
Glenn’s thesis is that Jewish women garment workers developed their own version of “New Womanhood” activism based on cooperation and partnership with men, unlike middle class Progressive “New Women” who operated separately. She finds the roots of the Jewish brand of New Womanhood in the conflicting shtetl legacy of the woman who could be breadwinner but not a leader in the shtetl power structure, because such roles were exclusively reserved for men; the socialist Bund, which tended towards gender equality; and the influence of the American notion of domesticity. This backdrop helps her explain convincingly why young Jewish women workers could be strike leaders one day, then non-working wives and mothers the next, yet champions of full education and work roles for their daughters. Her argument is complex, knitting the strands of gender, ethnicity, labor, and the immigrant experience. Generous use of quotations from memoirs and oral histories personalizes the social history.

Excerpt from: