



THE
JEWISH
PUBLICATION
SOCIETY



POTOMAC
BOOKS

***The Great Kosher Meat War of 1902:
Immigrant Housewives and the Riots***

Scott D. Seligman

CHOICE

By D. R. Jamieson

Vol. 58 No. 12

Book Review

August 2021

Seligman, Scott D. **The great kosher meat war of 1902: immigrant housewives and the riots that shook New York City**. Potomac Books, 2020. 276p bibl index ISBN 9781640123588, \$32.95; ISBN 9781640124103 ebook, \$32.95.

Seligman, a writer and historian, explores how gender relations, immigration, trade unions, poverty, and women's rights came together in 1902 when Chicago's Beef Trust raised prices. Caught between wholesalers and Jewish immigrant women were small, independent, kosher butchers trying to eke out a living on Manhattan's Lower East Side. Often recently arrived from Eastern Europe and illiterate, with minimal understanding of English, economics, and community organizing, the women who managed the family budgets quickly recruited thousands to boycott the butchers and refrain from buying their meat. Unfortunately, these actions brought retaliation from the butchers and the police, who used excessive force against the women, some of whom engaged in property violence. Though it lasted only a few weeks, the action spread to Brooklyn, Harlem, New Jersey, and Boston. Though the women were successful on their own, men also joined the fray. A few years later, the women's organizational activities encouraged a rent strike to protest increases established by uptown Jewish landlords. Throughout, Seligman explores the intricacies of keeping kosher and the divides between old and new Jewish immigrants. A well-written narrative history, this will appeal to historians and social scientists as well as general readers interested in a powerful but little-known community action program.

--D. R. Jamieson, Ashland University

Summing Up: Recommended. All levels.