“Intelligent, Efficient, Industrious, Dishonest, and Dishonorable”: Conflicting Views of Working Women in the 1914 Chicago Waitress Strike

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Senior History Honors Thesis
Fall 2012/ Spring 2013
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Senior Thesis
History Honors Program
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As the Loop district of Chicago began to stir on the morning of February 5, 1914, a group of women took their places on a picket line outside of Henrici’s Restaurant on Randolph Street. For several weeks, tensions had been brewing between unions representing restaurant and hotel workers and the restaurant owners. A growing number of Chicago restaurant owners had formed the Restaurant Keepers’ Association, an organization dedicated to shut out all unions from their businesses and return to an industry-wide seven-day work week. The unions of waitresses, waiters, cooks, and bakers, meanwhile, had been pressing to get more union contracts and to create closed shops, where only union members could work in Chicago hotels and restaurants. When William Collins, the manager of Henrici’s, refused to sign a contract with the waitresses giving them more favorable hours and wages as well as a commitment to hire only union members, the Chicago Waitress Local 484 and the Chicago Cooks Union 864 declared a strike.

The *Chicago Tribune* declared “Labor Opens War on Restaurants” as picketers gathered outside Henrici’s on a cold Thursday morning, asking everyone walking down Randolph Street to eat elsewhere. Though initially they made little impact, as their numbers grew (estimates ranged from fifteen to fifty) they started to turn more people away as the lunch rush began. Collins responded by calling the police, who arrested three women and made the rest disperse. The officers told the picketers, “If you come back again, you will be pinched [arrested] as sure as this is Thursday. Now, beat it!” Despite the threats, as the waitresses left the scene, they
warned the police they would return. This was simply the opening of what would become a very long conflict between organized labor and the restaurant owners.¹

The strike continued for another eleven months. What began as a disagreement between Waitress Union Local 484 and William Collins and the rest of the management of Henrici’s soon became much bigger. Both parties lined up advocates, with the Restaurant Keepers’ Association (RKA) and Employers’ Association supporting Henrici’s, and the Chicago Federation of Labor (CFL) and Women’s Trade Union League (WTUL) backing the waitresses. Meanwhile, crowds gathered to watch the strike every day, and newspapers covered the dispute in detail. Moreover, the strike soon spread to other restaurants, as owners George Knab, L. Walter Powers, and B.F. Efting all came in conflict with the waitresses. Local government was also drawn in, as the police arrested picketers daily while restaurant owners filed for injunctions before the county court. By the time injunctions finally crippled and ended the strike in January 1915, this had become much more than just a labor dispute by a small number of waitresses.

The picket on February 5, 1914, was the opening salvo in an eleven month labor conflict between the waitress union and the RKA about the wages, hours, and working conditions of the waitresses employed throughout Chicago. As Illinois legislators were beginning to restrict the number of hours employers could demand from their female employees, the waitresses contributed to this movement by arguing for a six-day work week as well as an increase in pay. Therefore, the waitresses’ demands for improved hours and pay, as well as their use of pickets and boycotts in order to force employers into compliance with their wishes, represent part of

the larger dynamic between employers and employees during the rapid urbanization and industrialization of the early twentieth century United States.

This waitress strike represents more, however, than an example of the on-going dispute of what it meant to labor in Progressive-Era America. The increasing number of urban actors who participated in or paid attention to the strike suggests a fascination with this particular dispute, one that centered on concerns about the proper relationship between women, wage work, and the public sphere during this intense period of industrialization in fast-growing cities like Chicago. As a growing number of women began to engage in waged work outside the home, Americans were forced to re-evaluate and define what exactly a woman’s place in society was and how femininity and work could intersect. The actions taken by the women striking Henrici’s thus present a window into how this group of working-class women saw themselves and the world they inhabited. While a lack of written records often makes it extremely difficult to see how working-class women viewed themselves and their relationships to others, the waitresses’ actions in the 1914 strike permit insight into how they saw their place in the new urban workforce. Meanwhile, reactions to these women--from the restaurant owners, the police, union leaders, newspapers, and the general population of Chicago--provide insight into the changing ideas of whether women should be treated as equal workers or protected as a vulnerable sex as well as conversations about how bounds of propriety and respectable behavior applied to working-class women.

The 1914 Chicago waitress strike is therefore a perfect vehicle for exploring bigger questions of women, work, gender, and class in the Progressive Era workplace. The public nature and unconventional social dynamics of waitresses meant that these questions of how to view working women were even more pronounced and exaggerated when it came to
considering waitresses as opposed to women working in other industries, such as factories. Waitresses were already a controversial working population, and the strike drew even more public attention to their profession, initiating intense debates about the proper place of women in the urban economy. An exploration of the waitresses’ strike produces an opportunity to explore competing views on the respectability of working-class women and differing notions of working women as equal laborers, victims in need of protection, or disgraceful troublemakers.

Chicago’s long history of unions, strikes, and labor-related violence has made the city central to American labor historiography, from Haymarket to Pullman to the Memorial Day Massacre and beyond. But the 1914 waitresses’ strike has not been studied by labor historians. Even Dorothy Sue Cobble, author of the standard history of waitress unionism, devoted only one page of Dishing It Out to the eleven-month strike in Chicago. Although largely forgotten by labor scholars, however, contemporaries felt otherwise, as the amount of public attention paid to this strike through newspaper coverage and other contemporary accounts reveals. Not only important in its own right, this strike was also one of the first major strikes by working women in Chicago, with only the garment worker strike of 1910 predating it. Clearly, the 1914 waitress strike deserves a study of its own, and that is the aim of the current thesis.

By focusing on the lives and labors of working-class American women, this project contributes to the growing body of women’s labor history. Alice Kessler-Harris’s Out to Work laid the foundation for the study of women's history with her broad survey of women’s labor

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2 For a sampling of standard works of American labor history showing Chicago’s importance, see Dulles and Dubofsky, Labor in America; James Green, Death in the Haymarket; Lizabeth Cohen, Making a New Deal.

history, but her focus was largely on industrial rather than service industries. Women’s labor history has since expanded in a variety of directions. Works such as Annelise Orleck’s *Common Sense and a Little Fire* used the work of individual labor reformers to study issues of women’s labor. Other historians have focused on histories of industries, such as Dorothy Sue Cobble’s history of waitress unionism or Susan Porter Benson’s construction of a social history of saleswomen in department stores during the first half of the twentieth century. Others have approached women’s labor history by examining activities in one city, such as Dana Frank, who looked at how service industries and consumer power was used in Seattle for labor unionization. Labor historians have also examined the social history of workers; Kathy Peiss and Nan Enstad both used the leisure activities and interest of working-class women in order to create a history for them. This work draws upon both the strike and union focus of Kessler-Harris, Orleck, Frank, and Cobble while also integrating the social history and investigations of workers’ lives outside the workplace of Benson, Peiss, and Enstad.

In the first chapter of this thesis, I explore who the waitresses were and why they struck Henrici’s and the other restaurants in Chicago. The working conditions in the industry, especially the long hours for low wages, created discontent among waitresses. Furthermore, the independence of the waitresses, who were known for ignoring middle-class ideas of

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9 I also draw on the methodology of Christine Stansell’s *City of Women* in order to research women who have little to no writings or records of their own.
respectability and following their own conventions, as well as the success unions had already had in the short time women had worked as waitresses, encouraged these women to use a strike in order to gain better working conditions for themselves.

In the second chapter, I explore the question of why others found waitressing so fascinating, generating a public record of interest and explorations of the world of waitresses. Commentators tended to take one of four main views of waitresses: they were seen as either disreputable troublemakers, strong workers, helpless victims, or some combination of these. Using four exposes written by middle-class women who worked undercover as waitresses during the years surrounding the 1914 strike, I argue that no matter which view one took, waitresses were seen as outside the social norm and a source of contention, hence the large amount of interest in the 1914 strike.

Finally, in the third chapter, I explain that everyone involved in the strike, from the waitresses and the restaurant owners, to the supporting players such as the CFL and WTUL, from the reporters of the various Chicago newspapers to the police, tended to see waitresses and the strike through the lens of one of the four categories outlined in chapter two: equal workers, fragile victims, disgraceful troublemakers, or an uneasy amalgamation of these. Consequently, the 1914 strike prompted a conversation in Chicago not just about the employer-employee relationship but also about the way to talk about and view working women, especially women working in the public eye.

By January 1915, the year-long waitress strike collapsed, as by then restaurant employers had won enough court injunctions to prohibit effective picketing. Without the ability to picket, the waitresses could no longer maintain a successful boycott, resulting in both a loss of union power as well as all of the industry gains they had made in regards to work hours.
and wages. The waitresses withdrew from public attention and the public conversation they
generated ceased, at least for the moment. However, though the strike was settled in the
employers’ favor, the larger questions raised by the strike -- about women, work, rights, and
respectability -- remained unresolved.

By the 1930s the waitress union returned to public prominence and power as it once
again challenged restaurant owners and brought the still unresolved labor question and
question of working women to eye once more. The assertive independence of waitresses as
well as their frequent defiance of societal rules, made them not only women who were willing
to picket their employers but also made them sources of fascination and contention for much of
Chicago. Because of this interest, the waitresses’ strike and the discourse about the strike are a
prime opportunity to see the evolving discussion on what it meant to have women in the
workforce and how these women should be seen and treated by the rest of the city. In light of
the continuing conversations Americans continue to have about work-life balance, women’s
proper place in the economy, and the roles and rights of service workers in urban settings,
perhaps those questions remain unresolved.
"The waitress does not live under the restraint of the public eye": Why Chicago Waitresses Struck in 1914

As Chicagoans woke up on Friday, February 6, 1914, the waitresses of Waitress Union Local 484, refusing to be deterred by the police the day before, once again formed a picket line outside Henrici’s doors. Five waitresses stood outside the restaurant and spoke to each person trying to enter the building, explaining they were boycotting the establishment and requesting that the person find a different restaurant to patronize. As the lunch rush multiplied the number of prospective customers coming to Henrici’s, the five waitresses could no longer address each person individually. Instead, they started yelling to everyone on the street that Henrici’s was being boycotted because of unfair labor practices and telling all passers-by to go somewhere else to eat.  

Incensed by the attempted boycott, restaurant manager William Collins called the police, who promptly arrested the waitresses for loitering. Carrie Alexander, the president of Waitress Local 484, refused to submit quietly, telling the arresting officer, "You have no right to make me leave this sidewalk.’ ‘Oh yes,’ the officer retorted, ‘If you are creating a disturbance, I have.’ Alexander replied, ‘I am not making a disturbance, and if you need me to go you will have to take me in the wagon, because I won’t walk a step.”

After the officer again ordered Alexander to begin walking to the police station, the other four waitresses gathered around Alexander. All five women shouted at the police, drawing a crowd of passers-by that encouraged Alexander to stand her ground. As two policemen tried to pull Alexander towards the street and make her walk, she sat down on the slush-filled sidewalk and refused to move. When one of the policemen tried to pick up

Alexander and carry her off, she responded by kicking him. The growing crowd laughed at the spectacle of the women and the police, resulting in “dinner and the boycott forgotten” as one Chicago Tribune reporter put it. Eventually Alexander and the four other picketing women--Helen Jones, Vera Meehan, Laura Wilhoite, and Catherine Jacobs--consented to walk to the jail, and the crowd tagged along.  

Henrici’s was not left alone for long, though, as new union members quickly came to fill the spots vacated by the five arrested waitresses. Meanwhile, when Alexander and the other arrested strikers were released on bail, they promptly returned to Henrici’s to rejoin the picket line. Faced with ten picketers outside his restaurant and a growing crowd, Collins again called the police. The Chicago Tribune reported as many as five thousand people gathered around Henrici’s to watch the waitresses and the police by the afternoon. When the police again tried to arrest Alexander, she informed them, “You can’t make me go away this time. I am acting under my constitutional rights, and if you try to make me go away, it is tyranny.” When a detective warned all the women he would have to arrest them if they did not stop causing a disturbance, waitress Sophie Dreislein immediately challenged, “Go ahead and take us.” But when the police arrested the women, they all sat down on the sidewalk and refused to move. The police, faced with a cheering crowd and women sitting on the ground in front of them, called for a wagon rather than trying to force the women to walk. The striking waitresses were carted to jail and charged with disorderly conduct, only to be released once again on bail.  

After being released from jail, Alexander and her fellow waitresses returned a third time to Henrici’s, and immediately resumed picketing outside the restaurant. Once again Collins

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called for the police and once again the waitresses refused to cooperate, sitting down in the middle of the sidewalk and refusing to move. The police were determined, however, to not be forced to call the wagon to Henrici’s for a second time, and they eventually forced the women to walk to jail. By the end of the day, the police had made thirteen arrests. Margaret Butler, Marie Shannon, Hazel Conroy, Lena Rushton, and Marie Ulrich were arrested for the first time, and Carrie Alexander, Catherine Jacobs, Sophie Dreislein, and Laura Willhoite were arrested twice in one day. Seven men, members of the cook union, were also arrested before the day ended, though the papers did not carry their names or details of their arrest.¹⁴

Despite the arrests, the strike continued, as the union returned with twelve women on Saturday, February 7. They were arrested for loitering several times, but returned to the picket line as soon as they were released on bail each time.¹⁵ Sunday, February 8 brought below zero weather, but, despite the cold, seven waitresses formed a picket line outside Henrici’s, where they were promptly arrested for “lounging and loafing.” As soon as they were released on bail, they returned to their posts, where Marie Ulrich and Mary Shannon were arrested a second time.¹⁶

By Monday, February 9, the waitresses decided to change their tactics. Picketers appeared in front of Henrici’s wearing yellow raincoats, featuring a list of demands on their backs. The raincoats read, “On strike at Henrici’s. Henrici pays $7 for seven days. We want $8 for six days.” Once again, the police arrived to arrest the waitresses, and once again the women resisted. As they were forced to walk to the jail, the picketers yelled to the crowd that

the police were hurting them with their harsh treatment. One waitress, Ora Duree, complained that the police wrenched her arm while she was being arrested, and she later went to a physician to examine her arm and confirm that it had been injured.\textsuperscript{17}

Upset by this harsh treatment, Carrie Alexander told the newspapers, “We shall protest to the mayor against the tactics of the police. We will be arrested, and we expect that, but we don’t want to be dragged to the station and then have our clothes torn from us as the police tore the raincoats from the girls today.” The Restaurant Keepers’ Association, meanwhile, held a meeting in which they unanimously decided that no employer should sign any sort of agreement with the union, nor recognize unions in any way. They also sought an injunction against the waitress union on the charges of conspiring to interfere with Henrici’s business with a boycott, invoking an Illinois state law against boycotting. Meanwhile, the waitress union asked Henry C. Moir, proprietor of the still-building Boston Oyster House to sign an agreement with them, threatening that the building trade unions would stop construction if Moir refused.\textsuperscript{18}

By the end of the first four days of the strike, both sides were adamant that they would not be giving in any time soon. Collins and the RKA proved they were not cowed by the sudden aggression of the waitress union. They would continue to call the police, continue their business, and ask the court system to force the picketers to cease their actions. The waitresses had likewise shown that they would not be scared by the restaurant owners. No matter how many times they were arrested or how they were treated, they would continually return to the picket line and resume the strike. The rest of Chicago started realizing that this was not a small


labor dispute which would be quickly and quietly settled; instead, the city braced itself for a long and ugly fight between the waitresses and the restaurant owners.

