



Legislating the French Family: Feminism, Theater, and Republican Politics: 1870-1920

Jean Elisabeth Pedersen

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Legislating the French Family examines family law reform in France from the foundation of the Third Republic in 1870 to the aftermath of World War I in 1920. Combining literary and historical approaches, Jean Elisabeth Pedersen provides a unique perspective on the political culture of modern France, analyzing French "problem" plays and their reception both as a measure of public opinion and as a force for social change. This approach reveals the complex cultural narratives within, against, and in spite of what the feminist activists, journalists, medical experts, and politicians debated. Pedersen's work demonstrates how republican political debates over divorce, illegitimacy, abortion, and birth control both provoked and responded to larger arguments about the meanings of French citizenship, national identity, and imperial expansion. She argues that these debates complicated the idea of French citizenship and exposed the myth of the supposedly ungended individual citizen. This new approach to the study of political culture and social reform during the period reveals the intricate intersections among family law, class, religious belief, republican citizenship, national identity, and imperial policy.

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