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Who Wants To Be an "English" Mother?

Irish and Southern African American Domestic Workers in New York, 1865-1935

"Who Wants To Be an 'English' Mother? Irish and Southern African American Domestic Workers in New York, 1865–1935" examines how a focus on the ideology of "mothering" provides alternative explanations for the infamous domestic service problem. While the shortage of servants might have been a reason why employers complained about the quality of servants during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the author advances the argument that the domestic service problem was also rooted in ideas of "mothering," which were embedded in particular racialized meanings of class, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity. By focusing on the labor histories of Irish and southern African American women who worked as domestic servants after migrating to New York, the author traces how racialized ideas of "mothering" circulated between the homes of England and New York and were shaped by the environment, daily interactions, and public discussions between domestic workers and their female employers. In addition, the author examines how ideas of "mothering" subjected employers to the scrutiny of the public as well as domestic workers.

The domestic sphere became subject to national debates about motherhood, race, and American citizenship in the late nineteenth century. National periodicals featured articles authored by women employers who complained about the decline in quality and quantity of domestic workers. The serving women responded by blaming housewives for the "domestic service problem." While tension existed between employers and domestic workers across ethnicity and race, Irish and African American household workers and their employers emerged as the dominant focus of newspaper headlines in the state of New York.

Early census reports suggest that the immigration of Irish women to the Northeast increased in the 1830s, and by 1845 women comprised nearly 50

percent of Irish immigrants to the United States. Moreover, by the 1840s the concentration of Irish women in domestic service became noticeable (Lynch-Brennan 2009: xix). Although other groups of European women such as Germans and Scandinavians were employed in domestic service and were highly sought after by employers, they did not migrate in large enough numbers to outweigh the Irish (Dudden 62). Only African American women, many migrating from the South during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, seriously challenged the Irish in the domestic service labor market. Most of the African American women migrants were young, single, separated, or widowed, and their destinations usually included Philadelphia, New York, Chicago, or Boston (Phillips 40). As early as 1905, one-quarter of all adult Black women in New York City lived alone or in a lodging house and ninety percent of Black women in the city were domestic workers.[1]

Irish and African American women migrated during a period when racial hierarchies in the United States had been disrupted due to the events that followed the Civil War. The abolition of slavery, the deterioration of the southern economy and the modernization of its northern counterpart, waves of labor migration to the United States from Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean, and the entry of African Americans into the wage labor force for the first time in U.S. history posed a challenge to the privileged socioeconomic and political status of the WASPs (white Anglo Saxon Protestants). Reorganizing social, economic, and political institutions to protect the privileges of the WASPs involved the process of marking racial differences among the population to locate which individuals deserved access to the promises of American citizenship such as livable wages, safe working conditions, and safe and affordable housing.

Touted as the "bedrock" of American civilization that should be cared for by women, I argue that the "home" became an environment where racial differences were marked between particularly white American women and women migrant laborers. Articulating the views of employers and journalists, local periodicals and domestic service manuals routinely characterized the newcomers from Ireland and the South as the worst domestic workers in U.S. history. Housewives sought to explain these perceived racial differences by frequently comparing the work ethics of English, Irish, and African American domestic workers. In 1869 a journalist for *Every Saturday: A Journal of Choice Reading, Vol. VII* laments, "Everywhere in England, not excepting London, the servants seem astonishingly docile, civil, willing, and well-trained. The worst London maid-of-all work who ever transformed a lodging-house into a purgatory shines like an angel by contrast with her Irish sister in New York" (109). In 1897 a housewife echoes similar sentiments in a letter that she submitted to *The New York Times*. She laments, "Do our housekeepers often wish for 'one of those fine old negro servants from the South,' and then, getting her, find that

her art does not go beyond frying bacon and boiling hominy? And have you not often, Madam, wished for 'one of those well trained English girls, always so prompt and respectful? " (Untitled 1897).

