

PRESENTATION / PRÉSENTATION

Bomb Girls

An Introduction

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ON WEDNESDAY, 28 MAY 2014, a standing-room-only crowd gathered at Brock University from 3:30 to 5:00 in the afternoon to listen to a panel discussion sponsored by the Canadian Committee on Labour History at the Canadian Historical Association annual meetings. The session, entitled “Bomb Girls: Women’s History Meets the Mass Media,” included presentations by four scholars: Joan Sangster of Trent University spoke on “Representing Women and Class: Assessing *Bomb Girls* as History for the Public”; Carmela Patrias of Brock University discussed “Racist Discrimination and Gender in *Bomb Girls*”; Pamela Wakewich of Lakehead University addressed “The Post (Modern?) Oral Historian’s Dilemma – Negotiating Voice and Visions in Popular Representations of Women’s Wartime Work and Identities”; and Valerie Korinek of the University of Saskatchewan spoke on “Decoding and Debating the Popularity of Bomb Girls.”

Bomb Girls is the short-lived television series produced for the Global Television Network that ran for two seasons in 2012 and 2013. Following the conclusion of the series, Shaw Media, the owner of Global, produced a two-hour concluding movie, *Facing the Enemy*. One commentator described the show as a “World War II drama-cum-soap opera focusing on the Canadian homefront and the gals (and guys) working at a munitions factory,” and offered the opinion that “*Bomb Girls* is probably the best Canadian series being made right now.”¹ Fans of the show were disappointed to see it end, and their reactions led another commentator to suggest that the show’s appeal lay in its being a “period drama” like the PBS hit *Downton Abbey* and in being a “female-centric”

1. D.K. Latta, “Why Canadians Should be Watching ‘Bomb Girls,’” *The Huffington Post*, 4 January 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/dk-latta/bomb-girls-canada_b_2988217.html, accessed 4 February 2015.

opportunity for “young women charmed and intrigued by the story of how their grandmothers fought to get jobs and respect.”² How good was the opportunity for people to learn about the experiences of women working in factories during World War II? At Brock, the panel presenters developed a number of perspectives that suggest there are opportunities in such mass media dramatizations to promote debate about the history of complex social relationships, but also that the process of producing such interpretations may easily slip into obscuring aspects of the interrelatedness of class, gender, and especially in the case of *Bomb Girls*, race. *Labour/Le Travail* invited all of the session participants to contribute versions of their presentations to its pages for your consideration. We are delighted that Joan Sangster has provided “*Bomb Girls, Gender and Working-Class History*” and Carmela Patrias has produced “*Race-based Discrimination in Bomb Girls*.”

2. Kate Taylor, “Why fans of cancelled TV show *Bomb Girls* are fighting back,” *The Globe and Mail*, 26 April 2013, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/television/why-fans-of-cancelled-tv-show-bomb-girls-are-fighting-back/article11571558/>, accessed 4 February 2015.