The waitress union had clear goals in their boycott. Primarily, they wanted waitresses to have one day off a week and to be paid at least eight dollars per week. Furthermore, they also wanted employers to refrain from reprimanding waitresses in front of guests, to stop asking waitresses to do porter work, and to stop swearing at their employees. They demanded employer-provided uniforms, a space to change into work clothes without having to pay, to be given working linens and not have to pay to have them laundered, and not to be charged for any breakages of plates, cup, or other kitchen items.

Members of a relatively new profession, waitresses were still negotiating not only the basic bread and butter concerns of wages and hours but also their duties and how they should be treated within this realm. Waitresses represented one set of the larger trend of women who, beginning with the rapid rise of industrialization, left the house and joined the paid labor force. The increase of waged female laborers did not end the practice of dividing work by gender, however, as women were quickly concentrated into industries and positions considered appropriate for women. Originally, this did not include serving food in restaurants, hotels or train cars, which was originally considered a male position. The few women who worked in taverns or saloons were usually related to the owner of the establishment or considered to be fallen women.

Fred Harvey and his opening of Harvey Houses along train stations throughout the western United States in the 1880s began to change that image. Harvey pioneered in by choosing to employ a female waitstaff, hiring white, single, young women and holding them to
strict behavioral standards, including a nightly curfew, in order to establish his chain as a series of wholesome places of hospitality staffed by respectable women. These “Harvey Girls,” who customarily worked for a year or two before retiring to marry, became a cultural phenomenon and encouraged a wider acceptance of female waitresses more generally.\(^{19}\)

Still, the majority of urban restaurants continued to keep a male waitstaff until the beginning of the twentieth century, when massive urbanization suddenly brought about a sharp increase in the number of restaurants. While the practice of “eating out” had previously been confined to single businessmen, more and more people began to patronize restaurants, causing the number of eating facilities to triple in a few short years. Consequently, the number of men and women who listed their occupation as waiter or waitress on a census went from 107,000 in 1900 to almost double that at 203,000 in 1910, doubling again to 415,000 by 1930.\(^{20}\) Not only did restaurant owners now suddenly need many more employees, but they were also catering to a more diverse clientele, as women and families began to eat at restaurants, which made it much more acceptable to hire women to serve food. Employers first began hiring women to work in hotel dining establishments and then later allowed them to enter restaurants as well. Higher class restaurants, however, still remained the sole province of white male waiters. This new openness of places women could serve, coupled with the labor shortages caused by the First World War, led to a greater expansion of waitresses in the restaurant industry.\(^{21}\) By 1920,

\(^{21}\) Cobble, *Dishing it Out*, 19-33.
women outnumbered men in serving occupations for the first time. The 1914 Chicago strike, then, took place in this transitional context, when waitresses were now to the industry.

Hours and conditions varied depending on what type of place a waitress worked. The hardest and least respected job was working at a hotel. Waitresses working for hotels often lived in the hotel and were on call for large portions of the day. One woman described a typical schedule involving thirteen-hour days, a three-hour break every other day, and seven-day weeks at a restaurant attached to a hotel. Women employed in these places were more likely to be from Eastern or Southern Europe, and may not have had strong English fluency and therefore were unable to find a better position. The 9.6% of waitresses who reported living with an employer in the 1920 census most likely indicates that roughly ten percent of waitresses worked full time in hotels.

The vast majority of waitresses, then, worked at some sort of restaurant. Cafés and tea rooms both served complete meals at tables and were on the higher end of the places women were allowed to serve. Tea rooms were more subdued, private, and formal than cafés and generally had a female clientele. Tea rooms were seen as more respectable and better quality places to work, but because women did not usually tip as much as men, they were typically not the highest paying places to work. One investigative reporter, Frances Donovan, who spent nine months in 1920 working as a waitress before writing a book about the world of waitressing described waitresses who worked in tea rooms as “a better class of waitress, a neater, prettier,

26 Cobble, *Dishing It Out*, 21.
and usually a younger girl.”27 They were expected to get to know their customers and always act respectfully.28

Cafés may have had lunch counters in them, but the vast majority of the business was done at tables rather than counters.29 Donovan observed that managers of cafés tried to find “the youngest, the prettiest, and most efficient girls” to work there, and often succeed because café wages were usually higher than in other types of restaurants, and tips more plentiful, which often outstripped the wage to become the main source of the waitress’s income, a luxury which was not always found in other types of restaurants.30

The majority of restaurants in Chicago were what contemporaries called “hash houses.” Hash houses did most of their business at a lunch counter rather than at individual tables, and their customers were almost solely male. Speed, rather than quality, was valued in hash houses, leading to those who worked at hash houses often being called “hash slingers.”31 These jobs were despised by most waitresses and only taken under desperation. Many waitresses got their first job in a hash house but gained enough skills to leave as soon as possible; they later returned when they were older and could no longer acquire jobs in cafés or tea rooms.32

Older waitresses also found employment in lunch rooms. Lunch rooms demanded less physical labor than other forms of waitressing, but were avoided by younger waitresses as long as possible because they required long hours, included no tips, and lacked the variety of customers and excitement in other types of restaurants. Older waitresses took these positions

29 Donovan, Woman Who Waits, 113.
30 Donovan, Woman Who Waits, 110-111.
because they either valued job security over excitement or could no longer gain employment in cafés and tea rooms.33

Waitresses were also divided into part-time or “dinner girls” and full time or “steady girls.” Part-time waitresses only came in for the lunch or dinner for a three-hour shift, while steady waitresses worked for nine or ten hours a day. Some came in and worked for ten hours straight but many more were hired for a split watch. These waitresses would arrive at work at 7 and work until 2. They then had a three-hour break until they were expected to come back from 5 to 8 in order to deal with the supper rush.

Henrici’s, the site of the 1914 strike, was classified as a café and hired younger waitresses, therefore making the women outside of Henrici’s also tending to be younger, and likely less attached and more adventurous. Of the women whom the newspapers reported being arrested, Alexander was the oldest at thirty-five years old; the other women whose ages were recorded ranged from twenty to twenty-eight. As union members, they were likely full-time workers rather than dinner or supper waitresses.

No matter what type of restaurant, working conditions for the waitresses tended to be harsh. The job was physically demanding. Of four personal accounts of waitressing published during the era, all detailed the pain and exhaustion which came with the job. Carrying heavy trays back and forth from the kitchen to the dining room, which could be on different floors in some restaurants, while navigating people, doors, and furniture, left constant bruises. As Tanner wrote, “Our arms ached from finger-tips to shoulders, and our backs and necks were lame from the strain of lifting the trays. Our feet were sore, swollen, and in some cases

33 Donovan, Woman Who Waits, 112.
blistered, from being on them so many hours a day.”  In another restaurant, two office girls who had recently become waitresses tried to sneak in moments to sit and rest their feet as the other waitresses around them rushed by. Other accounts involved rushing desperately to satisfy customers and fighting with both other waitresses and the cooks so that an order would reach a guest in time. With long hours, physical exhaustion, and frustration at having to “take the insults of the guests, of the cooks, of the checker, of the captain, of the manager, of the proprietor, of anybody and everybody in the place,” as Alexander phrased it, the waitresses were eager to find some way to improve their working conditions.

Harsh working conditions were not unique to waitressing. Many industries throughout Chicago demanded long, hard physical labor from workers with little pay. Yet not all workers chose to strike in order to improve working conditions or otherwise alter the employer-employee relationship. Why, then, did waitresses choose to go on strike? The answer, in large part, is due to the attitudes of the waitresses themselves.

In order to understand why waitresses were so willing to go on strike, it is important to understand exactly who the waitresses were and where they came from. Waitresses were largely an independent group, who did not fear social censure or the attention this labor dispute brought them. As Donovan wrote, “The waitress does not live under the restraint of the public eye.” In an era where most people, and especially most women, were careful to keep within the bounds of what was considered socially acceptable, they were a social vanguard who

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often ignored any hint of social censure in order to follow their own rules. A very independent group, waitresses’ habit of living without “the restraint of the public eye,” despite holding a job which placed them more in the public than women working in factories or at home, often brought them notoriety.

One manifestation of this independence was the frequency which waitresses switched employers. Rather than staying one place and working for one manager for a long period of time, most waitresses continually changed jobs in search for better wages or more pleasant managers. Many a waitress would simply work until she had earned a fair amount of money, quit her job in order to go out and enjoy spending the money she had accrued, and then find a new position once she had spent all her savings. Donovan estimated that ninety percent of the waitresses she had talked to had only spent a maximum of a few months at a job before they would seek a new place to work.38 By constantly changing places of employment, waitresses refused to be tied to one place or to one employer’s demands.

The frequency of job switching translated into a rather cavalier attitude towards being fired or losing work. When Donovan was fired from one of her positions, a coworker comforted her by telling her “‘Never mind, honey,’ … ‘you ain’t lost when you lost this job. You’ll get another,’” and immediately gave Donovan recommendations on where to look for work.39 After Donovan lost a different job, one of her coworkers commiserated by telling her, “‘I’m quittin’ myself tonight, this damn place gets on my nerves. Don’t you care, you’ll get another job.’”40 Another waitress recounted to Donovan the time she quit her job because she had been out drinking at a dance the night before and the manager would not give her a day off in order to

38 Donovan, Woman Who Waits, 124.
39 Donovan, Woman Who Waits, 30.
40 Donovan, Woman Who Waits, 56.
recover from her hang-over. Donovan was not alone in recognizing this attitude. Amy Tanner, a teacher who spent a summer working as a hotel waitress, noticed that “some impulse of freedom” would seize her co-workers and they would suddenly quit their jobs without a clear indication of where they would next find employment.

Indulging these “impulses of freedom” made waitresses different from many waged workers who tried their utmost to stay at one position as long as possible for fear of not being able to find another job. Such an attitude not only encouraged independence with jobs, it also removed fear of employers, since waitresses were not afraid of the employers’ ultimate weapon: firing a worker. Because waitresses did not worry about being fired, they felt little need to respect their bosses or be obedient in order to retain their positions. This helps explain why Donovan wrote that disagreements were so frequent between waitresses and anyone in higher authority, from the cooks on up to the managers. It also helps explain Tanner’s claim that her coworkers would steal everything from hairpins to towels to extra food without fear of the consequences. While during the slow winter months, waitresses had to be more careful to respect their bosses and keep their positions, everyone knew that come the busy summer months, when managers would be desperate for any and all waitresses, waitresses would “get even,” as one told Donovan. Summer meant that amusement parks, golf clubs, and summer hotels competed for waitresses with restaurants, making the demand for help greater than the number of experienced available waitresses. Consequently, employers became resigned to the idea that waitresses would lie, steal, and fail to show up for work without warning, for there

41 Donovan, Woman Who Waits, 145.
42 Tanner, Glimpses at the Mind, 50.
43 Donovan, Woman Who Waits, 125.
44 Tanner, Story of a Summer, 50.
45 Donovan, Woman Who Waits, 126.
46 Donovan, Woman Who Waits, 126.
was little they could do about it. As long as there were plenty of jobs for the taking, even the authority of the restaurant owners had little impact on the actions and attitudes of the waitresses.

This independent attitude encouraged waitresses to challenge their employers rather than to fear or respect them. From challenging authority on smaller issues within the walls of the restaurant, it is a small step to challenge owners on larger issues outside of the restaurant. The strike, therefore, was simply an extension of the waitresses’ habitual treatment of their employers and managers rather than a break from their normal attitude.

While waitresses’ independence created friction between themselves and their bosses that led to the strike, the bonds between waitresses are also essential to the understanding of why the waitress union picketed Henrici’s. The cooperation of waitresses created bonds of solidarity which encouraged organized action such as a strike. Furthermore, the wide variety of backgrounds among the waitresses meant this solidarity was more radical and inclined to sudden actions such as strikes. Waitresses influenced each other to take action and work together which led to organized action against the RKA.

Waitresses largely depended on each other for job training, which bred camaraderie among the workers at each restaurant. As Donovan explained upon starting her first job, she was turned over to another waitress for training, who told her: "'Well you got a lot to learn, kiddo' said she, and with that word 'kiddo' she seemed to admit me into the fraternal order of restaurant workers." With this induction, Donovan explained that “my fellow waiters and

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waitresses were very considerate and helped me in every way.” Examples of solidarity among waitresses were found throughout both Donovan’s and two other investigative reporters’ accounts of working as a waitress. Donovan and the other reporters all mentioned whispered instructions from coworkers and constant advice and encouragement as the reporters learned how to serve. As historian Dorothy Cobble concludes, this cooperation among waitresses meant that waitresses formed a very close work culture and influenced each other in social habits and tendencies as they taught each other about men, marriage, and other life advice as well as how to work as a waitress.