While embracing a shared ancestry with the English, WASP employers affirmed their sense of racial superiority by looking toward English employers for tips on how to manage women they employed. According to sisters Catherine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, "In England, the class who go to service are a class, and service is a profession; the distance between them and their employers is so marked and defined, and all the customs and requirements of the position are so perfectly understood, that the master or mistress has no fear of being compromised by condescension, and no need of the external voice of air of authority…" (321). Thus, the "home" was a site that fostered developing ideas of motherhood, race, and citizenship that circulated across the Atlantic and informed how racial and class distinctions were made among women in the United States.

The organization of domestic service in England and the United States was guided by the ideology of "mothering." Discourses of "mothering" crossed racial and ethnic lines, including the expectations that women should act as the primary caretakers of the household because their maternal instincts enable them to raise children better than men. Housewives were expected to perform the labor of "good" mothers by serving as self-less role models for their children by upholding the Christian moral of sexual chastity and cleanliness; keeping the house clean and safe; cooking nutritious meals for their children; and providing a haven of relaxation for husbands who worked outside of home.[2]

Although these responsibilities were expected of women employers, who were generally the biological caregivers, the specific tasks and the expectations associated with them were often delegated instead to domestic servants. Sociologist Bonnie Thornton Dill argues, "the domestic worker is, in some ways, an extension of the housewife. The housewife delegates some or all of her household and family maintenance tasks to the worker in exchange for wages" (5). This situation resulted in the sharing of "mothering" responsibilities between employers and domestic workers and the evaluation of those laborers according to ideologies intended to describe the employers' own performance.

Many female employers in the United States came from Anglo-American families who readily embraced this British notion of motherhood. Thus, these employers frequently used discourses of "mothering" to evaluate the labor of Irish and African American women. Housewives often cited the lack of intelligence and morals as evidence that Irish and Black women were "bad mothers" and thereby undeserving of adequate wages, safe working conditions, decent working hours, and compensation for vacation time. The arduous demands

of domestic labor and intersecting ideas of race, class, gender, and sexuality made it difficult for domestic workers to meet their employers' expectations, positioning them at the crux of contradictory ideas about "good" and "bad" mothers. The expectation that servants adhere to the dominant ideology of "mothering" is one of the reasons why, for over two hundred years, employers have constantly failed in their search for the ideal domestic worker.

Yet, housewives did not simply impose British ideas of domesticity on domestic workers, but absorbed expectations for themselves as well. Thus, while feminist scholars have generally studied domestic work to examine the privileges of housewives, I will evaluate the limits of those privileges. It is the difficulty that both biological and hired "mothers" faced in fulfilling these expectations that helped generate anger, frustration, and resentment. This has in turn contributed to volatile working conditions and relationships between housewives and Irish and Black domestic workers in nineteenth century households.

To be clear, it is not my intention to subsume the racial differences between Irish and Black women. For instance, by the 1930s, Irish women began to transition into the white racial category and eventually gained access to jobs outside of domestic service. They also gained membership in labor unions, which protected their rights as white workers. Black women had a far more difficult time accessing such resources and remained relegated to the lower ranks of domestic service well into the late twentieth century. However, when both groups were concentrated in domestic service jobs from the late nineteenth until the early twentieth century—there were some striking commonalities in their racial, class, and gendered labor experiences, and those intersections are the focus of this article.

