

of this methodology. Perhaps hindered by the disciplinary bounds that dictate the evidentiary parameters of sociological research, her awkward engagement with the valuable oral testimony that she has—with considerable difficulty—gathered undermines the very efficacy that this evidence should have.

This concern aside, Frost's work is a welcome addition to the existing literature on Sierra Leone's recent history. Scholars from across an array of disciplines can confidently rely on different aspects of this work as they pursue more focused micro-studies on their topics of choice. Frost has crafted a book that has broad utility, which is a testament to her comfort in navigating such a range of source materials. The reader's understanding of Sierra Leone's peoples, resources, and position in global economic and political contexts is significantly deepened because of Frost's prodigious efforts.

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Vicki Howard. *From Main Street to Mall: The Rise and Fall of the American Department Store*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015. 1 + 295 pp. ISBN 978-0-8122-4728-2, \$34.95 (cloth); ISBN 978-0-8122-9148-3, \$34.95 (e-book).

A recipient of the 2016 Hagley Prize for best book in business history, *From Main Street to Mall: The Rise and Fall of the American Department Store* is Vicki Howard's much-needed survey of department store history. While the field has enjoyed several important studies from the perspectives of labor history, cultural history, and architectural history, among others, Howard's work provides an essential overview through the lens of business history. The book is organized chronologically, tracing department stores' evolution from dry goods merchants, to grand "palaces of consumption" by the late nineteenth century, and to their decline in the last decades of the twentieth century when discounters such as Kmart, Target, and Wal-Mart came to dominate the retail sector. However, Howard argues that this "fall" was not the inevitable result of "progress" but rather was facilitated by decisions—or lack thereof—from a variety of historical actors, including retail executives, government officials, and consumers themselves. In following their

customers to the suburbs, department store executives encouraged suburban sprawl and displaced downtowns as economic centers of communities. In this way, Howard's research firmly situates department stores in their social spheres and not just in their economic ones.

Howard's approach is unique in her focus on regional stores, in addition to the well-known ones in big cities. Focusing on what Howard terms the "provinces" allows her to examine stores that have received scant attention from scholars but that provide new insights. Howard argues that bringing the small retailers back into this history shifts the periodization of retail's modernization and subsequent decline over a longer period than previously thought. She connects the provincial department stores to their general store forbearers, arguing that there was "overlap" between them in the provinces. While the grand metropolitan stores grew to immense proportions and actively modernized their operations, the provincial stores continued with "traditional trade practices" (28) well into the twentieth century. These practices, such as allowing "noncash relationships" (28; e.g., bartering work or goods for store purchases and open-book credit), also demonstrated the clear social nature of these institutions, whereby stores knew and trusted their customers.

At the center of Howard's argument is an analysis of the relationship between the department store industry and the state. Howard characterizes the industry as a conservative one, generally opposed to government involvement in business. During the Depression, industry leaders supported President Hoover's volunteerist approach, but they broke with him over the 1930 Smoot–Hawley Tariff that raised prices on the goods they imported. With the coming of the New Deal, the industry initially supported the new National Recovery Administration because retailers were able to write the codes. However, divisions emerged that had far-reaching consequences. Whereas small retailers wanted laws that would ensure fair trade and a level playing field between them and large firms, the department store industry, on the whole, fought these types of efforts to maintain prices across retailers and to stymie the growth of chain stores. The Depression-era legislation that Howard identifies as the most significant is the Miller–Tydings Act of 1937. The law ensured that state-level retail price maintenance agreements would not be prosecuted under federal antitrust laws. Although it did not require retail price maintenance (which benefitted manufacturers and small retailers), it did lead to a proliferation of state fair trade laws by the start of World War II. This key federal intervention failed to stop the discounters' rise. First, it only covered goods that comprised less than one-fifth of all retail sales; second, enforcement was up to the manufacturers, not the federal government. With loose enforcement, discounters both ignored

fair trade laws and fought them in court. Here, Howard makes clear the key role of the U.S. Supreme Court in the rise of discounters, especially in the 1951 *Schwegmann Brothers v. Calvert Distillers Corp.*¹ decision, which allowed retailers that did not sign retail price maintenance agreements to cut their prices. Although the federal government responded the following year with new fair trade legislation, fewer and fewer manufacturers participated because it was prohibitively expensive to litigate retailers' compliance. At the same time, the court system followed the *Schwegmann* precedent and issued more decisions in the 1950s and 1960s against fair trade laws and their enforcement. Ultimately, Congress abandoned retail price maintenance in 1975 with the Consumer Goods Pricing Act. Once the floodgates were opened to the discounters, traditional department stores, especially smaller provincial ones that did not carry higher-quality merchandise, struggled to compete against the megastores that would come to dominate the retailing landscape from the late twentieth century to today.

In analyzing the failure of fair trade regulation, Howard places responsibility not only on the government but also on the department store industry itself that chose to side with the discounters rather than manufacturers. Moreover, Howard returns again and again to the crucial role of consumers. Especially in the inflationary 1970s, consumers demanded the lowest prices possible, and thus also sided with the discounters. The result was discounter domination and massive department store mergers, so that shopping became a much more homogenous experience as many downtown department stores closed or were bought out by large national chains such as Macy's. In turn, a passionate grassroots backlash also started to emerge in the 1990s. The Internet has created a space for department store enthusiasts to pine nostalgically for the golden years of retail, when downtown stores provided a regional identity for consumers and participated in local community life. Ultimately, though, Howard critiques the nostalgia movements for largely accepting store closings as inevitable without taking concrete action to stop them. Consumers have demanded the perpetual "rollback" of prices for decades, and now are paying the social costs.

Howard's discussion of department stores' social and community roles builds on work from Lizabeth Cohen and continues a shift in the historiography on consumerism that has often criticized the adverse effects of mass consumption on American culture. Howard points to how downtown department stores, unlike Wal-Mart or Macy's, were local institutions, whose owners were active figures in the community. She notes that for provincial areas especially, department stores

1. *Schwegmann Brothers v. Calvert Distillers Corp.*, 341 U.S. 384 (1951).

were “sources of pride for the communities ... and helped put provincial cities on the map” (25). Nonetheless, this point could be developed more fully to delve deeper into the social and cultural functions of department stores in the twentieth century. It is not entirely clear what consumers are nostalgic for when they yearn for the defunct stores. What has been lost in American society and culture with the “fall” of department stores? Future studies also might probe more deeply into the roles of specific individuals in the industry to examine what they understood their social and cultural roles to be. Overall, *From Main Street to Mall* is an essential contribution to the field that will be a foundation for years to come for scholars of department stores and consumerism.

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Anne Meis Knupfer. *Food Co-ops in America: Communities, Consumption, and Economic Democracy*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013. xiv +273 pp. ISBN 978-0-8014-5114-0, \$29.95 (cloth).

Cooperatives have been a part of American agriculture since the mid-nineteenth century. The most successful have been organized according to the British Rochdale model. These associations sold stock to members and paid dividends at the end of the year. They bought goods at wholesale prices and sold at retail. Agricultural cooperatives saved farm families money, but they suffered from under capitalization, poor organization and management, and fickle members who often shopped elsewhere. Less well known are the food cooperatives organized in cities and towns during the twentieth century. Usually organized on the Rochdale model, they too saved consumers money on basic foods, which was often supplied by local farmers. Although many food co-ops were modestly successful, many failed. The attrition rate has always been high.

Until now historians of American agricultural, rural, and food history have not known much about food cooperatives, which are collectively owned by members who make business decisions, such as what to buy, whether to practice political and religious neutrality, and how to share the profits based on each members' purchases.