This sense of community fostered in job training was heightened by the large amount of job turnover for waitresses. Since they were constantly arriving in new positions, waitresses depended on each other to teach newcomers the foibles particular to each restaurant. Constantly changing positions also meant that waitresses felt ties not only to the waitresses who worked in the restaurant with them at that moment but also women with whom they had worked in the past who were now spread across other restaurants in Chicago. As government investigators for the U.S. Department of Labor concluded in 1911, this sense of camaraderie and sharing of information not just among one restaurant but across most restaurants in Chicago had forced non-unionized restaurant owners to follow basic standards of union conditions that were set in 1902.

Waitressing work culture often placed waitresses at odds with predominant social mores. Older women warned younger waitresses about the dangers of marriage, such as the

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48 Donovan, Woman Who Waits, 25
49 See Younger’s Diary of an Amateur and Anonymous’ Story of a Summer.
50 Cobble, Dishing it Out, 55-58.
51 Andrews, John B. and W. D. P. Bliss. History of Women in Trade Unions. New York: Arno Press, 1974 (originally Washington Government Printing Office 1911): 186-187. These 1902 standards were still not satisfactory to most waitresses, such as the seven-day work week, prompting the labor unrest of 1914.
widow who declared “nothing could induce her to marry again because as soon as a woman was married to a man she lost him, but if she were not married, she could keep half a dozen on a string.” ⁵² Because many waitresses did not follow traditional living and courtship patterns, this encouraged other waitresses to also defy social conventions.

Developing a sense of community and work culture among coworkers was not a unique attribute of waitresses. For generations workers have forged bonds of solidarity out of the workplace, as labor historians have amply demonstrated. ⁵³ In many ways, the waitresses’ circumstances paralleled that of saleswomen, as illustrated in Susan Porter Benson’s classic study Counter Cultures. Saleswomen, like waitresses, taught each other ways to improve their skills, valued time spent talking to each other, and prevented managers from assigning tasks that they felt were beneath them. ⁵⁴ Working at a store and working at a restaurant were both public occupations, in contrast to the secluded work in a factory or in a private home, and both saleswomen and waitresses served not only their employer but any member of the public in their workspace. Still, despite these similarities, the collective actions and work culture of waitresses worried the middle-class champions much more than saleswomen.

To understand why waitresses’ work culture was distinct from the culture in other occupations, and led to the strike, it is important to know who the waitresses were. Waitresses came from a large variety of social backgrounds. Historian Dorothy Cobble characterizes waitressing in this era as increasingly a trade of native-born, white women moving to the city from rural towns, with most waitresses having come from Northern European backgrounds, such as English, Irish, German, Scandinavian, or Welsh, either as first or second generation

⁵² Donovan, Woman Who Waits, 87.
⁵³ For more on work culture, see Herbert G. Gutman’s Work, Culture & Society in Industrializing America and David Montgomery’s Workers’ Control in America.
⁵⁴ Benson, Counter Cultures, 240-258.
immigrants. Donovan wrote that most waitresses were American-born girls, often the children of immigrants, who came from small towns or farms in Michigan, Illinois, or Wisconsin looking for excitement or adventure. If they were not from small towns or farms, Donovan found, waitresses were often the children of immigrant workers in Chicago stockyards and factories who became waitresses in order to have an easier and more interesting livelihood than their parents.

Waitresses could be of any age. A 1929 New York Department of Labor study found 17% of waitresses to be over forty-five, which was a great deal higher than the national average of only 4.4% of female laborers to be over forty-five in the 1930 census. Still, the majority of waitresses were under thirty-five. An investigation of New York waitresses for the Juvenile Protection League found that looks were an important part of being hired as a waitress; managers favored young, pretty women while older waitresses were more likely to work in lunchrooms and large cafeteria-style service, where personal attention and attractiveness to customers were not seen to be as necessary parts of the job. A 1916 Consumers’ League report found 33% of waitresses to be married, as opposed to the national average of between 23% and 24% of female workers married. This was a growing trend as there was a 132.5% increase of married waitresses between the 1910 and 1920 censuses. Frances Donovan estimated 40% of waitresses were divorced, and the 1929 New York Department of Labor study

55 Cobble, Dishing It Out, 29.
56 Donovan, Woman Who Waits, 9.
counted 35% of waitresses as being widowed, separated, or divorced, rather than the 15% counted in the 1910 census.\(^6^1\)

Moreover, single waitresses were less likely to live at home with parents or other family members than single women in other trades. A 1916 Consumer’s League study in New York City found that 34% of female hotel and restaurant workers did not live with their families or relatives, and Donovan characterized Chicago Waitresses in 1920 as being much more likely to live on their own than women in other trades.\(^6^2\) The 1920 Census found that only 52.7% of waitresses lived at home, as opposed to the 78.6% national average of women over sixteen years old who were engaged in waged work. This percentage included the 14.1% of waitresses who were the head of their own family. 37.7% of waitresses reported they were boarding or lodging, the highest in any of the reported industries and far larger than the 13.7% national average for female laborers. Only servants, housekeepers, and trained nurses, all occupations which frequently required living with an employer, reported a lower percentage of women living with family members than waitresses.\(^6^3\)

In contrast to the waitresses’ abnormal demographics, saleswomen adhered much closer to the national norm. According to Benson, saleswomen were usually older than those working in factories and service industries. However, saleswomen were fairly average when it came to marital status. The 1910 census reported 60.2% of female workers were single, 24.7% married, and 15.0% widowed or divorced. This was comparable with the 1920 census which found 77% of female laborers to be single, widowed, or divorced while 23% of the female

workforce was married. Until trends began to change in the 1930s, the department stores largely hired an employee force who followed these patterns. They were much less likely to live independently than waitresses. Surveys of eleven states from 1920-1922 found the minority of women working in general mercantile stores living independently, with no state reporting more than 20% of women living on their own.

As waitresses continually quit their jobs and obtained new ones, they received training from their coworkers and developed a unique work culture and sense of solidarity. The unusual demographics of waitresses meant waitresses’ work culture not only fostered solidarity, but also encouraged the women to become more daring and radical. In such an atmosphere, the somewhat drastic step of calling a strike on a major restaurant would seem to be a sensible move.

Choosing to publically boycott an employer was a step which risked braving Chicagoan’s disapproval. However, this was not a new concept for the waitresses. They regularly worked in the public eye. Furthermore, their interactions with men both on and off the job meant waitresses already felt public disapproval of their actions. Risking public wrath in a strike was therefore not as large a leap for waitresses as other occupations.

Unlike most female occupations, which took place at home or secluded in a factory under careful supervision, waitressing was conducted in the open. Anyone, or more problematically for Victorian social conventions, any man could come to a restaurant and be served by a waitress. Despite waitressing’s resemblance to the traditional female work of

64 U.S. Department of Commerce. Historical Statistics, 133.
65 Benson, Counter Cultures, 204, Appendix F.
66 Benson, Counter Cultures, Appendix G.
serving food, many feared for waitresses’ morality because of the job’s frequent contact with unfamiliar men. Especially as waitresses pushed to take the more profitable dinner shifts and began interacting closely with men at night, waitressing became a suspect profession even before the attitudes of the waitresses themselves were taken into account.

Laws showed some of the anxieties surrounding waitresses and their work in the public space. Many states prohibited women from serving liquor until the 1930s, when an end to Prohibition gave waitresses the opportunity to renegotiate the laws.\(^{67}\) Moreover night work restrictions forbade women from working between the hours of midnight and 6am, and some states even barred women from working between the hours of 10pm and 7am.\(^{68}\) When Illinois passed a law in 1872 that “no person shall be precluded or debarred from any occupation, profession, or employment (except military) on account of sex,” it clarified, “nothing in this act shall be construed as requiring any female to work on streets or roads, or serve on juries.”\(^{69}\)

These restrictions suggest how lawmakers- and the public- felt that women needed to be guarded from dangers in the public space, and waitresses were barely towing the line between dangerous and respectable.

Many of the concerns about waitress stemmed from their interactions with men. Bantering, flirting, and rejecting- or accepting- customers’ advances were common parts of waitressing work. As one waitresses informed Donovan, “You can’t get along in any kind of restaurant ... unless you jolly the customers.”\(^{70}\) “Jollying the customers” sometimes involved being willing to flirt with patrons of the restaurant. One waitress advised Donovan to hide her

\(^{67}\) Cobble, *Dishing it Out*, 156-157.

\(^{68}\) Cobble, *Dishing it Out*, 162-164.


\(^{70}\) Donovan, *Woman Who Waits*, 68.
wedding ring on a necklace or she would never make any money.71 At other times “jollying” meant just being willing to talk to customers about their lives or news of the day. This was especially true in cheaper restaurants, when the patrons were more likely to be working-class themselves and considered waitresses to be their social equals.72 As one coworker explained to undercover journalist Maud Younger, she would not get many tips until the customers were comfortable with her and knew her by name.73 For others, “jollying the customers” also meant being willing to stand up to them. While giving Younger advice on how to get regular customers and better tips, a coworker told her, “Now if a man says to me “Is that order coming?” I say something funny. Sometimes I say, “Yes, so’s Christmas.” Sometimes I give him a whack. The boss likes us to be fresh with our customers.”74 Every woman developed her own strategies for dealing with fresh or unruly customers, in large part from learning and copying the actions of their coworkers. Rough language and outrageous statements were widely accepted among waitresses, and every woman had her favorite story of how she played a trick on a customer.75 Outsiders, however, were bewildered and at times offended by these interactions and saw them as further proof of the immorality and disreputable attitude of waitresses.

These fears crystallized around the custom of tipping. By the early twentieth century, the practice of customers tipping their server was becoming prevalent but was still contested by some groups. Waitresses were largely divided on this issue. Some felt tips allowed them to earn much more than their wages and therefore defended tips as the means by which their trade was more profitable than the more common work in factories. Other waitresses disliked

71 Donovan, Woman Who Waits, 52.
72 Donovan, Woman Who Waits, 64.
73 Younger, Glimpses at a Mind, 669.
74 Younger, Glimpse at the Mind, 670.
75 Cobble, Dishing It Out, 47.
the uncertain nature of tips and felt employers should not push their labor costs onto customers. Rather than depending on the goodwill of customers, which could be easily spoiled by a slow cook, bad food, or any other number of factors out of a waitress’ control, those against tipping felt employers should pay a higher wage for waitresses and abolish tipping.\textsuperscript{76}

While waitresses discussed tipping as a worker issue, middle-class observers objected to tipping due to moral rather than fiscal concerns. A prevailing idea in the middle-class was that a woman working for tips would eventually, inevitably succumb to prostitution. A woman who had to please a man in order to accept money from him would be too easily tempted to go beyond delivering food in order to accept money from male patrons. Louise de Koven Bowen related the story of a young girl who, after becoming a waitress, started going out with men, moved out of her parents’ house, and eventually quit working as a waitress in order to work solely as a prostitute. This notion did contain some truth, as one of Donovan’s coworkers explained her large tips for the day by insinuating she had arranged to sleep with multiple customers.\textsuperscript{77} On the whole waitresses did not resort to illicit means in order to gain tips. They simply were attentive to their customers’ needs, discussed daily affairs, or complimented them on their golf swing and other meaningless niceties in order to receive a decent tip.\textsuperscript{78} However, the perception of waitresses as being willing to do anything for a tip was undisputed, and this led to waitressing being equated with a very dubious respectability.

Waitresses’ familiarity with men often spilled outside the workplace. Flirting and “treating” were both integral parts of how the women spent their time outside the restaurant. Tanner wrote that having a boyfriend, or at least dreaming of one, helped a waitress survive the

\textsuperscript{76} Cobble, \textit{Dishing it Out}, 41-43.
\textsuperscript{78} Donovan, \textit{Woman Who Waits}, 196-197.
drudgery of her work.\textsuperscript{79} As part of this dating culture, going with multiple men was encouraged. An eighteen-year-old mentioned having multiple lovers.\textsuperscript{80} However, this was not uniform throughout waitresses. Many of the waitresses Donovan talked to were married; some previously kept a string of boyfriends but decided to settle down and marry.\textsuperscript{81}

Boyfriends were often used as a way to pay for leisure time in an increasingly commercialized culture. Historian Kathy Peiss argues that working women would exchange sexual favors for “male attention, gifts, and a good time,” in part because most women could not afford to pay for drinks, transportation, or other leisure niceties without the help of a male companion.\textsuperscript{82} This practice, called treating, allowed women to take part in costly leisure activities in exchange for a range of varying degrees of sexual favors, most often by simply giving the man flirtatious attention. By and large, the urban middle-class disapproved strongly of this new trend in working-class women, resulting in vice investigations into treating in New York City as well as reformers’ censure of the women’s activities.\textsuperscript{83}

This practice appeared to be commonly found among waitresses. When a waitress Irene showed her coworkers a new, rather expensive, dress she had just acquired, someone immediately responded, “Whose your friend, Irene?,” insinuating that new clothes or other luxuries must be the sign of male companionship.\textsuperscript{84} Male companions were often described as much by the gifts they gave as their looks or personality. One waitress, Marietta, described her boyfriend by saying “he gave me this [box of candy] and a bunch of tulips and today he going to

\textsuperscript{79} Tanner, \textit{Story of a Summer}, 52.
\textsuperscript{80} Donovan, \textit{Woman Who Waits}, 87.
\textsuperscript{81} Donovan, \textit{Woman Who Waits}, 57, 79.
\textsuperscript{82} Peiss, \textit{Cheap Amusements}, 108-114.
\textsuperscript{83} Peiss \textit{Cheap Amusements}, 104-110.
\textsuperscript{84} Donovan, \textit{Woman Who Waits}, 204.
buy me that yellow sweater over in Carson Pirie’s window. Say, he is all right.”85 She went on to explain that she would “always keep two or three fellows on the string and I get all I can out of them. I never ‘come through’ unless I have to.”86 Donovan made clear that this was not considered prostitution among waitresses, as they all earned their living in their primary profession. Men took the women out to “places of amusement” such as dance halls, theaters, or other outings, and gave them an opportunity to wear good clothes, which were often a source of pride and respect among waitresses. While men may have given the women money, clothes, or other niceties, they were gifts rather than payment.87 These gifts were often more than just luxuries for the women. Good clothes were not only a sign of great respect among waitresses, but often helped them acquire jobs as employers advertised for “neat appearing girls.”88

Fear of social censure did not seem to concern many waitresses. As one girl teasingly told Donovan “’Hattie ain’t never pretended to be decent as long as I’ve known her’” to which Hattie responded “’No … I don’t make no claims to being decent.’”89 Even the more conservative waitresses did not necessarily follow social conventions. One woman told Donovan that she did not object to a woman living with a lover and choosing not to marry as long as no one else was hurt, because “living around this way” took any of her moral objections out of her; instead she only objected when a woman slept with a man for money.90 Some waitresses did make distinct efforts to remain “decent” and looked down upon their fellow

85 Donovan, Woman Who Waits, 213.
86 Donovan, Woman Who Waits, 213.
87 Donovan, Woman Who Waits, 214.
88 Donovan, Woman Who Waits, 208
89 Donovan, Woman Who Waits, 26.
90 Donovan, Woman Who Waits, 102.
waitresses, but they appeared to be in the minority of the women with whom Donovan worked.91

Waitressing, therefore, was filled with women who made “‘no claims to being decent’” but rather followed their own set of rules and encouraged their coworkers to the same. Having no fear of either their employers or the censure of the public eye, choosing to picket Henrici’s must not have seemed to be as drastic and astounding an action to the waitresses as it did to the rest of Chicago. For the women outside Henrici’s, perhaps, a strike was simply the most expedient way to resolve intolerable working conditions, and possibly give them a sense of adventure and excitement as well.

