313. back

Note 10: Some of these works are encyclopedic, such as James Laver's *Costume & Fashion: A Concise History* (reprinted London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1982). Others consider dress across a number of cultures and are hardly limited to western dress, such as the collection edited by Ruth Barnes and Joanne B. Eicher, *Dress and Gender Making and Meaning* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1992) or see it as a sociological study, as Fred Davis's *Fashion, Culture and Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). Others more immediately pertinent to this story look at gender, dress and culture, such as Jenna Weissman Joselit, *A Perfect Fit: Clothes, Character, and the Promise of America* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 2001); Anne Hollander, *Sex and Suits: The Evolution of Modern Dress* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994); Philippe Perrot, *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994, trans. Richard Bienvenu); and Claudia Brush Kidwell and Valerie Steele, *Men and Women: Dressing the Part* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989). back

Note 11: Joselit, *A Perfect Fit,* 2. back

Note 12: See James Livingston's *Pragmatism, Feminism and Democracy: Rethinking the Politics of American History* (New York: Routledge, 2001) and *Pragmatism and the Political Economy of Cultural Revolution, 1850-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994). For a range of views on consumption and culture, see Warren Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), Jennifer Scanlon, ed., *The Gender and Consumer Culture Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 2000); Susan Strasser, Charles McGovern and Matthias Judt, eds., *Getting and Spending: European and American Consumer Societies in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Roger Horowitz and Arwen Mohun, eds., *His and Hers: Gender, Consumption, and*

Technology (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998); Victoria de Grazia and Ellen Furlough, eds., *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996). back

Note 13: Rob Schorman, "Ready or Not: Custom-Made Ideals and Ready-Made Clothes in Late 19th-Century America," *Journal of American Culture* 19 (1996): 111-120, 111. back

Note 14: Two recent studies of rural women are Lu Ann Jones, *Mama Learned Us to Work: Farm Women in the New South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002) and Rebecca Sharpless, *Fertile Ground, Narrow Choices: Women on Texas Cotton Farms, 1900-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999). For the perspectives of immigrants (albeit mostly Jewish and Italian) see Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Susan A. Glenn, *Daughters of the Shtetl: Life and Labor in the Immigrant Generation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); and Elizabeth Ewen, *Immigrant Women in the Land of Dollars* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1985). Two studies of African American women's culture are Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997) and Stephanie Shaw's *What a Woman Ought to Be and to Do: Black Professional Women Workers During the Jim Crow Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), while for Hispanic and Indian women see Sarah Deutsch, *No Separate Refuge: Culture, Class, and Gender on an Anglo-Hispanic Frontier in the American Southwest, 1880-1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987) and Devon A. Mihesuah, *Cultivating the Rosebuds: The Education of Women at the Cherokee Female Seminary, 1851-1909* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993). Meanwhile, three perspectives on girls' culture are Jane H. Hunter, *How Young Ladies Became Girls: The Victorian Origins of American Girlhood* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002); Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls* (New York: Random House, 1997); and Miriam Formanek-Brunell, *Made to Play House: Dolls and the Commercialization of American Girlhood, 1830-1930* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993). back

Note 15: Many important studies of women's history and gender meanings focus on this particular time period. A few examples are Nancy A. Hewitt, S*outhern Discomfort: Women's Activism in Tampa, Florida, 1880s-1920s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), Margaret Finnegan, *Selling Suffrage: Consumer Culture and Votes for Women* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998). Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black*

Baptist Church, 1990-1920 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993) and Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987). back

Note 16: I would like to thank the leaders and participants in the 2001 Columbia University Oral History Summer Institute for their insights on the use of interview materials. back

Note 17: I'd like to thank Phyllis Magidson of the Museum of the City of New York; Margaret Ordoñez and Joy Spanabel Emery at the University of Rhode Island; Diane Barsa, Tunde Horvath and Coralee Cummings at the Hermitage Historical Society; and Alexandra Kowalski at the Metropolitan Museum of Art Costume Institute for their help with garments. For more insight into using clothing as a resource, see Nancy Bradfield's *Costume in Detail, 1730-1930* (1968; reprinted New York: Costume & Fashion Press, 1997). back

Note 18: In her technical study of early nineteenth century fabrics, Susan Greene reiterates this point, writing that museums "boast all kinds of pretty dresses. Made of lace, taffeta, velvet, chiffon, lawn and muslin – they evoke visions of teas and operas, weddings and balls. Conspicuous by their absence, or nearly so, are the early nineteenth-century printed calico dresses worn in kitchens and barnyards, seldom valued enough to have been stashed in family trunks with baby clothes and outdated dresses." Susan Greene, "Service with Style: Indigo, Manganese Bronze, and Hoyle's Purple Dress Prints, 1800-1855," *Dress* 26 (1999) 17-30, 17. back

Note 19: One such workbook is that by Florence Loop, Graded Sewing Exercises, Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera, Winterthur Museum, Garden and Library. back

Note 20: Michael Owen Jones, "How Can We Apply Event Analysis to 'Material Behavior,' and Why Should We?" *Western Folklore* 56 (1998): 199-214, 202-203. back

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