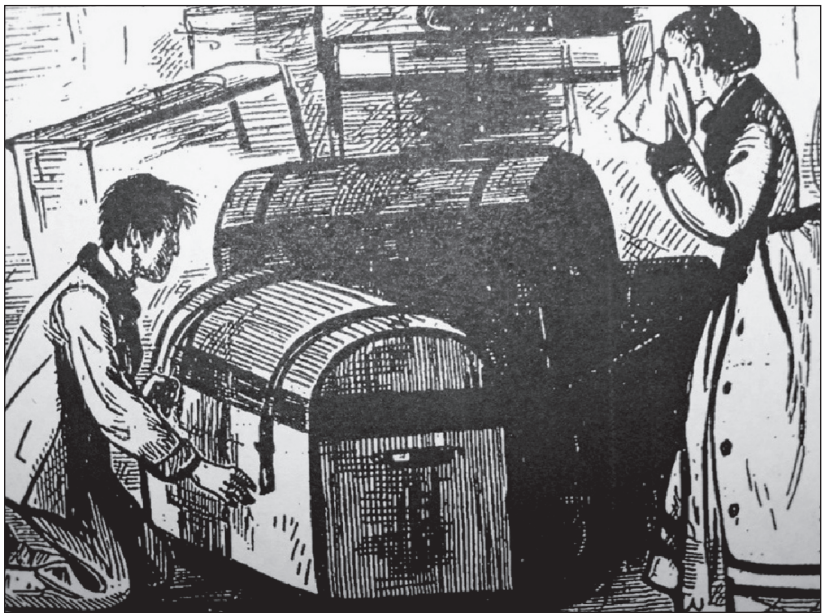
Working Towards the Impossibility of "Mothering"

Irish women

Employers' perceptions of Irish women as "bad" mothers were partly rooted in complaints that Irish women could not operate modern household technology. Margaret Lynch-Brennan notes, "Bridget was very familiar to readers of popular American literature where, from the mid-nineteenth century on, in cartoons as well as text, her faults and foibles, in particular her ignorance of American housekeeping methods, were decried and derided" (Lynch-Brennan 489). These ideas informed employers' concerns that Irish women could not fulfill the "motherly" duty of caring for children. An image of a woman looking frantically through a pile of luggage at a dock appeared in *Harper's Bazaar* and is entitled "That Servant Again." The caption reads: "Oh, Tom, what do you think? That horrid Bridget has just told me that as she could not

find the Cradle, she put the Baby to sleep in one of the Trunks, and I'm afraid it's in the lot that went on in the First Load, and that little Tootsy has been checked through to Saratoga."

The image below presents the Irish domestic worker as incapable of caring for a small child because she lacked the intellectual capability of distinguishing between a trunk and a cradle. Since the cradle was a new invention at the



time, the image also suggests that Irish women were once again incapable of adopting modern domestic technologies ("That Servant Again").

Complaints that Irish women could not operate modern appliances converged with employers' perceptions of Irish women as "unintelligent," "lazy," and "dirty." Such ideas, which positioned Irish women as incapable of caring for themselves, much less their employers' children, are reflected in the image below. The caption reads, "Mother: 'Gracious, Bridget, haven't you got the baby washed yet?' Bridget: 'Yes, mum.' Mother: 'Then, what in the world are you doing? Bridget: "Oim a wiping; of him, mum'" (*Harper's Bazaar* 1886).

Images of "dirty" and "unintelligent" Irish servants were partly rooted in racialized ideas of the "barbaric" Irish that had been circulating in England since the colonial era. Prior to the mass migration of southern African American women to northern cities in the 1870s and 1880s, their predecessors were discursively linked with Irish women in the colonial imaginaries of the English. The English identified what they viewed as race, language, and religious inferiority as reasons to colonize both Ireland and Africa (Garner 73). Such ideas also informed

how the English perceived African and Irish women as inefficient laborers in the domestic sphere in both England and its colonies. According to historian Bronwen Walter, "In both cases, portrayal of unkempt and slovenly houses contrasts with the cleanliness and order of British homes where the cult of domesticity underpinned industrial capitalism. Although Irish and African women were not necessarily included in the images, domestic scenes directly implicated them in the disorder" (Walter 110).

Such ideas continued into the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and were prevalent in both England and the United States. According to David Roediger in *The Wages of Whiteness*, "A variety of writers, particularly ethnologists, praised Anglo-Saxon virtues as the bedrock of liberty and derided the 'Celtic race.' Some suggested that the Irish were part of a separate caste or a 'dark' race, possibly originally African" (133). England's weakening control of its colonies; increased emigration of Irish Catholics to England and the United States; and growing resistance to British rule in Ireland provided a context that nurtured stereotypical representations of the Irish on both sides of the Atlantic. In addition, the actual working environment of Irish servants and the demands of domestic service made it difficult for Irish women to become ideal "mothers," or adhere to British notions of cleanliness in their places of employment. Consequently, WASP employers reproduced the negative portrayals of Irish servants in the United States that had developed its roots in nineteenth century England.