Working in the public eye not only gave the waitresses the courage to go on strike, but it also created some working conditions that were peculiar to their industry. Carrie Alexander, the union president, explained to a Chicago Evening Post reporter that, “A stenographer may have to take the insults of one man, her employer. In a restaurant, as it has been, the waitress has to take the insults of the guests, of the cooks, of the checker, of the captain, of the manager, of the proprietor, of anybody and everybody in the place. She is the lowest person in the scale.”92 The public nature of the waitresses’ interactions also meant that the waitresses felt they had to fight off the orders of not just one boss but any man they met. This strike, then, was not only a chance for waitresses to improve working conditions, but also to assert their independence and rights towards their bosses and customers simultaneously, a move for which their unique work culture clearly gave them confidence.

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91 Donovan, Woman Who Waits, 27, 43.
The waitresses decided to settle their grievances with Henrici’s and the rest of the RKA in a strike because unionization had worked very effectively for waitresses in the past. Waitressing unionism quickly followed the formation of the profession. Though few in number, waitresses had made some preliminary efforts at organizing as early as the 1880s, often as affiliates of the Knights of Labor. In 1891, the Waiters and Bartenders National Union was chartered under the American Federation of Labor with a membership of 450. The start of this union, which became the Hotel and Restaurant Employees and Bartenders’ International and eventually the Hotel and Restaurant Employees International Union (HERE), represented the first sustained attempt at waitress unionization.

Initial unionization efforts were slow, however, and did not begin to spread until the start of the twentieth century. Seattle Local 240 was the first permanent waitress union, receiving its charter in March of 1900. Rather than choosing to make one union for both waiters and waitresses, waitresses often elected to have their own separate locals, feeling that they had different needs and priorities than the male workers in their trade. New locals in San Francisco in 1906 and Butte, Montana, in 1907 confirmed this trend, as waitresses formed female-only waitress locals, despite some resistance from male unionists. Waiter unions often preferred for women to be in a coed local or to form a subordinate branch to their local rather than form an entirely separate one, fearing that female-only locals would result in conflicts over the distribution of job, wage scales, rules of working conditions, or even simply the loss of dues-paying members. However, waitresses often insisted they wanted the chance to organize on

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93 Cobble, *Dishing It Out*, 61-62.
their own and elect their own officers and stuck to a separatist stance, another indication of their independence of spirit.94

Forty-one Chicago waitresses formed Local 484 in March 1902, aided in large part by the milk wagon driver union, who would later help the waitresses in their 1914 strike, as well as Chicago Federation of Labor organizer John Fitzpatrick. They spent the next few months organizing waitresses, and soon had 1,500 members, a majority of the trade at the time. On a set day in June 1903, the newly-organized waitresses appeared at their places of employment wearing union pins and demanding a wage increase to eight dollars per week, a reduction from a twelve-hour day and seven-day week to a ten-hour day and six-day week, and recognition for their union. Surprised employers quickly agreed to their demands.95 Success proved short-lived, however, as many waitresses, apparently thinking they had nothing left to gain and that it was a waste of money to continue to pay union dues, abandoned the union only a few weeks later. Local 484 went from 1,500 members to fewer than 300 members and a $200 debt.96 The union refused to fold, however, and continued to recruit.97 Despite a low enrollment and agreements with only five restaurants by 1911, the union managed to keep union-conditions prevalent throughout the industry, especially among the large employers.98

Local 484, and in particular Secretary Elizabeth Maloney, were extremely vocal in their support of the eight-hour work day bill proposed in the Illinois legislature in 1909, despite the fact that it would not apply to the restaurant and hotel industries.99 They also continued to try

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94 Cobble, Dishing It Out, 61-62.
95 Cobble, Dishing It Out, 66-67. Emily Barrows lists the date of the charter as November 4, 1902 rather than in March in her 1927 thesis Trade Union Organization Among Women in Chicago.
97 Barrows, Trade Union Organization, 150.
98 Andrews et al., History of Women, 187.
99 Barrows, Trade Union Organizations, 151.
to get employers to sign agreements with the union, resulting in isolated disputes and pickets of individual hotels and restaurants. This campaign became more intense in 1914. In January of 1914, the waitresses, waiters, and cooks organized sixty-four restaurants, with little resistance. Just a month before the beginning of the strike, the union was so confident of their success that Lena Rushton, vice-president of the waitress union, wrote “Chicago will be organized. .... We expect to see every restaurant in Chicago unionized.” Until the union faced the RKA in February 1914, they did not face any large challenges or sustained campaigns against employers.

While the decision to strike on February 5, 1914 may have surprised most of Chicago, it could have been foreseen for quite some time. The waitresses were an independent group who held little respect for their employers, believed in taking action, and did not care if going on strike meant they would not be seen as decent women because they paid very little attention to notions of propriety. With working conditions that many waitresses found objectionable and a history of success using collective bargaining, a strike appeared to be the inevitable clash between the waitresses and the RKA rather than sudden action with no forewarning.

Throughout the 1914 strike, questions abounded as to whether the waitresses working inside Henrici’s actually supported the picket going on outside their doors. Henrici’s remained open throughout the picket, and many of the waitressing staff remained working at Henrici’s during all the turmoil. Collins, the manager of Henrici’s, claimed that most of his employees were happy, despite the claims of the waitressing union. In advertisements protesting the

101 Cobble, *Dishing It Out*, 66.
strike, Collins declared “there are no strange faces among Henrici’s employees.” A reader of the Chicago Evening Post, Thomas Benedict, reinforced this claim when he wrote to the newspaper that the regular staff at Henrici’s continued to work and that Henrici’s employees “are satisfied with their hours of work, and their wages; that profane language towards them is not tolerated, and, most important of all, they are not on a strike.” Meanwhile, the RKA disputed that the strike represented the workers at all and claimed that less than two percent of employees were union members, and that no one else wanted to become a union member. Collins’ application for an injunction against the picket included a claim that fifty-four waitresses employed in Henrici’s had not struck; Henrici’s attorney later provided an affidavit signed by fifty-three waitresses employed at Henrici’s which stated that the waitresses were satisfied with working conditions and took no part in the strike.

The waitresses union also claimed to have the waitresses working at Henrici’s on their side. Elizabeth Maloney argued that Henrici’s had some unionized waitresses working for it and that the waitresses working at Henrici’s supported the union. She accused Collins of firing any waitress who was even rumored to support unionization. As Maloney told Day Book reporter John Streeter, “The exact language Mr. Collins has used to several members of our union who did work in his place was, ‘Beat it, get the hell out of here.’ No girl will be tolerated there who talks about the benefits of workers getting together in a union.” Maloney named Mabel Wambaugh, Margaret Canning, Ruth Lessney and Mary Phelan as all being fired from Henrici’s because of their support of unionization. When Streeter interviewed Wambaugh, she reported

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working at Henrici’s for seven months before being fired.\textsuperscript{106} Union leaders Maloney and Alexander also claimed that they asked the waitresses to continue working at Henrici’s because the union did not have the funds to support them during the strike.\textsuperscript{107}

It is impossible to know how much both sides were exaggerating their claims of the support of Henrici’s waitresses. Collins may indeed have partly gotten his affidavits of support by intimidating his employees. On the other hand, the four women Maloney named may have been the only ones who had strong feelings of union support among the staff of Henrici’s. Perhaps the women wanted better conditions at Henrici’s, but were not willing to risk their income and being arrested and physically assaulted by the police in order to gain these improvements. Without the voices of the waitresses themselves who worked at Henrici’s, it is impossible to know their feelings on the strike and their reasons for continuing to work despite the ruckus outside their doors.

Despite the confusion, clearly there was a group of waitresses, whether or not they were employed at Henrici’s, who wanted to improve the working conditions of waitresses in Chicago, and were willing to defy convention in order to do so. Moreover, the opinions of the waitresses were not the only ones that decided the fate of the strike. The attitudes and opinions of the rest of Chicago, on the 1914 strike, waitresses, and working women in general, had a large bearing on the outcome of the labor dispute.

\textsuperscript{106} Whittaker, Jane, “Game Young Girl Striker Showed Her Ability to ‘Come Back,’” \textit{Day Book}, Feb 17, 1914.

For the first few days after the waitress strike began on February 5, the conflict largely remained one between the waitress union and the RKA. Very quickly however, the rest of Chicago became involved. On Tuesday, February 10, the Employers’ Association, an anti-union organization dedicated to protecting what they termed “right of freedom of contract” and opposing strikes, announced they would support the RKA, which included financial backing and lawyers’ services in the court battles against the waitress union. Three days later, Henry Moir, the owner of the Boston Oyster House, also announced that he would not accept any agreement with the waitress union. Despite the waitresses’ threats that this decision would result in a building trade strike which would cripple the construction of his restaurant, the Building Trade Council decided not to strike Boston Oyster House, stressing it would be a violation of an agreement between the Building Construction Employers’ Association and the Building Trades Council. The waitress strike of Henrici’s no longer represented a local, isolated struggle.

The police also became a growing presence in the strike as the month of February wore on. For their part, the striking waitresses appealed to the rest of Chicago, accusing the police of abusing them when they were arrested and dragged to jail. Ora Duree, the waitress injured during her arrest, went so far as to sue the Philip Henrici company and Detective Jeremiah Loughlin, petitioning that they had handled her too roughly and committed assault while transporting her to jail. Duree accused Loughlin of dragging her to La Salle Street Station, where


he then strip searched her and kept her in a small, dirty cell while continually insulting her with both words and gestures. Duree said her arrest dislocated her shoulder to the point of permanent damage and cost her five hundred dollars in medical bills.\textsuperscript{110} Fellow striker Mabel Wambaugh told a reporter that she had also been injured by the police, saying that officers threatened “to put the fear of God in her” before grabbing her arm in such a way that twisted her shoulder and forced her to keep her arm in a sling.\textsuperscript{111}

With increasing cries of rough treatment against the police, the middle-class female reformers of Chicago began to enter the fray. The clubwomen of Jane Addams’ Hull House held a meeting on February 22 to discuss the strike on Henrici’s and particularly the actions of the police, while the Women’s Trade Union League (WTUL) issued a paper entitled “Statement of the Facts Concerning Henrici’s on Randolph Street,” which included an indictment of police for arresting women without legitimate cause. As the WTUL’s report stated, “Besides these unlawful arrests the conduct of the private detectives and police has been brutal in the extreme. These men have used foul and profane language in addressing the girls, have tramped on their feet as they were passing along the street and when arresting them have used the same methods that they would use on a strong man who is resisting arrest.”\textsuperscript{112}

The intercession of the Hull House and the WTUL did not stop police involvement in the strike, but it led, on February 26, to policewomen, rather than policemen to begin arresting the waitresses.\textsuperscript{113} On Friday, February 27, mounted police came out to Randolph Street in order to break up the crowds which had gathered to watch the waitresses be arrested in front of

\textsuperscript{110} “She Sues Henrici’s and Cop,” \textit{Chicago Tribune}, February 15 1914.
\textsuperscript{111} Whittaker, Jane, “Game Young Girl Striker Showed Her Ability to ’Come Back,’” \textit{Day Book}, February 17, 1914.
\textsuperscript{112} Women’s Trade Union League. “Statement of the Facts Concerning Henrici’s on Randolph Street.” February 20, 1914.
\textsuperscript{113} “Women Police to Guard Café,” \textit{Chicago Tribune}, February 27, 1914.
Henrici’s. By the end of the month, Elizabeth Maloney, secretary of the waitress union, issued a public statement which denounced policewomen as being more brutal than policemen and for arresting picketing women for completely arbitrary reasons.\(^{114}\)

The reported attention of Progressive reformers appeared to make an impact in mid-February as officers stopped the repeated arrests of the picketers. The waitresses attributed this change to the WTUL, specifically the presence of the older, respectable Miss Ellen Gates Starr, a founder of the Hull House, on the picket lines. Picketers also began wearing American flag pins on the theory that the police would not assault someone who was bearing the nation’s flag. For whatever reason, though, the truce was broken on Monday, March 2 when Mrs. Anna W. Timeus, a former president of the waitress union, joined the picket. Timeus arrived and immediately began telling all passers-by about the strike on Henrici’s and requesting they find elsewhere to eat. The police arrested Timeus, and perhaps learning from their earlier scuffles with the picketers, called for a patrol wagon to take her to jail. Timeus chose to use the time in which she was waiting for the wagon to give a speech to the on-looking crowd. Two other waitresses were arrested and also began to make speeches to onlookers. When Gates Starr protested that the police did not have any reason to arrest the three women, she was also placed under arrest, to the outrage of even the conservative *Chicago Tribune*.\(^{115}\)

