

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

JENNIFER A. STEPHEN, *Pick One Intelligent Girl: Employability, Domesticity, and the Gendering of Canada's Welfare State, 1939-1947*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007, x + 266 p., index.

To begin, let's describe this book as it really is: Jennifer Stephen's *Pick One Intelligent Girl* is that unlikely prospect for publication, the revised doctoral thesis. Only a minority of recent PhDs are successful in publishing their thesis in its entirety, and Jennifer Stephen accomplished this formidable task, attesting to the excellence of her student work. She took a dissertation titled "Deploying Discourses of Employability and Domesticity: Women's Employment and Training Policies and the Formation of the Canadian Welfare State, 1935-1947," a massive work in historical sociology some 523 pages long, and re-worked it into a more accessible tome.

Under the broad area of employment policy for civilian and enlisted women, *Pick One Intelligent Girl* examines government policies, as well as innovations in personnel selection and educational psychology that emerged during the three phases of World War II: mobilization for war, the Canadian women's contribution (both domestic and military) to the European theatre, and the de-mobilization period. Canada entered the war on September 10, 1939, and by 1941, still had not dealt effectively with labour shortages that threatened to undermine military production. Jennifer Stephen first examines the solution to this dilemma, the creation of the National Selective Service Women's Division (NSSWD), and the development of policies around workplace conditions (hours of work, safety, recreational facilities, and daycare), vocational training, and the mobilization of single and then married women into war-related employment.

Proving herself a skillful writer, Jennifer Stephen uses the exemplary career of Dr. Olive Ruth Russell as a narrative thread throughout her book. Dr. Russell, as a personnel selection officer for the Canadian Women's Army Corps (CWAC), supervised the recruitment and intelligence testing of women who aimed to serve in the military. In the demobilization period, Ruth Russell was appointed to the Department of Veteran's Affairs (DVA), where she played a key role in organizing the rehabilitation and re-training of civilian and military women. Jennifer Stephen carefully reconstructs World War II employment policy through the meticulous use of archival documents, including the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation Archives, the Library and Archives of Canada, and the Olive Ruth Russell papers.

Nevertheless there are some uncomfortable corners in this work. One of the most apparent proved to be the awkward fit between intersectional theorizing; the mantra of gender, race and class as a kit of conceptual tools of analysis and a relatively recent arrival on the methodological scene; and the historically-situated archival data with which Stephen was working. Certain scholars (and I include myself in this category) would happily mark the demise of this allegedly “inclusive” methodology which by its very form necessitates the exclusion of data that might be crucial to any one part, and creates debates around prioritization. The structure of intersectional theorizing implies that balanced analysis is achievable – not always the case; and frequently, political correctness is realized at the expense of a weak argument in one of the sections. This is precisely what occurs in *Pick One Intelligent Girl*. What inevitably suffered in Stephen’s work are her arguments around “race,” given that she worked with archival data on employment policy originally created for a white, middle-class, heterosexual female subject. The presence of a “raced” subject in her work is diminished: the experience of aboriginal Canadian women mentioned only in passing, and the Japanese internment alluded to only briefly.

Finally, a lingering question remains in the book as to the lot of women war workers in the munitions industries when laid off during the demobilization period, and whether their work category was listed in the Unemployment Insurance Act passed in 1940. Were they eligible for Unemployment Insurance, if only for a brief period, or only for re-training in government-sponsored initiatives such as the Home Aide and Ward Aide Programs? Yet this oversight remains negligible, as well as the problematic match of theory to data, given the overall high quality of Jennifer Stephen’s historical sociology. This is an important book for historians of Canadian social policy, policy analysts, Women’s Studies, war historians, and sociologists of work.

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