As poor, single, and immigrant women, many Irish servants lived in their employers' homes to save money and send some of their earnings to family members in Ireland. While laboring in the homes of WASP families, Irish servants were usually relegated to cramped and unsanitary living quarters. If

more than one servant was employed in the home, then it was not uncommon for them to sleep in the same bed in the attic. Attics in New York homes were usually dusty, dark, and had no windows for ventilation during the hot summers. As workers who sometimes lived in an unclean living environment and were responsible for cleaning clothes, dishes, furniture, floors, and the bodily wastes of employing families, it was difficult for Irish women to adhere to the "mothering" expectation that respectable women should avoid contact with "dirty" objects.

The idea that "mothering" was an instinctive responsibility that women could perform with ease and perfection also posed a challenge for Irish women since the arduous demands of housework made it difficult for servants to perform daily household tasks without committing errors and becoming fatigued. Some servants worked in houses with three or more floor levels and were required to walk up and down several flights of stairs multiple times a day to clean the rooms, cook meals, clean the laundry, and serve the family. While walking up and down the stairs, servants usually carried food trays, laundry, and other household items that sometimes weighed over forty pounds. In addition, the process of preparing meals was laborious since most were made from scratch and servants had to operate heavy kitchen machinery to prepare essential ingredients such as butter and bread (Knapp and Ulz).

Caring for children added more fatigue to the daily responsibilities of "mothering." A late nineteenth century article in *The New York Times* explains the duties of childcare for servants:

> Pretty thorough observation will convince one that no servant thinks a family with a baby is small. A baby in a house may be a wellspring of pleasure and all that sort of thing. But it is a terror to "help." Their principal objection to it is the additional washing it imposes. American mothers may be slatternly, but they will have their babies' gowns and dresses and "skirts" washed and ironed to exquisite nicety. It is a plain, somewhat deplorable fact that the birth of a baby directly diminishes a housekeeper's chances to get good servants.… ("Domestic Servants")

Working in an intimate environment where servants had close contact with the employing family and where their employers believed that Ireland was a "dirty" and "uncivilized" country helped create representations of Irish immigrant women as carriers of disease. Employers and the local media pinpointed an Irish servant, referred to as "Typhoid Mary," for the cause of the typhoid epidemic. Mary Torney responded by filing a lawsuit against the City and its Health Department for $50,000 with the claim that "she had been unable

to follow her trade of cooking, and her chances of making a living had been greatly reduced" ("Typhoid Mary asks"). It was not until the 1970s when city government officials acknowledged that the source of typhoid fever was not an Irish immigrant woman, but rather poor sanitation practices in the City ("Typhoid carrier").

Ironically, however, the inferior racial, class, and immigrant status of Irish women also made them ideal "mothers" for white American homes. The increasing availability of "cheap" Irish labor and the reluctance of some employers to hire Black women after the Civil War informed some perceptions that the most qualified "mothers" hailed from Ireland. Some U.S. employers thought Irish women were such good workers that they argued for higher wages on their behalf by comparing them to Black servants. In 1888, an employer wrote a letter to the *Brooklyn Eagle* asking others to raise Irish women's wages. She claims, "Harriet Beecher Stowe, in 'Uncle Tom's Cabin,' immortalized the negro 'Mammy,' who watched over little Eva from babyhood to womanhood, but the faithful Bridget, whose tender care has endeared her [to] households, needs not the eulogy of a novelist to establish her unclaimed right to be remembered for her motherly devotion to the children of her mistress" ("Servant Girl").

