Emma Casey, *The Return of the Housewife: Why Women are Still Cleaning Up* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2025)

Emma Casey's *The Return of the Housewife* explores what it means to imagine domestic labour as glamorous, fulfilling, and new. Set in the post-pandemic digital age, this fascinating book asks how the "housewife" became a new expression of self, though it is wholly tied to an old idea about the fulfilling nature of keeping house and home according to impossible standards.

The research into the digital realm is situated in a historical understanding of the colonial and capitalist roots of housework that have kept women tied to the home. The work builds on a previous generation of feminist analysis of domesticity, notably Anne McClintock's *Imperial Leather* which understood the intertwined nature of empire and the domestic space. North American social historians will recognize the arguments of Mariana Valverde's *Age of Light, Soap, and Water* which explored the 19th century social purity movement. Looking at the 21st century, Casey explores housework as a form of capitalist accumulation in which women serve as both unpaid labour and promoters of domestic labour as a capitalist commodity. The book is a fascinating exploration of how this is accelerating in the digital age.

This is less a book about housewives themselves, but rather about the *image* of the housewife. As such the central figure and subject of investigation of the text is the "cleanfluencer." A cleanfluencer is an online personality, usually women who leverage social media to idealize and sanitize housework as a glamourous and desirable pursuit. Like the "tradwife" of North American parlance, the most successful cleanfluencers in the United Kingdom are selling both fantasy and commodity, combining their fame with merchandising that supports the pristine image of domesticity perfected.

The book addresses five central goals. First, Casey adeptly explores the origins and rise of the cleanfluencer and digital culture and positions her in the context of global capitalism. Though the book deals with English digital spaces, this focus makes the work helpful and applicable to international readers who will surely recognize the commonalities shared by all influencers in these spaces. Secondly, the book positions domestic labour itself as an issue of gendered inequality. Casey's handling of this question makes the work relevant to the sociology and history of domestic labour and gives us a compelling new look at this field in the post-COVID-19 world. The third and fourth themes knit image and self into the portrait of the influencer – both as a singular image to be consumed and a model for the consumer to imagine self-realization and happiness. Casey's final theme weighs in on the value of this entire phenomenon and considers alternatives to the ongoing inequalities of the domestic sphere.

Chapter 1 will be of interest to historians as it explores the connections between home education, the "celebrity housewife," and its modern iteration in the cleanfluencer. There's a curious democratization that has happened with the new generation of social media stars. Their exceptionalism, Casey argues, is normalized as an act of self-expression of ordinary people. Though the biggest cleanfluencers are online celebrities, the immediacy and intimacy of the internet make them accessible and universal. Obscured by this flattening effect is the real labour and effort of housework. This is paired with the second chapter that responds to the new phenomenon of the cleanfluencer to illustrate how cleaning becomes an act of self-expression rather

than domestic reproduction. This is an update on the 20th-century glamourization of housework that nonetheless reifies the gendered division of labour in the home. The larger effect, Casey argues, is to simply repackage capitalism for women in the home and make them feel empowered by their role.

Chapters 3 and 4 deepen Casey's analysis of the relationship between cleanfluencers and the construction of the self by exploring concepts of wellness, health, and happiness. These chapters are such a fascinating analysis of a cultural movement that is so pervasive and everpresent in women's online lives that it has become uncritically naturalized. Marie Kondo's quest to "spark joy" in the lives of her readers through cleaning and decluttering is the most famous example, and Casey deconstructs the assumptions and messages that accompany this global phenomenon. Kondo is not so different from 19th or 20th century educationalists who made women feel responsibility for both the cleanliness and the happiness of their domestic lives.

Casey also argues that self-help narratives are also a considerable influence in the domestic sphere. The new generation of cleanfluencers are both aspirational and confessional. Chapter 4 draws a connection between cleaning and mental health and illustrates the ways that the material determinants of wellness and health are made invisible by the coalescence of self-help and cleaning. The solution offered is about as far from "wages for housework" as one can imagine. Cleanfluencers promise instead that all women need is a new attitude and the real monotonies of domestic reproduction can be nullified. It's a pernicious yet seductive package and one that dovetails perfectly with a refusal to acknowledge the true scale of labour performed by women in the home.

Chapter 5 responds to all of this with a very strong sociological analysis and an entreaty to understand why this all matters. The chapter is a response to similar questions raised in the Introduction that insist on the relevance and importance of understanding women's roles and to pay attention to the material realities of the domestic sphere. It matters because at the root of these questions is a reality about inequality that the modern phenomenon of cleanfluencers can hardly address. Positive thinking alone does not make for a transformative feminism, and Casey's work perfectly illustrates the most modern iterations of how feminist goals are neutralized by liberal individualism and the continuing demands of capitalist accumulation. The effect of it all is to make women's lives more difficult and demanding while allowing patriarchy and capitalism a free pass.

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Zhongping Chen, *Transpacific Reform and Revolution: The Chinese in North America, 1898-1918* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2023)

In this extraordinarily detailed and exceptionally researched study, University of Victoria historian, Zhongping Chen, chronicles the institutional history of the North American overseas Chinese communities in the reform and revolutionary movements associated primarily with Kang Youwei and Sun Yat-sen. Deploying a wide-ranging knowledge of primary and secondary sources in both Chinese- and English-language archives and historiographies, Chen analyzes the transnational movements of Kang and Sun Yat-sen and traces the institutional development of their respective primary North American organizations, the Chinese Empire Reform Association