## 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 openended 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. Middleand 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 childcare 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



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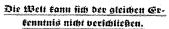
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the first single-volume overview of Jew-hatred throughout history.

"Although I loathe anti-Semitism," wrote Harold Nicholson satirically in 1945, "I do dislike Jews." Jews have proved, it seems, rather easy to dislike. After the Diaspora, Jewish exiles-with their prohibitions against intermarriage, their dietary laws, and their doctrine of election-met with distrust wherever they ventured in the Mediterranean world. But pagan "anti-Semitism" (to apply the term generically) hardly differed from other kinds of xenophobia common to the ancient world. Christianity, with its need to distinguish itself from its parent religion, came up with a novel accusation: The Jews had murdered God. This charge, elaborated with salacious and sensational details and drummed into the European populace for centuries, gave anti-Semitism a radically different character. It became theological, metaphysical; it no longer even required the presence of Jews. If, during the 18th century, the Enlightenment and French Revolution finally ended legalized discrimination and ghettoization, they paved the way for something worse. Once anti-Semitism was based on pseudoscientific theories of racial pollution, Christians gave up their campaign to convert the Jews. "The Nazis took over all the negative anti-Jewish stereotypes in Christianity," Wistrich writes, "but they removed the escape clause."

Fifty years after the Holocaust, anti-Semitism is again rearing its head, in Poland and Romania, where almost no Jews now live, in Russia, where a

sizable remnant remains, and in the Middle East, where Islamic fundamentalists have imported an earlier Christian anti-Semitism to fortify their enmity toward Israel. The particular logic in each case eventually comes to seem almost superfluous: Enough of contemporary politics is sufficiently catastrophic to support most paranoia and conspiracy theories. By the end of his chronicle, even Wistrich questions the ultimate value of his project: What is the sense, he wonders, of applying the historian's rational craft to a history of irrationality?

## Arts & Letters

**CULTURE AND IMPERIALISM**. By Edward W. Said. Knopf. 380 pp. \$25

Critics in the tradition of Matthew Arnold imagine culture to be above the selfish and sordid calculations of politics, a disinterested realm of sweetness and light. Where a social historian would record, for example, that the Greeks practiced slavery, the Arnoldian critic would note how in their culture and art the Greeks fashioned so noble an image of the individual soul that, in the long run, it constituted an argument against slavery.

Said, a professor of literature at Columbia, rejects notions of "high" culture and its essentially benign effects. In his earlier and highly influential book Orientalism (1978), he argued that Western writers had created a fictional Middle East, one that served to justify France's and England's imperialistic policies in the region. In Culture and Imperialism the suspect on trial is no longer simply the Orientalist but modern Western literature itself. When literary mandarins such as Arnold or T. S. Eliot specify the best that society has known and thought, they are actually, in Said's view, ennobling certain "codes of intellectual and moral behaviour" at the expense of other codes: theirs, in other words, at the expense of those of the oppressed and non-Western. Eliot is thus an imperialist, a literary Cecil Rhodes.

More specifically, Said charges, it is no accident that during the heyday of imperialism the novel "achieved eminence as *the* aesthetic form." The sense of narrative that 19th-century fiction fostered made the disjointed colonial conquests seem themselves part of an ongoing, necessary narrative, while specific novels, from Dickens's *Great Expectation* to Kipling's *Kim*, defined "us" and "them" in ways that created a rationale for the former gov-