

## History

**POVERTY AND COMPASSION:** The Moral Imagination of the Late Victorians. By Gertrude Himmelfarb. Knopf. 496 pp. \$30

Most arguments about how to deal with poverty come down, ultimately, to different interpretations of compassion. Himmelfarb, professor emeritus of history at City University of New York, distinguishes between "sentimental" compassion, which consists of moral indignation and *feeling good*, and "unsentimental" compassion, which is practical and seeks above all to *do good*. Himmelfarb profiles the era in which British reformers brought to the fore the practice of this unsentimental compassion. The era begins roughly with, and continues for a generation after, the publication of the first volume of Charles Booth's *Life and Labour of the People in London* (1889), a book which calculated a morally freighted "arithmetic of woe." The period, much like our own 1960s, rediscovered poverty even as poverty was declining. What united Himmelfarb's late Victorian reformers—from the neoclassical economist Alfred Marshall to the religious reformer Arthur Toynbee to the Fabian socialists Sidney and Beatrice Webb—was their blend of realism and morality: They were convinced that the state had to assume a greater role in coping with poverty but, at the same time, that the poor required moral guidance as much as money.

At the end of this period, Beatrice Webb criticized the unconditional social benefits being advocated by the young Winston Churchill. In 1909 Churchill objected to tying social benefits to personal behavior, saying, "I do not like mix-



ing up moralities and mathematics." By then, however, events were passing the Victorians by. They had done much through their writing to foster more compassionate government—the era saw the extension of housing aid, workmen's compensation, schooling, unemployment insurance—but the compassion of the emerging welfare state was increasingly what Himmelfarb calls sentimental, "an exercise in moral indignation." As the welfare state grew, she argues, "it became a moral principle to eschew moral distinctions and judgments." Later reformers, "with a much attenuated commitment to religion, redoubled their social zeal as if to compensate . . . It was then that the passion for religion was transmuted into the compassion for humanity." A century later, as compassion in its unsentimental guise slowly works its way back into social policy, this is an era—and a book—worth studying.

**REVOLUTION AND REBELLION IN THE EARLY MODERN WORLD.** By Jack A.

Goldstone. Univ. of Calif. 608 pp. \$34.95

A generation ago, the accepted view of revolutions, found in such books as Hannah Arendt's *On Revolution* (1963) and Crane Brinton's *Anatomy of Revolution* (1965), was that great political upheavals occurred when conditions were improving and popular expectations were dangerously high. Goldstone, director of the Center for Comparative Research in History, Society, and Culture at the University of California, Davis, stands much of this old thinking on its head.

All of the revolutions Goldstone considers, from the Ottoman Crisis in the early 17th century to the Taiping Rebellion in 1850, were preceded by periods in which population growth was rapid but material production failed to keep pace. With their economies based almost entirely on agriculture, old regimes had little flexibility in dealing with large fluctuations in population. Massive growth made goods less available, causing both soaring inflation and state fiscal crises. At the same time, social turmoil and fluctuation created at least the illusion of social mobility, "a scramble for credentials," as Goldstone calls it, and attendant friction between the haves and have-nots.

This is hardly an interpretation of revolutions to encourage would-be revolutionaries. Gone are the old romantic theories that depicted revolutions as glorious struggles between past and future or good and evil; the revolutions Goldstone studies arise from imbalances between human institutions and environmental factors such as disease, weather, and the productivity of the soil. The fall of an *ancien regime* and its revolutionary replacement could hardly have been expected to bring an end to social difficulties. "In practice," those societies "convulsed by severe problems [were] more likely to find solutions in stern authority." Revolutions, Goldstone concludes, "create great debates about freedom but often shrink from establishing it."

### *Contemporary Affairs*

**EDGE CITY:** Life on the New Frontier. By Joel Garreau. Doubleday. 526 pp. \$22.50

Joel Garreau has seen the urban future, and it's not that bad.

This future will be dominated by what he calls Edge Cities, those massive agglomerations of office parks, shopping malls, and housing developments that already dot the periphery of our metropolitan regions. Garreau, who combines the journalist's eye for detail (he is a *Washington Post* reporter) with the analytic training of a demographic geographer, portrays these one-time suburbs as diverse and healthy places. They put individuals within easy reach (by car) of everything, from high-technology firms to used book stores. Concentrating on a hundred-odd Edge Cities, mostly clustered around nine metropolitan areas, Garreau argues that they all reflect the search for a new balance between the human desire for social contact and for individual freedom. He excuses their various deficiencies, such as New Jersey's Bridgewater Commons mall, as those of "a first generation vision . . . an experimental effort in a national work in progress."

While Garreau sometimes echoes the boosterism of the developers, he is disturbed by the development "growth machine." His book concludes with an account of the 1988 confrontation in northern Virginia between mega-devel-

oper John T. Hazel, who sincerely believed he was bringing the benefits of civilization to an empty landscape, and the local activists who opposed his plan to develop a 542-acre portion of the Civil War battlefield at Manassas (Bull Run). In the end, the federal government was persuaded to preserve the battlefield. That solution will not often be available for the American Edge City of the future. Indeed, Garreau has little faith that government—or architects and planners, who tend to be focused on the restoration of the old central cities—can have much impact on the Edge Cities. Ultimately, developers and citizens will have to work out local "social contracts" to channel growth. Garreau is optimistic that they will. He is talking, after all, about a frontier, where all things seem possible.

### **THE DISUNITING OF AMERICA:**

Reflections on a Multicultural Society. By Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. Whittle. 91 pp. \$11.95

The most innovative—some would say the most questionable—development in recent publishing comes from the Tennessee publisher, Whittle Communications. Whittle hires well-known writers to address, in short, punchy books of about 100 pages, some of the thornier issues of the day; it then sells commercial advertising and distributes 150,000 free copies to business and opinion leaders before the book goes to stores. With this new addition to the series, it can now be said that the multicultural "political correctness" controversy has been "Whittled" down to size. Schlesinger, professor of history at the graduate school of the City University of New York and one of the deans of American liberalism, is well qualified for the task.

As one would expect, Schlesinger takes the long, middle-of-the-road view. Recognition of the contributions of non-WASP minorities was much needed in this country, he argues. But what began in the 1960s as a healthy corrective built on sound scholarship has degenerated into propagandistic "compensatory" history that distorts the truth in order to fuel a cult of group- and ethnicity-mindedness. The matter is far from merely academic, says Schlesinger: "The ethnic revolt against the melting pot has