This marked the end of any sort of truce. At noon the next day, in the middle of the Chicago lunch rush, the police arrested Isabelle Smith, Mabel Kramer, Anna Porter, Ruth Leslie, Catherine O’Dea, and Ella Kenney while Julia Conroy, Minnie Meyers, Fred Ebeling (president of


the cooks union) and Andrew Weth (business agent of the cooks union) were all arrested that
night. 116 Fourteen women were arrested on March 4. Mabel Kramer, Isabelle Smith, Catherine
O’Dea, and Ella Kenney were all arrested for a second day in the row, along with four other
women. Four more women, including Minnie Meyers who had been placed in jail the day
before, were arrested three times throughout the day. 117

While police and protestors continued to battle on the street, on Thursday, March 5 the
RKA and the waitress unions began a parallel spat in the in the courts. Manager of Henrici’s
Collins filed an injunction against the waitress union, arguing that they were in a conspiracy to
injure his business by forming a picket line and telling potential customers that Henrici’s had
unfair labor practices. Collins pointed to the fifty-four waitresses who had not joined the strike
but continued to work at Henrici’s as proof that this strike was not coming from the women
actually employed in the restaurant and therefore the union was simply unjustly molesting his
business. 118 Collins and his attorney presented an affidavit signed by fifty-three waitresses
employed at Henrici’s which stated that the waitresses were satisfied with working conditions
and took no part in the strike. Collins claimed that the picketing had cost him two hundred and
fifty customers a day and requested an injunction in order to force the picketers to cease
targeting Henrici’s. 119

The waitress union, working with the bakers union, filed a counter injunction. The union
listed their demands of eight dollars per week wages as well as one day off a week and for

116 “Ellen G. Starr’s Trial on Today”, Chicago Tribune, March 4, 1914; “Cops Say They are Forced to Arrest
117 “Flags Fail to Aid Girl Pickets,” Chicago Tribune, March 5, 1914; Whittaker “Another Occurrence That
118 “Circuit Judges to Decide Fate of Henrici ‘Strike,’” Chicago Tribune, March 6, 1914; Whittaker, “Young Girl
Explains What a Waitress Has to Put Up With,” Day Book, March 5, 1914.
119 “Henrici Picketing Injures Business, Judges are Told,” Chicago Tribune, March 7, 1914; “Big Business Enters
Henrici’s to officially recognize their union. They argued they were simply peacefully picketing Henrici’s in order to pursue their demands; they pointed to the one hundred and fifty arrests and rough treatment by the police as unnecessary and requested that the police no longer interfere in the picket.\textsuperscript{120} When the three judges reviewing the injunction applications suggested that all sides cease picketing and protesting while the court case was in hearings, the waitresses chose to ignore the recommendation and continued to picket Henrici’s.\textsuperscript{121} Meanwhile, in a sign of things to come the court case which Ora Duree, the waitress who had sued the police for rough treatment, fell apart when she identified the wrong policeman as her arresting officer and admitted to being paid two dollars a day to picket.\textsuperscript{122}

At the beginning of April, the court placed an injunction on any picketing which would cause crowds. The RKA celebrated the injunction as a victory, since it severely hampered the waitresses’ ability to picket. But the waitresses celebrated that the ruling was not clearly defined and the injunction was not against all picketing, vowing they would continue to picket.\textsuperscript{123} As part of the injunction, the waitresses were no longer permitted to talk to passers-by on the picket line. Therefore, the picketers began to hand out cards which informed people about the strike on Henrici’s. One union member, Annie Timeus, was arrested for this.\textsuperscript{124}

By Thursday, April 30, the waitress union decided to expand their strike. Over the previous weeks, the waitress union, cook union, and baker union had proposed new contracts to George Knab, L. Walter Powers, and B.F. Efting, who together owned Chicago twenty

\textsuperscript{120} “Circuit Judges to Decide Fate of Henrici ‘Strike,’” \textit{Chicago Tribune}, March 6, 1914; Whittaker ““Police-Brutes are Low-Minded Regarding Even Good Women,” Says Waitress,” \textit{Day Book}, March 5, 1914.


\textsuperscript{122} “Women Picket Tells of Arrest,” \textit{Chicago Tribune} March 11, 1914.


restaurants. When all three men indicated they did not intend to sign the new contracts, waitress and cook union members walked out of their restaurants to join a picket line outside, resulting in as many as four hundred waitresses leaving twenty restaurants. George Knab, speaking for Efting and Powers as well, sent an offer to the unions in an attempt to halt the strike. He said he would be willing to pay union wages for union hours, but would not exclude non-union waitresses. This offer was rejected by the union.

When Knab refused to sign the contracts, the Chicago Federation of Labor (CFL), the umbrella organization of labor unions in the city, came out against him. Waitresses, cooks, bakers, teamsters, laundry drivers, chauffeurs, and all union men connected with delivery planned a general boycott of all Knab, Efting, and Powers bakers and restaurants. The president of the cook union agreed to supply fifty men to picket at night, while the waitresses would continue to picket during the day. As fourteen bakers and cooks walked out of a bakery owned by Knab, wagon drivers and delivery men refused to deliver bread to the striking restaurants. Once again this elicited a police response, as two waitresses were arrested for picketing Knab’s restaurant and giving out handbills on Saturday, May 2, the first day of the strike. By the end of May, the fairly straight forward labor conflict between the waitress union and the owner of Henrici’s had escalated into a two-front fight which involved not only more restaurant owners but also much of Chicago, with neither side willing to back down or concede any ground.

The waitress strike, as Alice Henry wrote in the WTUL newsletter, “was being discussed at over half the family dinner tables in the city.”129 As the strike continued on from its initial days, it expanded from a straightforward employer-employee labor conflict to one which involved larger and larger numbers of Chicagoans. Not only had the number of employers involved in the strike expanded, but the Restaurant Keepers’ Association, Employers’ Association, Women’s Trade Union League, and Chicago Federation of Labor had all begun to take part in the conflict. Meanwhile, the press continued to devote column inches to the struggle, and crowds continued to surround Henrici’s to catch the daily sight of strikers confronting the police. The responses to the waitress strike, from the watching crowd, to the police, to the reporters who kept their newspaper readers updated daily on the most recent happenings in front of Henrici’s, also show a passionate reaction and involvement of the rest of Chicago in the strike.

In Alice Henry’s WTUL article, she contrasted the attention it received with the Chicago garment worker strike of three years earlier. Despite the much larger scale of the garment worker strike, Henry argued, the WTUL had trouble attracting press attention, while reporters were flocking to the waitress strike. Moreover, hundreds of onlookers who came to watch the police arrest the waitresses every day lent credence to Henry’s claim that this strike was being discussed in half the dinner tables of Chicago. As a labor reformer, Henry attributed the change to the WTUL’s efforts in drawing the public’s attention to problems women workers faced. This may be an overly optimistic interpretation, as the public was possibly more interested not because this was a women’s strike but rather because it was a waitress strike, as waitressing had consistently been a profession which excited, intrigued, and titillated the rest of the

population. Chicagoan’s apparent fascination with the 1914 strike was a manifestation of a larger curiosity about waitresses, their work, and their status and respectability in urban America.

This curiosity even led four separate middle-women to go “undercover” and take jobs as waitresses in order to write exposés on the industry and those who worked within it. Exposé writers could have been driven by the great social change occurring at the time and the concerns these changes created. The Progressive Era’s rapid economic, population, and cultural transformations brought a good deal of unrest, especially to the middle-class. Cities grew rapidly as industrialism changed the center of the United States’ economy from the farm to the factory. Immigrants came in droves to the United States, bringing new conflicts about what it meant to be American and anxiety from the native-born Americans, especially those of the white middle and upper classes, as the social make-up of the country was radically altered. The newly populous cities and shifted economy brought crises of work and working conditions as workers, employers, labor unions, reformers, and municipal officials all struggled to redefine the employer-employee relationship. In addition, the increase of women in the workforce brought about debates about women’s proper place in society, prompting the suffragist movement challenges to the traditional gender norms that kept proper women excluded from a new public eye. All of these factors created a tense atmosphere of dramatic social changes and arguments and fears over what shape this change should form.

132 Painter. _Standing at Armageddon_: 253-282.
As historians such as Alan Dawley, Neil Irvin Painter, and Michael McGerr have concluded, American society was undergoing a great social shift during the early twentieth-century and these social shifts were causing new conversations and conflicts about both what it meant to be American, and in particular an American woman. In such a contentious context, waitresses, as independent young women who worked in the public space and did not always follow the middle-class notions of respectability, represented the epitome of the changes which were causing so much unrest in America. Discussions about waitresses, therefore, were not simply about a very select group of working women but also about the larger issues on how to understand and shape the United States and its new society.

As part of the public fascination of waitresses, four journalists worked undercover as waitresses in order to publish accounts of the work and attitudes of waitresses. An anonymous writer published an account of being a summer hotel waitress in a 1905 issue of the *Independent*, a popular weekly magazine which published muckraking, or investigative reporting on social issues, articles. In 1907, Maud Younger wrote a piece about her time as a waitress for *McClure’s*, a monthly muckraking magazine. Amy Tanner published her article in a 1907 issue of the *American Journal of Sociology*, the first academic journal for sociology established in 1885. Frances Donovan published an entire book on waitresses in 1920. These different forms of publications exhibit the wide-spread interest in waitresses as readers of both popular magazines and academic journals found waitressing intriguing and generated enough interest to even publish an entire book.

Four basic attitudes reveal four basic middle-class attitudes about waitresses. For some, waitresses were agents of disorder with no hope for redemption. They were the embodiment
of all the worst parts of urbanization, changing gender roles, and evolving sexual mores that were developing during this era. This view is manifested in the anonymous article for the *Independent*. Younger’s piece in *McClure’s* displays a different attitude in which the middle-class saw waitresses primarily as workers. They were more concerned with the wages and working conditions of the waitresses rather than about the propriety of their actions. A third group saw waitresses as victims who were always in constant danger of being lured into prostitution if not protected from the designs of their employers and customers, as demonstrated in Tanner’s essay. Perhaps the most common view was to see waitresses as a volatile combination of these characteristics. Convinced that waitresses embodied a new social these, these observers were unsure as best how to deal with them. Donovan took this route when she worked as a waitress in various locations in Chicago for nine months and then published the book *The Woman Who Waits* in 1920.

In all these exposés, no matter the view the author took, it is clear that waitresses were seen as being a problematic group with special characteristics that made them into sources of fascination and despair. These exposés, all written in a span of a few years, reveal the public fascination towards waitresses and claimed to reveal “the truth” of the rumors to the rest of the world.

The first published exposé on the truth about waitresses appeared in *The Independent* in 1905 when an anonymous “refined and educated girl” went undercover to work for three summers as a waitress in three different hotels. The writer deplored the conditions in which she was forced to work; she opened her article by explaining how often she wished that the

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typical guest of a summer resort, “for whose pleasure and convenience everything possible is
done, could gaze upon the obverse of the picture, could see out of what strife and discomfort,
yes, and sometimes from what squalor and even misery, the peace of his condition arises!” \(^{135}\)
The writer complained of having to carry heavy trays from the kitchen facilities in the basement
up to the waiting customers, working long hours in excessive heat, and having to not only serve
food but also wash dishes, fill containers, and help clean rooms if necessary.

As a hotel waitress, the writer not only worked but lived in the hotel. The living
conditions also proved to be a problem for her; she described her living quarters as “unceiled,
uncarpeted, hot and filthy, and filled to overflowing by the possessions of my roommates.” \(^{136}\)
In another hotel, her room was in the attic, and she had to climb five flights of stairs and pass
through two other bedrooms in order to gain access to it. At times the water did not work,
forcing the author to carry water up from the basement kitchen to the attic; at other times
plumbing pipes broke, filling their dwellings with steam, which would only be fixed when
waitresses threatened the engineer into repairing the pipe. \(^{137}\)

But while the *Independent*’s anonymous writer objected to her harsh working
conditions, she also found fault with waitresses themselves. The reporter was horrified by her
manager cursing about an absent employee and being intoxicated while talking to her; she also
disliked her roommates. It is hard to tell whether she objected more to her roommates asking
questions about her own life or by the fact that of her three roommates, two of them were
married but did not live with their husbands and the third was thirty-five and still unmarried. \(^{138}\)

Anonymous was appalled when her coworkers happily ate what she described as “large chipped

\(^{135}\) Anonymous, “Story of a Summer,” 1337.
soup plates full of soggy oatmeal, bowls of boiled potatoes, meat whose odor was all-sufficient, and a cold, bitter mixture called, by courtesy only, coffee” and did so without any table manners, instead cheerfully grabbing whatever they might like. She hated the “vulgar familiarity which the others seemed to court, and the profanity which prevailed among men and women alike disgusted me.”

Interestingly, in contrast to her coworkers, Anonymous liked and respected her customers and argued that any impropriety or offense given by the customers was the fault of the waitresses. She constantly bemoaned the intoxication of her coworkers, especially among the male bartenders and cooks who fell to “quarreling and rough words” while drunk but still held authority over the waitresses. Professional waiters and waitresses were described as being “of the lowest, vilest class,” and she was much happier when her fellow servers were college students working for a summer.

Overall, through her three stints as a waitress, the writer found some employers acceptable and some customers very nice, but she never formed a positive opinion of the common career waitress. Informed with a middle-class sensitivity of propriety, Anonymous, like many others, saw waitresses as a deplorable subset of the population, who were not willing to obey the rules that the reported valued. Rather than arguing that changed working conditions, unionization, or protective laws could help reform the women, Anonymous wrote off the entire group as hopeless. Others, however, saw some chance of reform and change for waitresses.

