
History

PROTECTING SOLDIERS AND MOTHERS:

The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States. By *Theda Skocpol*. Harvard. 714 pp. \$34.95

For decades scholars have been trying to understand why the American welfare state was such a late bloomer and why, by European standards, its growth remains stunted. Was the absence of a strong, European-style labor movement to blame? Or were America's individualistic values? These and other theories are admirably surveyed (and, with varying degrees of success, refuted) by Skocpol, a Harvard sociologist, on her way to introducing yet another theory: The United States was no latecomer; indeed, it pioneered the welfare state.

Her case rests on two early trial runs for a welfare state in America. The first took form with the gradual expansion of Civil War pensions, which were inaugurated to aid disabled veterans and the dependents of men killed in the war. These pensions, Skocpol writes, evolved into "an open-ended system of disability, old-age, and survivors' benefits for any who could claim minimal service time on the northern side of the Civil War." By 1910, more than one third of elderly northern men were receiving federal pensions averaging a relatively generous \$172 annually. Skocpol concedes, however, that the pension system was "not really a 'welfare state.'" It was more an elaborate patronage scheme—the Republican Party's answer to the turkeys handed out at Thanksgiving by Democratic ward heelers—and it helped to ensure the GOP's domination of national politics during the late 19th century.

The first modern welfare-state measures were enacted in Germany during the 1880s and in Britain during the early 1900s, but the United States emphatically declined to join in. An early 20th-century attempt by reform groups such as the American Association for Labor Legislation to win pensions and other programs for the "army of labor" failed miserably. But even as these efforts fizzled, reform-minded women's groups were crusading for programs that could have become, in Skocpol's view, the foundation of a "maternalist" welfare state. By mutual agreement, the sexes inhabited "separate spheres" in late 19th- and early 20th-century America, with men immersed in the world of work and partisan politics and women

presiding over hearth, home, and morals. Middle- and upper-class women, supplied not only with moral authority but with leisure, expanded their horizons through innumerable local church and civic clubs, which were then united through such organizations as the General Federation of Women's Clubs (GFWC). "All clubs," the GFWC stated, "as bodies of trained housekeepers, should consider themselves guardians of the civic housekeeping of their respective communities." They took up a host of causes, from temperance to juvenile delinquency, and pressured many states into enacting labor laws regulating the hours, wages, and safety conditions of female workers. In 1912, the federal government created a Children's Bureau, which during the 1920s briefly offered prenatal and child-care education for mothers.

By the mid-1920s, Skocpol notes, this wave of reform had passed. Women cast their first votes in a national election in 1920, and feminists embarked on a quest for equality, which could not be squared with the notion of separate spheres. The exalted moral status that had allowed women to prevail was gone. Skocpol's study illustrates, albeit unintentionally, that in America receiving public support posed questions that bore a higher moral charge than they did elsewhere. Only extraordinary circumstances could overcome popular doubts about the welfare state. It took nothing less than the Great Depression to bring about passage of the cornerstone Social Security Act of 1935. But uniquely American doubts—as President Clinton's pledge to "abolish welfare as we know it" suggests—still linger.

ANTISEMITISM: The Longest Hatred. By *Robert S. Wistrich*. Pantheon. 341 pp. \$25

Before the 1870s no one ever encountered an anti-Semite, at least by name. Only in that decade did a German journalist, Wilhelm Marr, invent the term *anti-Semitism* to advertise a new, improved way of hating Jews. Prejudice against Jews on religious grounds was then coming to seem backwards, even medieval; Marr and others like him proposed better grounds, reasons based on economics and race—a hatred of Jews that was, so they claimed, modern and "scientific." To understand a prejudice that has existed for millennia but whose shape and justification keep changing, Wistrich, a noted historian at Jerusalem's Hebrew University, has written