

Favored Flowers: Culture and Economy in a Global System. By Catherine Ziegler. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007. vii + 306 pp. Index, notes, bibliography, figures, tables, illustrations. Cloth, \$79.95; paper, \$22.95. ISBN: cloth, 0-822-34007-2; paper, 0-822-34026-3.

Reviewed by Vicki Howard

Cut-flowers are ephemeral goods—we buy them, they wilt and lose their petals, and we throw them away, all in a very short period of time. Most people give little thought to the origin of the flowers they buy. As Catherine Ziegler's well-written ethnographic study of the global flower industry demonstrates, however, cut flowers are not unimportant commodities. The provisioning of blooms for gifts, domestic decoration, holidays, weddings, funerals, and other events constitutes a four-billion dollar market in the United States alone. Purchased mostly by women, flowers are rich cultural symbols and reflections of gender and class identity. And, as Ziegler argues, since the 1970s they have become part of a global commodity chain that links increasingly diverse consumers with a wide range of international growers and middlemen. Something as ubiquitous as a Valentine's Day bouquet of "Charlotte" roses sold at a Manhattan retail florist link consumers with farmworkers and packers in the Ecuadorian Andes, flower-importing firms in Miami, and New Jersey wholesale florists, among others. The decline of the traditional florist, who enjoyed a monopoly in his field for over a hundred years, is a reflection of the broader effects of globalization that have transformed retailing. Yet, as Ziegler persuasively argues, the evolution of flower production, distribution, and consumption in the New York metropolitan area is a specific one, filled with its own set of cultural and economic factors.

Beginning chapters provide historical background on changing consumer tastes for flowers and the rise and decline of U.S. flower growers from 1870 to 1970. A hundred-year span is a long period to cover in such a varied and complex industry, and, as a result, discussion of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century flower trade moves quickly and draws largely on secondary sources. The book's first chapter skims across such varied topics as gardens, floral varieties, the wearing of blossoms, and decorating practices. Ziegler adopts a trickle-down argument here, suggesting that, during this early period at least, elites shaped floral styles and trade. Interesting details emerge, such as the example of the fragrant winter-blooming, violet-wearing craze that generated a lucrative greenhouse industry in Rhinebeck, New York. Known popularly as "Crystal City" for its large number of glass greenhouses, the town's violet business completely disappeared after World War I, when the blossom-wearing fad declined, showing the power of demand on the flower trade at that time. By the mid-twentieth century, floral culture in the United States became standardized as suppliers came to dominate the industry. Improved insecticides and greenhouses, the rise of large growers who were better situated to take advantage of new technologies, and the introduction by breeders of flowers with "more profitable characteristics" led to high-volume production.

Consumers came to have little to choose from besides carnations, chrysanthemums, roses, and gladioli, all grown with an eye to the long post-harvest life and disease resistance required of mass-produced flowers.

The strength of this book is in its treatment of the postindustrial or postmodern period after 1970, when economic life underwent a complete reorganization along global lines. Influenced by global commodity-chain theory, Ziegler's mobile or multi-sited ethnography focuses on the middle sector of the chain—the exporters, importers, wholesalers, and retailers. She shows how the distribution chain changed in concert with the developing global flower-growing regions in 1970. Critically, Ziegler also addresses the consumer, arguing that, after 1970, demand came to dominate supply in the industry as consumers pushed their desires up the chain. While, before 1970, the flower trade had been local, specialized, and mostly seasonal, after 1970, it became global, diverse, and year round. Although some Colombians began to supply the growing U.S. market in the 1960s, most flowers were grown domestically, while small quantities came from Canada, the Netherlands, and Mexico. By the 1980s, however, the Ecuadorian flower-exporting industry was expanding rapidly and transforming the U.S. field. During the early period, the flower industry was based on local networks of relationships, but as production became global, networks also extended globally. Yet, interestingly, the industry very rarely integrated vertically, either nationally or internationally.

As globalization led to increased competition, the availability of different types of flowers expanded. Ziegler argues that flowers became democratized. Consumers could now purchase a wide range of blooms in convenience stores, supermarkets, super centers, and on the Internet. By the early 1990s, flowers that were once rare, such as freesia, lily, and gerbera, joined the ranks of the commonplace. Consumption of specialty flowers, moreover, became democratized after 1970. As a result of increased contact with the global garden, consumers grew more sophisticated in their tastes, pushing growers to offer more and more varieties. Even once-rare orchids became ordinary.

In addition to her work in the New York City area, Ziegler did impressive research on the contrasting floriculture in the Netherlands and Ecuador, showing how the business was shaped by structural factors, such as historical variation in land availability and distribution, distinct political and economic conditions, and varying state involvement. The Netherlands had several more long-term strengths than the Latin American system, which made money quickly, but not in a sustainable way. The Netherlands system relied on specialized, cooperative, quality-focused, small-scale producers or family farms that did not have to take consumer tastes into account, because its distribution system (cooperative auctions) took care of this for them. Moreover, knowledge was shared among growers, and the state invested heavily in research and education in the industry. Large mass producers in Ecuador, in contrast, did not take this direction. By relying on consignment marketing, moreover, Ecuadorian growers take on most of the risk in their transactions.

Favored Flowers makes compelling reading for anyone interested in learning what makes globalization tick. Discussion of the 1950–70 period is also fascinating, but the historian is left wishing for a fuller primary-source study of the pre-1970 era, something that is understandably beyond the scope of this

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book. As a case study of the effects of globalization upon one particular industry, *Favored Flowers* will make a strong contribution to business historians' understanding of the post-1970 rise of differentiated markets.

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