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Two years after “Story of a Summer Hotel Waitress” appeared in the *Independent*, Maud Younger published “The Diary of an Amateur Waitress: An Industrial Problem from the Workers’ Point of View,” in the April 1907 issue of *McClure’s* magazine. After working as a waitress in various restaurants in New York City, Younger vehemently disagreed with Anonymous’ sentiments.¹⁴³ Like the writer for the *Independent*, Younger found working as a waitress physically demanding and very exhausting. However, her views on her coworkers fundamentally differed from Anonymous’. Rather than being disgusted by the attitudes of waitresses with whom she worked, Younger expressed admiration and sympathy for her coworkers. She, too, noticed the profanity that was common among the women but did not feel that they meant anything harmful with their swearing. To the contrary, Younger thought her fellow waitresses were extremely supportive towards each other, and they taught Younger how to be a waitress. They gave her advice on how to relay orders to the cooks more efficiently, explained how to handle new jobs, and encouraged her to get her own tables and begin to make money.¹⁴⁴ As Younger concluded, “I do not think a stupid girl could be a waitress.” “It was as though,” Younger wrote, “we were all one large family, bound to one another by common interest.”¹⁴⁵

One of those common interests was outwitting bosses. As content as Younger was with her coworkers, she had nothing positive to say about her various managers and bosses. Younger and her coworkers constantly helped each other to get around bosses’ orders and ignore their demands. They would create tasks in order to look busy enough to not be assigned unpleasant tasks, and employees warned each other when the boss approached so that they

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could cease talking and look industrious as he walked by. When a waitress wanted to go to her sister’s funeral without losing the pay for missing an entire day’s work, her coworkers helped cover for her so that their manager did not notice her absence.

Younger’s coworkers were also invaluable in helping her learn to manage customers. They taught Younger to flirt and joke with her tables so that they would leave her better tips, telling her, “The boss likes us to be fresh with customers.” They encouraged her to gather some regular customers, explaining, “You don’t get much on the side here ‘till the customers know your name.” Younger’s fellow waitresses also warned her that customers would try to take advantage of new waitresses by trying to get more rolls or butter than was supposed to come with an order. Younger’s first-hand interpretation led her to conclude that restaurant industry were caused not by waitresses but rather from the poor working conditions and low pay which the waitresses were forced to accept. She concluded her article by arguing that all waitresses really needed were unions to make working conditions better.

For Younger, then, waitresses were workers, and any anomalies in their behavior that attracted the concern and scorn of middle-class commentators could be attributed to the nature of their work, not their questionable character. The only problem about waitresses was that they were in conflict with their employers. Younger, in envisioning waitresses as workers, saw unionization and a different employer-employee relationship as the solution to all the problems in the restaurant industry.

146 Younger, “Diary of an Amateur,” 672.
Fellow interpreter Amy Tanner agreed with Younger on the need to change working conditions in her article “Glimpses at the Mind of a Waitress” published in the *American Journal of Sociology* nearly simultaneously to Younger.\(^{152}\) Tanner worked for a few months as a waitress in a hotel, and, like Anonymous in “Story of a Summer Hotel Waitress,” above, Tanner was expected to live at her place of employment in order to be constantly available.\(^{153}\) She found the hours long, the work physically exhausting, the food scant and monotonous, and the drudgery mind-numbing. Tanner described working from seven-thirty in the morning until nine at night, with only a three-hour break every other day. She never had an entire afternoon off, or even more than fifteen minutes for a meal, and was expected to work seven-days a week.\(^{154}\) In short, the working conditions of waitressing were atrocious.

Tanner had some of the same complaints as Anonymous on the social habits of waitresses: they were dirty, they loved alcohol, they stole from their employers, and they constantly took up with different boyfriends. She described how waitresses stole pins, hairpins, towels, and other small items from the rooms they cleaned and tried to take advantage of their employer as much as possible.\(^{155}\) However, Tanner attributed all these traits to being the byproducts of such horrible working conditions rather than concluding this represented character flaws of waitresses. As Tanner challenged her middle-class readers, “But how many of the sterner virtues of life ought we to expect from a girl who looks forward to such work all her life?”\(^{156}\)

\(^{152}\) Tanner, “Glimpses at the Mind,” 48-55.
\(^{154}\) Tanner, “Glimpses at the Mind,” 48-49.
\(^{155}\) Tanner, “Glimpses at the Mind,” 50.
\(^{156}\) Tanner, “Glimpses at the Mind,” 50, 52.
Tanner especially explained waitresses’ problematic preoccupation with men as a byproduct of their current state. A “gentleman friend” was “their only avenue of escape” and source of excitement in their dull days. “It is a small wonder,” Tanner concluded, “that they take the first one who comes, and are quite satisfied if they only have a chance to ‘lie around.’”

Tanner argued that better working conditions could help reform waitresses, but until then it was senseless to judge them for their immoral behavior.

For Tanner, then, waitresses were best understood as victims. They were poor, desperate women being taken advantage of in a harsh industry that urgently needed regulation. The behaviors that Anonymous condemned, in other words, Tanner saw as a symptom of their horrible circumstances. Agreeing with Younger that working conditions needed to change, Tanner concluded that waitresses needed protection more than empowerment via unionization.

Anonymous, Younger, and Tanner all saw the same working conditions and ways that waitresses deviated from middle-class social norms, but they reached vastly different conclusions about the cause and solution of this issue. Anonymous felt the true problem in waitressing was the waitresses themselves; she viewed waitresses as disreputable troublemakers and thought nothing could be done to make waitresses respectable. Younger viewed waitresses as workers and thought that while unionization was needed to improve working conditions, there was nothing wrong with the waitresses’ social deviance. Tanner saw waitresses as victims who needed better working conditions in order to fix their social habits. These three reporters articulated the primary ways the middle-class saw waitresses: troublemaker, worker, or victim.

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While troublemaker, worker, or victim were the three main categories through which the public saw waitresses, a fourth category existed which saw waitresses as a combination of the abovementioned views. Investigative reporter Frances Donovan followed this fourth view when she wrote *The Woman Who Waits* after working for nine months as a Chicago waitress in 1920. Donovan saw the waitresses helping each other to get through long work days and teaching Donovan the tricks of the job as Younger did. Donovan’s coworkers taught her the basics of the job, showed her how to order food from the cooks, and made sure to help her if she was overwhelmed by customers. As she wrote, “My fellow waiters and waitresses were very considerate and helped me in every way. They called me ‘dearie’ ‘Girlie’ ‘kid’ and ‘kiddo’ and gave me whispered tips to save the butter, bits of bread, etc and to use a dirty glass if I couldn’t find a clean one, but not to let anyone see me do it.”158 Like the other exposé writers, Donovan found that her coworkers were the ones who taught her the tricks of the trade and kept her from being completely overwhelmed by her new profession, confirming the camaraderie and solidarity of the waitressing culture.

However, Donovan was not as sold on the idea of working-class solidarity as Younger was. She reported the account of one girl, Jane, who felt that her coworkers “walked all over her” and that “a working girl has to fight every inch of her way.”159 While Donovan’s coworkers were willing to train her, she found things were not so idyllic once she knew her way around a job. Donovan complained of coworkers playing cruel jokes on each other or trying to pass off work to one another. She wrote of one waitress who took all the silverware Donovan had just finished polishing, leaving Donovan to have to spend more time polishing silverware for her

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own tables. Another made a practice of slipping her own dirty dishes onto others’ trays so that she would be spared the task of carrying the large, heavy trays back to the kitchen.\textsuperscript{160} Two of Donovan’s coworkers, Mary and Letty, consistently fought, played tricks on each other, and lied about the other, though they remained friends despite all these antics.\textsuperscript{161} Donovan also did not see the strong sense of solidarity between working-class patrons and waitresses that Younger delighted in. Instead, Donovan found the patrons to assume the waitresses were “not good girls” and were far too familiar with them, a practice that the waitresses encouraged in order to gain better tips.

As a whole, Donovan found waitresses’ morality deplorable. Donovan wrote of waitresses swearing with abandon, stealing stockings from their landladies, and keeping a string of boyfriends so as to always have someone to take them out. Worst of all to Donovan, the waitresses did not seem to be bothered by their lifestyle. As Donovan wrote, “They seemed proud of their way of living and wished to flaunt it in everybody’s face. They appeared to be happy, too, and not cast down and ashamed of their degradation.”\textsuperscript{162} Like Anonymous, Donovan veered towards writing off the entire profession as filled with disreputable women with no redeeming value.

Donovan’s discomfort with her fellow waitresses went beyond simple class differences. After working as a waitress, Donovan later went on to work in two different department stores in New York, which she then recounted in her book \textit{The Saleslady}. Her tone towards her coworkers in department stores was much warmer and less censorious than her fellow waitresses. While she noted that some of her coworkers had boyfriends, she did not express

\textsuperscript{160} Donovan, \textit{Woman Who Waits}, 78, 129-130.  
\textsuperscript{161} Donovan, \textit{Woman Who Waits}, 22.  
\textsuperscript{162} Donovan, \textit{Woman Who Waits}, 27.
any major concerns about their language or any serious doubt on their morality or concerns that salesgirls might descend into prostitution. 163

In the end, however, Donovan refrained from siding with Anonymous but instead took a much more complex view. Like Tanner, Donovan attributed some of the actions of the waitresses as symptoms of larger problems. “This independence is not,” Donovan wrote, “wholly of her own choosing and it is quite likely that if the family had remained what it formerly was, the economic unit, the waitress would have been fairly content to live the quiet and secluded life of the housewife.” 164 Donovan, like Younger, also saw the value of waitresses organizing and solving their issues as workers. Both the social and economic issues, Donovan contended, “must be solved from the inside by the waitresses themselves.” 165 She concluded that a waitress, “Is intelligent, efficient, industrious, dishonest, and dishonorable, loose in her sex relations, impatient of the restraints put upon her by the members of the group from which she came (parents, relative) and inclined to set up new standards for herself and to make a new group life in which these standards are approved.” 166 Donovan’s interpretation of waitresses went beyond the caricatures of immoral layabouts, heroic workers, or helpless victims found in the other reporters’ sketches to understand waitresses as a complex group of women. While Donovan’s book reveals a deep fascination of waitresses, she never presented any sort of idea on how the rest of Chicago should have dealt with the issues of the restaurant working conditions or the waitresses themselves. This lack of resolution indicates an uncertainty Donovan, and many others, felt about waitresses.

164 Donovan, Woman Who Waits, 221.
165 Donovan, Woman Who Waits, 227.
166 Donovan, Woman Who Waits, 140-145.
Clearly, then, the middle-class fascination can be attributed to their many growing fears about urbanization, changing gender roles, and the burgeoning impropriety that had been growing rapidly in the new urban centers crystalized in the waitresses. To some extent, all working-class youth, especially working-class girls, were objects of fear and concern to older generations and especially to the middle-class. Many of the middle-class saw the attitudes and actions of the working women as leading to an inevitable end in prostitution and social and moral impurity. Waitresses embodied the worst of these fears. By most accounts, the women who chose to work as waitresses were not the obedient daughters and dutiful wives of yore. Rather, their independence and embrace of sexuality made them into the personification of older generations’ and middle-class’ fears of what working women in large cities could become.

In short, the work, behaviors, and very public presence of waitresses scared much of the middle-class. Donovan, when concluding her book about her time working as a waitress, explained how waitresses were fundamentally different from other working women. “The little office girl,” Donovan explained, “is bourgeois middle class, bound by the same conventions and actuated by the same motives as the housewives in the little western city where I had lived for many years.” But waitresses were different; they were free from most social conventions, Donovan argued: “the waitress talks about everything, men, marriage, God and religion with a freedom which we expect to find only in the male sex.” Donovan concluded, “There are many striking personalities in this vulgar Bohemian group ... and they have their own ideas about life. They live up to these without any moral support outside of themselves and they will be the

167 Peiss, Cheap Amusements, 163-164.
168 Donovan, Woman Who Waits, 226.
169 Donovan, Woman Who Waits, 224, 225.
leaders of the group in establishing new standards. This living outside of the social conventions, particularly the social conventions of the middle-class, made waitresses the focus of volatile public debate. General fears about working women in urban centers became more focused and more potent when discussing waitresses. The waitresses striking on Henrici’s, therefore, placed themselves in the public eye and stirred the conflicting views and conversations about the proper place of working women in the world.

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“If we are men and women with decency in our hearts”: Responses to the 1914 Strike

Legal battles resumed on May 2, 1914, when Collins, the manager of Henrici’s, entered a final order to stop all picketing in front of Henrici’s. In retaliation, Maloney and Fred Ebeling, president of the cooks union, reported to the press that the restaurant owners were allied with brewery and saloon interests, possibly in an attempt to win the support of the prohibitionists in Chicago. Maloney also accused the restaurant owners of trying to keep down women’s wages. In other words, as the waitress strike entered its fourth month, tensions continued to escalate. The conflict was so explosive that when Knab decided to use legal action and began to prepare his own case for an injunction against the picketers outside his restaurants, striking waitresses or their sympathizers retaliated by allegedly throwing bottles containing hydrogen sulphide into Knab’s restaurants in order to create an intolerably strong smell.

Meanwhile, the picket continued. By May 13, the Chicago Bakery Men’s Association, an employer’s group, threatened to lock out 1,600 men unless the twelve men who had gone on strike at Powers Baking Company returned to their jobs. Knab, frustrated by the picketers, offered a very favorable contract to the bakers, baker’s wagon drivers, and waitresses, but did not offer one to the cook union. When the cooks sent a delegation, backed by the waitresses, to ask Knab to renew their contract as well, Knab refused and withdrew his offer from the waitresses as well. The baker union and bakery wagon driver union both returned to work the next day, despite being informed of the lack of contract for the waitresses and the cooks, while the other two unions remained on strike.

As June began, the waitresses found it harder to continue to keep their fight against both Knab and Henrici’s, though the month began with good news. Collins had attempted to get the courts to place an injunction against the silent picketing occurring outside Henrici’s, but his proposal was rejected. He then turned to higher courts in an attempt to get more stringent injunctions in place. In response, the waitresses and cooks unions presented a resolution to the CFL, calling for a general boycott of all businesses owned by Knab, Powers, and Efting.  

Knab had sought several injunctions against the waitresses in order stop the picketing outside his restaurants and hotels, but had failed to get an injunction which completely prohibited picket lines. Therefore, Knab turned to a new tactic, hiring new women on as waitresses. These women, however, did not work within the restaurant serving customers; instead, they walked the picket lines right next to the striking waitresses, wearing signs that read, “I am a Waitress Employed by Knab and I am Satisfied.” Both the waitresses and the cooks accused Knab of employing these new picketers in order to create a general disturbance to convince the court to declare a general injunction against picketing.  

