

## *Respectable Citizens: Gender, Family, and Unemployment in Ontario's Great Depression* By Lara Campbell

Françoise Noël

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cused on single men, in the breadlines and riding the rails, Campbell examines how the Depression affected men as husbands and fathers whose masculinity was linked to their status as breadwinners. The shame they felt over accepting relief was real; they wanted work, not charity. The breadwinner ideal, Campbell argues, survived the stress of this period and was embedded into the programs of the liberal welfare state which later emerged.

That children and youth had a critical role to play in the family economy during the Depression is hardly surprising. Based largely on case files, Campbell presents this role in terms of the conflict and negotiations which took place, both within the family and between the family and the state. Examples include older children who resisted handing over most of their earnings to parents, adult children forced to support elderly parents, and young men brought to court to provide support for a child born out of wedlock. The state increased its efforts to ensure that family members lived up to the ideal of family mutual support thereby minimizing the responsibility of the public purse. Using case files to uncover these tensions and conflicts means, however, that the 'good moments' in family life are largely missing, as Campbell herself notes.

Family strategies of 'making do' were simply not enough to cope with the problems related to unemployment created by the Depression. Yet Ontario accepted responsibility only reluctantly, even in the face of protests and political action by citizens who framed their demands in terms of their role as parents and breadwinners. The last two chapters of Campbell's study add to a growing literature on these types of protests. Because the home was much more than a place to live—it was a visible symbol of status within the community—the fear associated with foreclosure and eviction

radicalized many homeowners. While community action to fight evictions was seldom successful in the long run, it highlighted the suffering caused and put pressure on public officials to provide housing aid to those on relief.

The home is also discussed as the site of conflict and negotiation over gender roles. Although unemployment was recognized as a key factor in such cases, Campbell concludes that the courts and relief agencies supported the ideal of the respectable male-headed family and, even when abuse was an issue, tried to keep families together. Campbell examines various other collective and individual political actions, and shows how these protests were shaped by both gender and ethnicity. Those people of British ancestry saw themselves as 'true citizens' and more entitled than others to claim assistance from the state. The extensive use of letters to the premiers, a previously untapped resource, gave a voice to the 'respectable citizens' of Ontario.

*Respectable Citizens* has already received national acclaim and it is easy to see why. It weaves together strands of the history of the family, of the rise of the welfare state and of the development of a Canadian national identity in the Ontario context, not just in the larger cities but also in rural areas and in northern Ontario. It contributes significantly to our understanding of masculinity during the Depression. It also tells the stories of individuals and families who experienced the Great Depression first hand, showing them as actors and not just as victims of hard times. *Respectable Citizens* is essential reading for teachers and researchers in Canadian social history but it will also appeal to a larger audience interested in the social conditions of the Depression era.

Françoise Noël  
Nipissing University