Preface

Historians have long been fascinated by the dramatic changes in the economic structure of the United States in the late nineteenth century. At that time the development of monopoly capitalism transformed the workplaces, life-styles, and aspirations of American workers, native-born and immigrant, male and female. The changing patterns of life in the United States at the turn of the century raise familiar questions: Why did some sectors of the economy expand more rapidly than others? Which groups of workers filled the new jobs? What was the significance of growing numbers of women in the paid labor force, and what was their impact on the industries they entered? What did the future hold for the children of workers in contracting sectors of the economy? How did the people involved in these changes understand and react to their situation? This book addresses these and other questions by investigating the people who filled the rapidly growing clerical occupations at the turn of the century. Who were the young people who entered these new jobs, and how did their decisions to do so grow out of and affect their families and communities?

I first became interested in these issues while writing my senior thesis as a women's studies major at the University of California, Berkeley in 1978. My thesis was about clerical workers, and I found that when I told people my topic, most of them responded, "Oh, yes. You're writing about middle-class women, then." Having once worked as a clerical worker, I knew this characterization did not seem to fit most of the people who had worked beside me in Oakland's large offices. I became intrigued with the question of the class background and status of clerical workers. The next year, as a graduate student at the University of Pittsburgh, I stumbled

across the enrollment records of the Pittsburgh public high school programs in the 1890s. This book is the result of that discovery.

Over the past ten years many people and institutions have aided me in this work. At the University of Pittsburgh, Yale University, the University of Maryland–College Park, and the School of Industrial Relations at Cornell University, communities of scholars and activists contributed to this project in diverse ways. I am especially grateful to Carolyn Schumacher, who first told me about the Pittsburgh high school enrollment records. My thinking about history and theory has been influenced by sharing ideas and work with, among others, Peter Albert, Ava Baron, James Barrett, Jeanne Boydston, Cecelia Bucki, Nancy Cott, Thelma Crivens, Tony Fels, Julie Greene, Maurine Greenwald, Linda Hassberg, Douglas Koritz, Gale McGloin, John Merriman, John A. Miller, Priscilla Murolo, Steven Sapolsky, Patricia Simpson, Amy Stanley, and Richard von Glahn. In addition, my students have consistently contributed more than they probably realize.

The research for this book profited from the assistance of many library staff members, friends, and institutions. The staff of the Sterling and Mudd libraries at Yale University were always helpful. Special thanks go to Frank Zabrosky, Frank Kurtik, and Katie Kerwin of the Archives of Industrial Society at the Hillman Library of the University of Pittsburgh and to the staff of the Pennsylvania Room at the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh. Richard Strassberg of the Labor-Management Documentation Center and other staff members of Catherwood Library at Cornell University provided invaluable assistance through the final years of my work on this book. The people I stayed with on research trips were equally important. Thanks go to Linda Hassberg, Doug Koritz, and Joshua, as well as Peter Albert, Gay Gullickson, and Amy Stanley in Washington, D.C. In Pittsburgh the Greenwald family—Maurine, Mickey, and Marla—put up with me for an entire summer, and Gale McGloin survived a week of last-minute checking.

My research was funded by a Lena Lake Forrest Fellowship from the Business and Professional Women's Foundation, a Ralph Henry Gabriel Fellowship from Yale University, a Whiting Fellowship in the Humanities from the Mrs. Giles Whiting Foundation, as well as by the Affinity Group Foundation and the School of Industrial and Labor Relations at Cornell University. The School of Industrial and Labor Relations also provided me with research assistants, including Sue Kline, Alice Oberfield, C. Michael Roland, and Daria Steigman.

The computer research for this project would have been impossible without the aid of friends and colleagues. Nora Faires first introduced me to SPSS and its benefits and complications. At several crucial stages Thomas Dublin gave me long-distance advice and ideas on record linkages. William Cronon provided continuing help as well as last-minute consultations. Tim Nolan and Eileen Driscoll helped me transfer my data and text from Yale to Cornell, a task that should have been much simpler than it was. Ali Hadi of Cornell's Department of Economic and Social Statistics helped me with the figure that appears in chapter 4. Research assistants also helped with data collection and coding, including Cara Grigsby, Ken Packman, Ken Pomeranz, Alice Oberfield, and James Rundle. Any shortcomings in my numbers appear in spite of these people's valiant efforts.

I am sure that my editor at Cornell University Press, Peter Agree, sometimes despaired at my stubbornness as he prodded and pushed me to finish this book. Amazingly, we have managed to become and remain good friends. Roger Haydon, also at the Press, and Lise Rodgers, my copyeditor, used their skills and good humor to improve my final round of revisions. Susan Porter Benson provided helpful comments and support; she has given me a model of thoughtful collegiality. Jackie Dodge typed and retyped, cheered me up, and provided support and inspiration in ways she'll never know. I only wish this book could have translated into a well-deserved raise in her salary.

Four people deserve special thanks. When I was very young, Marjorie DeVault began to teach me the meaning of "sisterhood"; she has continued to do so, not only in the personal sense but also politically and intellectually. I am thrilled to find that I still learn so much from her. Dana Frank and I have remained friends ever since we were both labeled "Californians" at Yale. She has always supported me and reminded me of the vital connection between clarity of thought and clarity of writing. Over almost a decade Lori Ginzberg has always come through with the hardest questions, the sharpest insights, and the most unquestioning support. My debts to her go far beyond anything I could ever say here. Finally, David Montgomery not only served as my academic adviser but provided incisive comments throughout this project. He is a formidable role model—as a historian, a teacher, a political actor, and a person. I have been aided in my research by all these people; in addition, my parents, brother, and grandparents provided crucial insights and support over the years.

I have never met any of the people who appear—however opaquely—

on the following pages. In the final analysis, however, they are my most important “audience.” I hope I have come close to uncovering the texture and significance of these early clerical workers’ lives.

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Sons and Daughters of Labor