African American Women

By the time Irish women arrived in the United States in the mid-nineteenth century, Black women had been positioned at the crux of representations that deemed them as both "bad" and "good" mothers since slavery. According to Deborah Gray White, "One of the most prevalent images of black women in antebellum America was of a person governed almost entirely by her libido, a Jezebel character…. She did not lead men and children to God … indeed domesticity paled in importance before matters of the flesh" (29). White argues that such ideas derived from the first encounters between European colonists and Africans. The Englishmen "mistook semi-nudity" and practices of polygamy for "lewdness" and "uncontrollable lust." These claims served the colonial interests of slaveholders who wanted Black women to provide future laborers through constant reproduction while simultaneously positioning them as "bad" mothers.

According to Angela Davis, "Ideological exaltation of motherhood—as popular as it was during the nineteenth century—did not extend to slaves. In fact, in the eyes of slaveholders, slave women were not mothers at all; they were simply instruments guaranteeing the growth of the slave labor force" (7). Facing increasing criticism from northerners about slavery toward the mid-nineteenth century, southerners created a stereotypical "Mammy" figure to defend the institution of slavery. "Mammy" was a loyal servant, hard worker, helped the

wives of slaveholders maintain moral and ethical standards in the home, and devoted twenty-four hour attention to the needs of the children. Representations of the Mammy and Jezebel continued to shape northern perceptions of Black women after slavery and informed northern employers' beliefs that the southern women could be "good" or "bad" mothers.

Circulating discourses of "Mammy" encouraged some employers to send advertisements to the South encouraging Black women to work in the North after emancipation. A New York employer asserts, "In the not universal quality of kindness to children, they are simply excellent by the laws of their gentle, cheerful, grateful natures. These colored people, for the present at least take pride in considering the household their family" ("Domestic Servants"). Some northern employers were also delighted to employ the southern migrants because they thought the women could provide cheap domestic labor as formerly enslaved workers. Yet, what complicated the notion that Black women were "good mothers" was that their racially inferior status positioned them outside of the boundaries of American citizenship. An article published in the *New York Times* titled, "Work to Domestic Service," reads, "The Women's Municipal League thinks that the chief need for lightening the domestic problem is to furnish training to both negroes and immigrant girls … they must be in an elementary way Americanized before they can properly go into American homes" ("Work to Domestic Servant"). This precarious positioning of southern Black women as "foreigners" in the North made them susceptible to complaints that they would not know how to maintain a home.

Similar to Irish peasant women, southern African American women were considered incapable of maintaining a modernized household. Considered an extension of "uncivilized" southern planters, some northerners expressed disdain for Black migrant women by accusing them of spreading diseases to their employers. Thus, some northern employers described southern Black women as licentious and incapable of taking proper hygiene measures when working in "refined" northern homes (Hunter 195-196). Domestic service training schools were created by both white employers and middle class African American reformers to help rescue black female migrants from their "innate" sexual temptations and educate them in skills and technologies necessary to respectable (if low paying) employment.

While these schools demonstrate efforts to train African American women on how to become "good mothers," the assumption that they needed to be trained suggests that they were inherently "bad mothers." After all, knowing how to manage the household is supposedly an innate female characteristic. Thus, even African American women with training did not prevent employers from painting them as "bad mothers." An employer wrote to the *Brooklyn*

Eagle, "I am going to part with my colored maid, and will bear in mind for the future that my system of training is not infallible, if it did take me thirty years to make the discovery" ("Tyranny of Servant").