As the months wore on, things continued to get worse for the waitresses. In July, the baker union objected to the boycott of Knab bakeries, since those bakeries were now staffed by union members, which reduced the power of the CFL’s boycott. Throughout August and September, Maloney continually appealed to the CFL for union men to stop patronizing the picketed restaurants. Clearly, if the waitresses could not even keep fellow unionists from breaking the boycott, they had little hope of making a real impact on the businesses.  

meantime, court battles were becoming costly. On July 23, both Dudley Taylor, attorney for the Employers’ Association, and Elizabeth Maloney, along with a number of other figures in Chicago’s business and labor forces, testified before the Commission on Industrial Relations, a study on working conditions throughout the United States from 1913 to 1915 for the United States Congress, in regards to the strike against Knab as well as larger issues of unionization and minimum wages in Chicago. The commission did not comment specifically on its view of the Knab strike, but did generally conclude that police brutality in Chicago was a serious issue though they thought the court system fair. ¹⁷⁸ In short, by the summer of 1914, not only had the number of people involved in the strike had increased but also the ways in which the conflict was being fought, making it increasingly difficult for the waitress union to continue to strike.

As the strike progressed from February 5 through the summer of 1914, more and more people and organizations became involved in the waitress strike. Each person brought with them their own views of waitresses, which largely fell in the four categories of the exposé writers previously discussed. Actions to help or hurt the strike were all influenced by how each individual saw waitresses, whether as workers, victims, troublemakers, or some combination thereof. These actions, from protesting police brutality, to seeking injunctions, to reporting the events of the strike as public entertainment, influenced other views and actions on the strike and eventually determined the outcome of the strike.

Throughout the eleven months of the strike, the continual presence of crowds watching the picket lines attests to the interest of Chicagoans in this labor conflict. As newspaper

reported daily coverage of the events and thousands of people stopped to watch the conflict between the waitresses, the restaurant owners, and the police, this was clearly an event which was talked about in the homes of most of Chicago. What is not so clear, as the actions of the crowds indicate, is what exactly Chicagoans thought of the waitresses and their cause. The throngs of people watching the picket often seemed more interested in entertainment than in favoring a side. While, on February 6, the crowd encouraged Carrie Alexander to stand her ground against the police officers trying to arrest her, many responded to her and the other waitresses’ refusal to move with laughter rather than support. In the same vein, while they followed Alexander to the police station once she was arrested, they made no move of support for her or for the restaurant owners. Instead, they seemed to view the entire thing as public spectacle for their entertainment.\footnote{179 “Women Pickets Taken By Police Despite Defiance,” \textit{Chicago Tribune}, February 7 1914.} Day in and day out, crowds appeared to watch the waitresses picket. On February 27, the numbers in the crowd were so large that mounted police had to be called to break them up.\footnote{180 “Mounted Men Disperse Mob Drawn by Henrici’s Boycott,” \textit{Chicago Tribune}, February 28 1914.} Yet still the most common reaction of the crowd was to laugh at the actions of the police, restaurant owners, and waitresses. The crowd’s refusal to take one side or the other seems indicative of the confusion Chicago as a whole felt on this issue. The question at hand was not just one of the wages, hours, and working conditions of a small group of workers, but a broader one on how to view working women, especially working women in public spaces. The strike brought out these questions and conflicting views on women. But as the indeterminate loyalty in the crowd indicates, these questions did not all find answers.

The same general divisions with which people viewed waitresses, as detailed in the previous chapter, also applied to how they saw and talked about the waitresses’ strike. Some
saw waitresses primarily as workers. They either argued that the waitresses did not have a valid right as workers to higher steady wages, or they argued that the waitresses’ rights as workers meant they should have shorter hours and higher pay. Even though they disagreed on what the outcome of the strike should be, they saw it primarily as a labor dispute between workers and employers. Others saw the waitresses as victims. They thought waitresses were poor women, dependent on the whims of their employers and struggling to get by in Chicago. Therefore, they should be granted higher pay for their own protection rather than because of some inherent right as a worker. Still others saw waitresses as disreputable troublemakers. For them, striking waitresses were stirring up trouble and making a ruckus for nothing more than public entertainment and did not deserve any respect or protection but rather needed to be told to stop causing a scene and to remove themselves from the public eye.

The divisions between these three views were not cut and dry. The waitresses themselves bounced between presenting themselves as workers and as victims, depending on the circumstances. Some saw the waitresses as victims falling fast down the scale into public spectacle and hoped that a resolution of the strike would protect them from falling completely. Though it was unclear at times how exactly the actors and observers of the strike saw the waitresses, it was clear that this was more complicated in their eyes than a simple labor dispute.

The Restaurant Keepers’ Association largely viewed the waitresses as workers and the strike as a labor dispute. Henrici’s argument against the strike was based upon the idea that the waitress union did not represent Henrici’s employees and therefore the picket was an unfair disruption of their business. On February 9, Henrici’s placed an advertisement in most of Chicago’s major newspapers displaying their opinion of the picket. Under the title “A Brief
Explanation of the Situation at Henrici’s,” Collins explained that the dispute began when two “business agents” of the waitress union visited Henrici’s with a request that Collins sign an agreement with them, but Collins refused due to the stipulation that Henrici’s only employ members of the waitress union. According to Collins, none of his employees wished to join the union and the members of the union did have the proficiency which Henrici’s required of its waitresses. In the ad, Collins invited the members of the public to talk to the waitresses employed at Henrici’s, declaring “Henrici’s employees are not of a class to stand in awe of an employer. They are self-respecting, level headed people who know they are entitled to their own opinions and not afraid of expressing them.”

In justifying the invalidity of the strike, Collins argued that waitresses were reasonable, responsible workers who were capable of both thinking for themselves and valuing loyalty to an employer. Collins’ argument against the strike hinged on the idea that waitresses were not dissolute women who could be trusted or helpless victims which could be easily swayed but rather skilled, reasonable workers who are happy with their situation.

Collins’ argument implied that while the waitresses who worked at Henrici’s were respectable workers, the waitress union was filled with women who caused trouble for no reason. Collins claimed that the members of the waitress union could not match the high standards of Henrici’s, therefore making a distinction between those who worked in Henrici’s and the less skilled and less respectable waitress union. Furthermore, Collins talked of being “forced” to sign an agreement with the union, that his restaurant was picked as the first “victim” by the union almost at random, and that, because the employees of Henrici’s had no

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grievances, the waitress union was stirring trouble with no viable grounds. Perhaps due to Chicago’s strong union presence, Collins went so far as to explain that Henrici’s respected labor unions and acknowledged that labor unions had accomplished great good in the past. Therefore, the implication became that while the waitresses who worked in Henrici’s were reasonable workers and that while unions in general were a needed part of the employee-employer relationship, the women who were picketing Henrici’s were unreasonable, unskilled, and made trouble where no trouble was warranted.

In approaching the legal component of the case, furthermore, Collins and the rest of the RKA largely treated the waitress union as workers. By applying for an injunction in order to stop the picket, both Collins and Knab were taking the usual approach to a labor dispute during that period. Appealing to courts, including the Industrial Labor Board, was a sign that this was a labor dispute between workers and employers. Knab’s tactic of hiring more women to picket alongside the waitress union made an argument that there were satisfied workers at his restaurants, placing the discussion once again about labor and the employer/employee relationship.

At the same time, however, his use of a second picket line depended on the idea that these women were a public spectacle which crowds would form to watch and tried to use other women to make the spectacle even bigger and more disruptive to Chicago city life. Despite this, the rhetoric of the RKA, when making appeals to the public through newspaper ads or when testifying in front of the judges, continued to argue that they paid their employees a fair wage, their employees were happy with their jobs, and therefore the picket was not just. In making

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this argument, the restaurant owners focused the discussion on the demands of the strikers and the issues of wages and hours, therefore treating the strike as a straight labor issue and the waitresses as workers, rather than through the other lens with which observers discussed the strike.

Waitresses also largely saw themselves as workers. Their major reasons for the strike— an increase of wages from seven dollars to eight dollars a week and one day off a week— were very concrete demands common in labor disputes. Even their other demands, such as a space to change into work clothes, to be provided working linens and to have them laundered without charge, for the employer to supply any special uniforms he might demand, and to not be charged for any broken dishes, testified to this view of themselves as workers who should be respected by their employer rather than abused.183 The waitress union wanted restaurant owners to sign a contract agreeing to the union’s conditions, attempted to negotiate with the owners, and when the negotiation failed called a strike and picket along with the other unionized trades that were involved in the business, such as the cooks, the bakers, the brewers, and the wagon drivers. These actions followed the basic formula of most labor disputes, indicating that the waitresses saw themselves as workers with the same legitimacy as all the other trades in Chicago.

When interviewed by newspapers reporters, the waitresses brought up their demands and descriptions of poor working conditions in Henrici’s, making clear they saw this as a fair strike no matter how the newspapers viewed waitresses and their picket. When a reporter asked waitress Mabel Wambaugh how she injured her arm, she turned the conversation to the

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issues of the strike, saying “We’re going to organize that place over there. We know what we want. Six-days a week instead of seven to work. And more pay. The only way we can get that is to organize.” 184

Other waitresses also worked the demands of the strike in their answers to by the press. In a response to a question about the Employers’ Association giving lawyers to the RKA, Maloney brought up Henrici’s seven-day work week, while another waitress answered a question about how many times she had been arrested by saying, “We have been arrested four times. We will be arrested 100 times before we let Henrici’s work his girls seven days a week for $7.” 185 By consistently bringing attention to the labor demands of the strike, even when reporters showed more interest in the actions of the police or the drama, the waitresses made it clear that they saw themselves as workers who were involved in a straightforward labor dispute.

Even when describing the working conditions, the waitresses did not make allusions to any weaknesses or helplessness of the waitresses which would make readers think they should be given higher wages in order to protect them from the harshness of the world. By consistently returning to the number of days waitresses were willing to work for their wages—six-days for $8—they presented an increase in pay as their right as workers rather than as a measure of protection. The women emphasized that Henrici’s had unfair working conditions, implying that waitresses were honest workers who deserved fair working conditions. At other times, the arrested women used the attention to lecture the crowd about labor issues of the strike. The consistent calling of attention to their demands makes clear that the waitresses

saw this as an issue of workers being treated unfairly and tried to convince both the restaurant owners as well as the rest of Chicago that they were ordinary workers who deserved better treatment, and saw themselves as part of a broader workers community with the men of the CFL, not helpless women in need of protection.

Other times, however, the waitresses did present themselves as victims in need of protection. When she tried to sue her arresting police officer for brutality and claimed that he injured her arm, Ora Duree presented herself as a poor, helpless woman. For example, when she accused the police of dragging her to La Salle Station and stripping her, she presented herself to both to the circuit court and the court of public opinion as a victim who needed protection, and monetary compensation, for the cruelties inflicted upon her by the policemen. This worked against her, however, for when Duree misidentified which man arrested her, the press turned her from a helpless victim into a “militant waitress” who was purposely causing trouble, an example of the tightrope which waitresses walked in presenting their case to the public.

In an interview with Jane Whittaker, reporter for the progressive paper The Day Book, Carrie Alexander switched from arguing that waitresses were workers to waitresses needed protection. In the past, Alexander had presented the strike as an issue of employer/employee relations in which the waitresses deserved better treatment because of their status as workers. In an interview with The Chicago Daily News on February 11, Alexander argued that no one could satisfied with the working conditions at Henrici’s, asking the reporter, “Would you be [satisfied] with $7 for seven days when you could get $8 for six days work?” Whittaker,

186 “She Sues Henrici’s and Cop,” Chicago Tribune. February 15 1914.
however, was much more interested in showing the waitresses to be helpless women trapped in horrible circumstances. In a February 27 interview, Whittaker retold two stories of young girls who were led astray and abused by taking tips and finally asked Alexander if it was true that waitresses were being abused in such a way. Alexander, when presented with this opportunity, agreed with Whittaker. She stated, “That is why I so strongly object to tips, because they force a girl to submit to such insults. That is why we are demanding that restaurant keepers’ pay waitresses a living wage, so they need not depend on tips in order to live. Then they will be in a position to resent insults which now they must endure or lose the tip which is vitally necessary to them if they are to live at all.”\textsuperscript{189} Though Alexander primarily saw herself and other waitresses as workers, they sometimes played into the idea that waitresses were victims if this would win them more allies in the strike, even when portrayed by a seemingly sympathetic reporter.

The Chicago Federation of Labor (CFL) also generally saw the waitresses as workers. E.N. Noeckels, the CFL’s secretary, was the official who signed the bonds that released all the women arrested for picketing from jail.\textsuperscript{190} The CFL also placed Henrici’s, as well as any restaurant or business owned by a member of the RKA on an “unfair” list so as to discourage any union members from patronizing those establishments.\textsuperscript{191} The CFL Executive Board elected to pressure on the police to stop siding with the restaurant owners in the conflict.\textsuperscript{192} When the waitress union did not have enough money to pay for their lawyer in order to

\textsuperscript{190}“Waitress Pickets Taken By Police Despite Defiance,” \textit{Chicago Tribune} February 7 1914.
\textsuperscript{191}Chicago Federation of Labor Meeting Minutes. June 7, 1914.
\textsuperscript{192}Chicago Federation of Labor Meeting Minutes July 19, 1914.
continue the legal fight against the injunction, the CFL gave the union the remaining three hundred dollars.\textsuperscript{193} With all these actions of support, the CFL was acting in acknowledgment that the waitresses were fellow workers who were fighting a tough battle against their employers, the same way they would if a male local would go on strike.

