



The Dos and Don'ts of Staying at a Hotel, or Why the Green Program is BS #LAWCHA19

Posted on July 12, 2019 by Emily E. LB. Twarog

Ed: This is one of a series of conference notes from the recent LAWCHA conference. If you have reflections from one of the panels or plenaries, please send them along.

I interviewed a long-time worker at Chicago's palatial Palmer House hotel for a project I am working on. When I asked her how long she has worked as a housekeeper at the Palmer House, she promptly admonished me, "Let's clarify that. I'm a room attendant...." Laughing she pointed out, "we don't actually maintain the kids or the cooking and we don't enjoy the husband, either." (1) Hotels are fascinating places – there is so much that goes unseen, that is misunderstood by hotel guests. I should know, I spent five years working in one while I was in graduate school. At the recent LAWCHA conference at Duke University, I was honored to participate in an excellent panel called "A People's History of Emergent Movements – And Our Roles in Them," assembled by Dawson Barrett. I spoke about last year's Chicago hotel strike that brought thousands of hotel workers out onto the streets as 26 hotels attempted to run their multi-billion dollar businesses without their labor. Suddenly, those workers were no longer invisible.

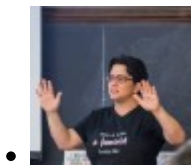
During the Q&A, a conference attendee asked me why the Chicago hotel workers opposed the various hotels' "green program." Shouldn't we care about the environment? Aren't hotels doing something good for their earth by asking us to hang up our towels and not have our sheets changed? This is another one of those invisible moments. Hotel "green programs" are smoke and mirrors. Who doesn't want to save the earth one towel at a time? Yet, what is the cost to the hotel worker? When you opt to "go green," you actually add more work to the hotel room attendant. She is now expected to clean additional rooms because you opted to not change your sheets and we hung up our towels. While we may have hung up our towels, she still needs to make our bed, wipe down the bathroom, clean our piddle off the toilet seat, and tidying up our mess. The reality is....the "green program" is really an effort to get more work out of room attendants. It is not really about global warming.

So the next time you stay at a hotel, think about how you can put our discipline into action:

- Tip your housekeeper every day, do not wait until the end of your stay;
- Hang your towels but don't opt into the "green program;"
- Say, "hello" and "thank you" to the woman with the giant cart of sheets and towels in the hallway;
- Be sure to tell management what an amazing job the staff does;
- And, for goodness sake, do not cross a picket line! Walk it instead.

1. Emily E. LB. Twarog, "Interview with Tina Graham," June 19, 2018, Chicago, Illinois.

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Twentieth Century America (Oxford University Press, 2017)