The environment in which many Black women lived after migrating to the North helped fuel representations of "dirty" Black servants. Due to practices of racial discrimination in the northern housing market, most Blacks were relegated to poor living conditions in tenement homes. Sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois sought to challenge negative portrayals of Black household laborers in his sociological study entitled *The Philadelphia Negro*. By providing detailed accounts of his ethnographic research in tenement homes, Du Bois provided strong evidence that Black women were not inherently prone to diseases. While describing a tenement home in Philadelphia, he stated:

> Many share the use of one bathroom with one or more other families. The bath-tubs usually are not supplied with hot water and very often have no water-connection at all … the bad sanitary results are shown in the death rates of the ward … over 20 percent and possibly 30 per cent of the Negro families of this ward lack some of the very elementary accommodations necessary to health and decency.… These tenement abominations of Philadelphia are perhaps better than the vast tenement houses of New York.… (292-294)

The groundbreaking study demonstrated that diseases in nineteenth century was the result of structural problems and was not an issue of race and gender. Due to the lack of information about sanitation information at the time, it was equally possible that illnesses were spread by the employing families themselves. Northern employers' complaints about Black women stemmed from their dissatisfaction with how Black women transformed domestic service from a live-in to a live-out occupation. According to historian Elizabeth Clark-Lewis, "…they developed the determination to transform a master-servant relationship into an employer-employee relationship," in an effort to establish their status as wage laborers and not slaves (5). The insistence of Black women to "live-out" confirmed for some employers that they were "bad mothers," especially since the ideology of mothering required women to devote themselves eternally to caring for the home. Black women could not exercise this commitment if they had their own lives outside of that environment. In addition, Black women's demand for adequate compensation for their labor introduced the reality that "mothering" was a job similar to the work performed by males in the public sphere.

Similar to depictions of Irish women, Black women were considered "bad" mothers regarding how they cared for their own children. It was difficult for

Black women to adhere to the ideals of "mothering" in their own homes since the demanding requirements of domestic service often meant that the laborers spent most of their time in the employers' homes. Dill asserts, "[Black] Children with keys around their necks and the mothers who left home to earn wages in factories and private households were thought to be a major contributing factor to juvenile delinquency" (22). This arrangement often contributed to hegemonic beliefs that Black women were incapable of mothering.

Yet, children of the southern migrants remember how their mothers still made sure they were well taken care of. Vanessa Spear recalls that her mother provided a stable home life after migrating from South Carolina to New York. Spear recalls, "The whole thing [domestic work] was financial. And then she had a kid to send to school. Even though I went to public school, she still had to feed me, clothe me, and send me to the dentist. We didn't have health insurance like we have today." Spear always had food, shelter, and a support network of friends and family in Harlem. She remembers having the necessities while growing up and receiving parental instruction that prevented her from getting into trouble with the law. Through this personal account, Spear describes the concept of "shared mothering." According to historical sociologist Evelyn Nakano Glenn, "Shared mothering has been a characteristic of African American communities since slavery … caring for kin is shared among male and female adults, elders, and children" (Chang, Glenn and Forcey, 6). Thus, Black women performed alternative forms of "mothering" by creating support networks through churches, family members, and friendships with neighbors to help provide care for their own children.

Women Employers

The ideology of "mothering" deemed middle class and upper class women as managers of the domestic sphere and this role included supervising domestic workers. An anonymous employer bragged to the *Brooklyn Eagle* and its readers about how she effectively manages both Irish and "colored" women. Through her letter she explains how her status as a housewife was intricately tied to the women she employed. She wrote, "I always have every detail of my housekeeping in my mind, anticipating and preparing for each day's work as it comes … I try never to forget that first of all, I am a home keeper and a housekeeper, and the pivot around which all the domestic machinery revolves" ("Servant Girl Question").

Clearly, ideals of "mothering" and "lady hood" relieved employers of domestic drudgery yet still tied them to the home and created expectations among domestic workers that they assume primary responsibility as the biological mothers of the home. Letters submitted by Irish servants to the *Brooklyn Eagle*

suggest that these less affluent employers were positioned as the main targets of public criticisms. An Irish servant sent the following letter to the *Brooklyn Eagle* about an employer she referred to as "C.O.P.," "I pity the poor, innocent Irish girls who meet with such as 'C.O.P.' I don't consider her a lady. I guess 'C.O.P.'s' girl must have been starved when she took the bread …'C.O.P.' is more of a servant herself than the lady help that worked for her" ("Hopes").