However, the male members of the CFL were not always fully unified in their support of the waitresses. The baker union petitioned for some of the bakeries owned by Powers to be taken off the unfair list because they had a contract with those bakeries. The brewer union similarly objected to a brewery which the waitresses tried to declare unfair since it was owned by Knab. When Harry C. Moir refused to sign a contract with the waitresses for his new restaurant, the waitresses wanted to have the building trades refuse to continue construction his building, but the other unions refused because that would be a violation of their own agreements with the Building Trade Council. As the strike continued, Elizabeth Maloney had to continually appeal to union leaders to remind their locals to not patronize the restaurants the waitresses were picketing, indicating that many union members throughout Chicago had lost interest in boycotting the RKA.\textsuperscript{194}

Another important player in the strike, Chicago’s police frequently employed harsh tactics in order to place the waitresses under arrest. They grabbed the women roughly and, at times, dragged them all the way from the restaurant to the police station rather than waiting to summon a police wagon to drive the waitresses to the station. When the waitresses resisted arrest by sitting on the sidewalk rather than cooperating with the officers, the officers tried to carry them.\textsuperscript{195} These actions raised enough concern that people began to call for an

\textsuperscript{193} Chicago Federation of Labor Meeting Minutes December 6, 1914.
\textsuperscript{194} Chicago Federation of Labor Meeting Minutes. October-December 1914.
\textsuperscript{195} Chicago Tribune Feb 6-20, 1914.
investigation of the police force. In April, the CFL held a mass protest about the police actions in the strike. Over five hundred people attended and passed a resolution against police brutality and illegal arrests. The WTUL protested to the mayor about the rough treatment of the police with enough vehemence that the police sent out policewomen to arrest the picketers instead of men, though the policewomen, too, were accused of brutality.

It is difficult to interpret how the police saw the picketing women solely based on their actions. The public outcry and investigations could have been signs that the police were much rougher than normal in the arrests of the waitresses. This would indicate that the police did not see the waitresses as respectable workers with legitimate cause or as helpless victims who needed to be protected. Instead, the police saw the waitresses as a public spectacle which needed to be silenced as quickly as possible, even if this meant using severe means.

However, it is also possible that this was the normal police response to a workers’ strike, and the outcry only occurred because observers were reacting to the idea that waitresses, as women, needed protection. The police and labor unions had a contentious history in Chicago, dating to the Haymarket Riot of 1886 and before. Therefore, the police could have been treating the waitresses as workers in their mass arrests and harsh treatment of the picketing women. If this was the case, the public outcry and investigations were due to the WTUL and other women’s clubs seeing the waitresses as female victims in need of protection from the police in a way that they did not view other male picketers who had also been arrested by the police.

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196 Chicago Federation of Labor Meeting Minutes. March 1, 1914.
While the views of the police are unclear, it is evident that the Chicago Tribune treated the waitresses as a public spectacle. Headlines such as “Waitress Pickets Taken By Police Despite Defiance” and “Woman Pickets Arrested In Cold” put the emphasis on the antics of the waitresses rather than on the issues of the strike.\(^{199}\) In the eleven months of coverage of the strike, the Tribune rarely mentioned the demands of the picketers, the working conditions in the restaurant industry, or any of the actual issues of the labor dispute. Instead, the focus dwelled on the conflict between the waitresses and the police. When a waitresses was arrested, the Chicago Tribune often reported the event in great detail. Headlines focused on the number of waitresses arrested, such as the headline “Arrest Eight Waitresses at Café as Conspirators.”\(^{200}\) When a waitress was arrested, the newspapers would print her name, age, and often her address. Any men arrested, usually members of the cooks’ union, were treated very differently by the newspapers. The headlines, and in fact the bulk of the articles, frequently ignored the arrests of the men. Finally, at the bottom of the article a sentence would mention “Seven men at Henrici’s were also arrested at night” without listing names, much less ages and occupations.\(^{201}\) This distinction points to the idea that the Chicago Tribune saw the waitresses as a spectacle which would be entertaining to the public and sell newspapers while the idea of cooks being arrested did not involve misbehaving women and therefore would not be of interest to the public.

The Day Book, and in particular Day Book writer Jane Whittaker, took a different view on the waitresses. Whittaker, and to some extent the entire newspaper, saw the waitresses as

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victims in need of protection. In an article entitled “What the Waitress Much Endure” Whittaker passingly mentioned the hard labor and poor working conditions prevalent in the restaurant industry before expounding upon the dangers of tipping. She wrote, “The giving of tips should be abolished because of their pernicious effect. A young girl who under any other circumstances would not dream of accepting money from a man will accept it in the guise of a tip. In the hands of a vicious man this tip establishes between him and the girl a relation of subserviency and patronage which may be easily that of improper attentions. The most conscientious girl, dependent upon tips to eke out her slender wage, finds it difficult to determine just where the line of propriety is crossed. Thus, in addition to the other dangers surrounding the girls employed in hotels and restaurants, they encounter that lack of respect which curiously attaches itself to one who accepts a gratuity." Whittaker continued on to argue, “We would not dare, if we are men and women with decency in our hearts, ignore the fact that to prevent the necessity of this tipping evil and the advantage vicious men take of it, restaurant employers should be compelled to pay a living wage.”

In various other articles in The Day Book, Whittaker argued that women, because they were not as physically strong as men, should be given a day to rest, especially in cases such as the waitresses, where she claimed they were doing a man’s job. She also wrote against the brutality of the police, dwelling not only on the violence but also the fact that the police officers used rough language in front of “the girl waitresses.” In her articles, Whittaker consistently presented waitresses as helpless girls working for starvation wages and trying desperately to

fight off the advances of encroaching men. While Whittaker supported the strike, she thought
the waitresses deserved a living wage in order to be protected from “vicious men” and should
be allowed to rest due to their inherent frailty rather than seeing the goals of the strike as rights
for workers.

The Women’s Trade Union League saw the waitresses in a similar way. Their main
actions during the strike represented efforts at protection. They interceded with the mayor in
order to have policewomen be at Henrici’s in order to prevent police brutality, though the end
result of this was not as favorable as the WTUL and the waitress union hoped. They spoke out
more against the arrests and actions of the police rather than the actions of the restaurant
owners or the poor working conditions in the restaurant industry. The WTUL’s “Statement of
Facts Concerning Henrici’s on Randolph Street” included a section entitled “Police Brutality,”
which accused the police of being too rough in their arrests and using foul language in their
unlawful arrests of the picketers. Though the WTUL’s Statement also included a list of the
demands of the union and a small section on the working conditions at Henrici’s, the only
request for action included was the sentence, “The Women’s Trade Union League asks women’s
organizations of the city to join in the demand that a police woman be assigned a duty of
protecting these girls.”205 They largely wished to act as protectors for the waitresses by
shielding them from the brutality of the police rather than supporting them as equals in the
strike for fair wages and working conditions. The WTUL argued that the waitresses needed
higher wages and shorter hours because they deserved special protection as women rather
than simply because all workers needed reasonable hours and a living wage. The focus on

protecting working-class women made these women into victims, and they saw the waitresses and their strike through the same lens.

The waitress strike served as impetus for Chicagoans to voice their views on waitresses and what it meant for women to work or for women to be in public. The conversations throughout Chicago about whether or not the waitresses should win the strike, and perhaps more importantly the reason that each person supported or did not support the waitresses, was a way for Chicago to have a conversation about these issues of women working in public.

While many in Chicago, like the restaurant owners, waitresses, CFL, police, newspaper writers, and WTUL, undoubtedly had clear views on how to categorize the waitresses and what they thought about working women, the majority of Chicago was most likely similar to the crowds thronging around Randolph Street. They knew this was an important issue and an issue of clear interest, but were less clear on how they viewed both waitresses and the larger new body of women these waitresses represented. At times, they claimed to support the waitresses as workers and respect the strike. At other times, they thought the waitresses were victims of abuse from all sides and should be defended. And, perhaps most frequently, they saw the waitresses as public entertainment and a spectacle for their amusement. Varying among these three basic positions, the crowd, and Chicago as a whole, was unclear on how they should view waitresses as relatively new members of Chicago’s workforce. Should women be welcomed into the workforce as equals? Should women in public spaces inherently lose any sense of respectability? The strike gave Chicago a chance to discuss these questions.
“The representative of the great mass of free women”

By November, the waitress union was almost out of money; the cost of continuing to support the picketing waitresses as well as paying a lawyer and other legal fees had drained their treasury. The strikers asked other Chicago unions to have each union member donate five cents in order for the waitresses to continue fighting the injunction as well as the keep the pickets ongoing, but by December, the waitress union was still two hundred dollars short of the fees they needed to pay their attorney.206 The CFL gave the union the remaining sum, but things were still looking bleak. The boycott was breaking, court decisions were continuing to issue stricter and stricter injunctions, and the employers were forming their own employer-friendly rival unions in order to combat the waitresses union. The union attempted to get the court injunctions overturned so they could resume picketing, but the courts remained firm. After eleven months, the waitress strike was over.207

The failure of the waitresses’ strike could be attributed to a number of factors. If the union had not expanded their strike to encompass the restaurants of Knab, Powers, and Efting, perhaps they would have had the resources to win at Henrici’s. If the employers had not chosen to go to the courts, perhaps the union would have been able to outlast the restaurant owners. And if more Chicagoans had viewed waitresses as workers and supported the strike by not patronizing Henrici’s, perhaps they would have had a better chance at success.

The lens with which most of Chicago viewed waitresses not only governed how they thought about the strikers, but also altered the events of the strike. The newspapers’ habit of viewing the waitresses more as public spectacle than workers meant that the actual issues of

the strike were often buried in the media coverage. With the exception of the coverage by *Day Book*, newspapers rarely mentioned the actual demands of the strike. Unless a waitress interviewed brought it up, or reporters relayed the content of the signs which the waitresses wore, the focus was much more on the conflict between the waitresses and the police rather than the issues of the labor conflict.

Furthermore, if the Women’s Trade Union League saw the waitresses more as workers and less as victims, they might have gotten more involved in campaigning for a favorable resolution of the strike rather than simply focusing on the issue of the police and their interactions with the picketers. Like the newspapers, the WTUL’s way of viewing and thinking about waitresses, and working women in general, meant they did not pay as much attention to the actual issues to the strike as to the interactions between the waitresses and the police.

The treatment of the strike by the newspapers and the WTUL in turn undoubtedly influenced the way that the rest of Chicago saw the striking waitresses. If the newspapers did not make clear what exactly was at stake but rather treated the waitresses as part of an ongoing entertainment, it makes sense that the rest of Chicago would be inclined to view the strike as a public spectacle rather than a serious dispute over working conditions and the employer-employee relationship. The lack of public pressure to treat the waitresses’ demands seriously in turn gave the restaurant owners more freedom to use the police and court to stop the picket without needing to fear public disapprobation.

Still, it is impossible to tell how the strike would have turned out if everyone had seen the waitresses as workers. By following the usual procedures against strikes at that time period and issuing injunctions that limited collective action, the courts, ironically enough, were treating the waitresses as workers, suggesting that a greater perception of waitresses as workers may
not have changed anything for the court. However, perhaps things would have turned out differently for the waitresses if they had been fighting not only for higher wages and shorter hours but also for the very right to be seen and heard as workers.

The courts silenced the waitresses when they refused to repeal the injunctions against picketing and ended the strike. Waitresses quickly and quietly faded from the public eye when they no longer occupied the streets, the newspaper, or the conversation of Chicago. As the waitresses withdrew from such a prominent place in the public eye, Chicagoans also ended this particular conversation about the larger issues of working women in the public space that waitresses represented. While the judges’ decision ended the strike and the conversations about the waitresses for the moment, however, these were simply part of a larger, and longer-lasting, issue.

The employer-employee relationship, and even the working conditions for waitresses, had not been settled. While the employers won the battle in 1914, the waitresses still made some gains. The strike had crippled George Knab’s company, and he was forced to sell his restaurants. 208 Nine lunchrooms left the Restaurant Keepers’ Association and chose to sign contracts with the waitress union rather than risk their wrath. 209 Furthermore, despite the best efforts of the RKA, waitress unionism was not dead. Still, the domination of waitress unionism in the restaurant industry had been severely damaged by the loss of the strike and the rejection of the six-day work week.

After Local 484 lost the strike against the restaurant owners, two rival waitress unions, encouraged by the RKA in an attempt to break the power of Local 484, formed. These employer-sponsored groups, the Chicago Waitress League and Chicago Waitress Club,

continued to split waitress membership, and the effectiveness of the union, until the 1930s when they merged with Local 484 again.\textsuperscript{210} Then, during that tumultuous decade in labor history, waitress unions grew in size and strength such that by 1940 over one quarter of all hotels and restaurants had been unionized.\textsuperscript{211}

Just as the conflict between waitresses and restaurant owners was halted but not resolved in the 1914 strike, the social questions of women’s place at work and in the public continued as well. In one sense, those who saw waitresses primarily as workers won. The end of the strike was caused by a court injunction against picketing, which was the common fate of labor strikes in Chicago during that period. The waitresses, therefore, did not receive any preferential protection as victims or harshness as dissolute women, but instead the court system treated them as workers equal to the male unions. By handling this strike as it would any other strike, the court system was implicitly stating that waitresses should be seen first and primarily as workers.

Waitress activism in the 1930s would continue to assert food servers’ identity as workers. After the repeal of Prohibition, waitresses argued, and won, the right to serve liquor and work at night like waiters.\textsuperscript{212} While Local 484 had fought extremely hard for protective legislations and the passage of the law prohibiting women for working more than ten hours a day in 1911, by the 1930s they argued that protective legislation made employers more likely to hire waiters over waitresses and fought to repeal the female-only hour restrictions to ones that would benefit all workers equally.\textsuperscript{213}

\textsuperscript{210} Cobble. \textit{Dishing It Out} 88.
\textsuperscript{211} Cobble \textit{Dishing It Out} 86.
\textsuperscript{212} Cobble \textit{Dishing It Out} 157.
\textsuperscript{213} Cobble \textit{Dishing it Out} 153.
Frances Donovan described waitresses as “the representative of the great mass of free women.” Chicago’s failure to resolve how to view waitresses was part of a larger confusion for Chicago and the rest of America on how to view the new emerging class of working women more broadly. The 1914 strike, therefore, was an opportunity for Progressive Era Chicagoans to discuss how to see and deal with women’s changing place in urban America. Studying this waitress strike, then, offers an opportunity to uncover not only the labor conditions under which women worked at that time, but also the interplay of work, identity, and social perception that combined to govern the life opportunities available to individuals within rapidly urbanizing America.

Studying previously forgotten strikes, such as the 1914 waitress strike, brings to light new perspectives on the relationship between women and work and American society’s continuing struggle to understand and adapt to working women. Questions on how women should be treated in the workplace, whether more protection for female employees is necessary, and other similar concerns can still be found almost one hundred years later. While these concerns persist, events that push the issue to forefront of the public allow for attention and conversation which can further the discourse and come closer to finding some sort of resolution.

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