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Drew Whitelegg

Whitelegg's book is based on interviews with more than sixty flight attendants and labor leaders.

book, published by New York University Press.

In addition, flight attendants are losing the power they once had over their work schedules. Roughly 80 percent of flight attendants are women, Whitelegg says, and half have dependents at home—either children or aging parents.

Whitelegg's book is based on interviews with more than sixty flight attendants and labor leaders, and it also draws upon his observations while flying across the country and overseas in the past five years. He traces the profession from its origins in the 1930s to today, when flight attendants find themselves wearing the hats of therapist, security guard, and undercover agent.

"Their feelings of control have been taken away from them," he said, adding that the bankruptcy of many airlines after 9/11 allowed them to tear up labor contracts and rewrite hiring rules. "A key point of the book is that the hiring profile of the job is going to go back to what it used to be."

Whitelegg argues that airlines want flight attendants on the job for less than five years because of labor costs. "They never wanted flight attendants to be full-time workers. They used to have ways to prevent it from happening."

Whitelegg interviewed many veteran flight attendants who chose work schedules that allowed them to be home during the week when their children were young. They volunteered at

school and drove carpools. Those who flew international routes would be gone for several days at a time, but then could be home for longer periods of time between flights. It was a career that allowed them to balance work and family, even though, like many working mothers, they wrestled with guilt when they were away from their families.

The book has been praised by distinguished work-family scholar Harriet B. Presser, author of *Working in a 24/7 Economy: Challenges For American Families*. She calls it "a great read," adding that "after reading this important book, one will find it difficult to observe flight attendants without concern for the vulnerability of their careers and for the complex ways they juggle space and time along with work and family."

Most of today's flight attendants are not able to create their own schedules, according to Whitelegg. Many are "on reserve" and have to race to the airport whenever they are called to work. As airlines cut back on staff and supplies, flight attendants have found it more difficult to do their jobs.

"We don't have pillows, we don't have plastic spoons anymore," one unnamed Delta Air Lines flight attendant told Whitelegg. "We don't have plastic wings anymore. Kids love those wings. I'm so embarrassed. . . ."

Since 9/11, many flight attendants had to deal with children and family members who didn't want them to fly, Whitelegg said. In one case, children hid their mother's uniform in the hope it would keep her on the ground.

Parting from loved ones is particularly painful, he says, because anything is possible and you might not come home. "You make sure you say 'goodbye' and 'I love you' every time you leave . . . just in case," a flight attendant told Whitelegg.

Whitelegg did much of the research while he was a postdoctoral fellow at the MARIAL Center. He has taught classes at Emory on gender in the workplace. He has a PhD in geography from King's College in London.

More information on Whitelegg's book is at www.nyupress.org/product_info.php?products_id=4993. ■