"Brave Irish Girl's" letter explains that the contents of the physical space in the home partly signaled whether or not housewives were "good" mothers. Highlighting what the author considered to be an insufficient food supply led her to question the employer's status as a "lady." Canned and boxed foods were inventions that accompanied the advancement of industrialization during the 1920s and developing class standards required housewives to purchase an abundance of prepared foods. Thus, food supply became a measure of a properly managed household (Conan 8). The author for an article published by *Harper's Bazaar* explains the importance of food supply: "The excellent manager has preserves and pickles in her cupboard, and cold meat in her pantry.… We all know houses in which, when meal is over, the cupboard, like Mother Hubbard's, is bare of even a bone.… [Thus] they [maids] resent reproof, and never identify themselves with the family. It is all because of bad management" ("Good Management").

The emergence of domestic training schools for housewives during the early twentieth century suggests that widespread preoccupation with the declining

quality and quantity of domestic workers was intricately tied to negative evaluations of especially middle class housewives and their "failure" to fulfill their roles as mothers, or managers of household work.

The photograph (on the previous page) is an image of the Dorcas Boardman School established in New York City in 1935. The purpose of the school was to instruct housewives how to perform household duties such as kitchen and pantry organizing, garnishing and carving foods, how to make a bed, and how to iron clothes. The caption for the photograph emphasizes the blurred boundaries between socially prescribed roles for housewives and domestic servants. The caption reads, "…Scientific Housekeeping realized that while it was sending perfectly trained servants into the world, there was an astonishing lack of training among employers, a fact that undoubtedly contributed to making servant troubles as frequent a topic of conversation as health, wealth, or offspring … the mistress of the house should know as much about household work as her servants" ("School for brides"). During training housewives were required to wear a service uniform at the school that was similar to the uniforms some domestic workers were expected to wear on the job. The dress code for the students and the school's descriptions of housewives' roles reveals how both employees and employers were intricately and simultaneously tied to the expectations of "mothering."[3]

Conclusion

The discrepancies between the prescription and practice of "good" mothering points to the impossibility of achieving the ideal among both employers and domestic workers. According to Glenn, "The idea that domestic labor, including mothering or caring work, is 'women's work' is familiar. What may be less familiar is the idea that mothering is not just gendered, but also racialized" (7). Racialized ideas of social class, gender, and sexuality that defined the socially prescribed responsibilities of "mothering" made it impossible for domestic workers or employers to meet them. Examining such ideas requires tracing domestic labor, domestic workers, employers, and ideas of mothering along a messy route that reaches from England to Ireland, Africa and the United States.

Domestic workers and their employers are still expected to adhere to ideologies of "mothering" today. Middle-class women continue to hire domestic workers because their jobs demand important time away from their children. Moreover, surveillance of domestic workers remains the responsibility of women employers, leading to technologies, like nanny cams, that allow employers to record the behavior of domestic workers (Hondagneu-Sotelo 40). A New York prosecutor who is also a mother of two has created a new surveillance system.

Mothers buy license plates for their children's strollers so that people can record the plate number when domestic workers take children to a public venue and behave in some inappropriate way. The observers can make an anonymous report to the website <http://www.howsmynanny.com>. Employers, in turn, can create an account on the website and view the reports daily.

The groundbreaking study demonstrated that the outbreak of diseases in northern cities was the result of structural problems and was not initiated by the migration of southern African Americans Yet, interrogating the ideals of "mothering" can lead scholars to ask questions about the complexity of domestic workers' experiences that disrupt the binary framework of "evil" middle-class women who oppress poor "vulnerable" workers. Being a "good" mother is a goal that is difficult for any woman to achieve, and barriers of race, class, and immigrant status add challenges for those who take care of their employers' children as well as their own.

[1]"African American" and "Black" will be used interchangeably throughout the article.

[2]I refer to mothering as an idea because women are not born with the desire to care for the home. Such responsibilities were society's expectations of what is proper for a woman to do in the home.

[3]The photograph is courtesy of the Kheel Center labor archive at Cornell University.

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