

Patriots, Settlers, and the Origins of American Social Policy

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the ideology of redemptive womanhood is inclusive in many respects, this fine study is influenced by the northeastern bias of the primary sources on which it is based. To what extent did midwestern women embrace this redemptive power? Does it apply equally to American Indian women? To politically active immigrant women? These few reservations aside, this carefully researched and thought-provoking work offers an ideology for nineteenth-century women who became active agents in a world of change.

Patriots, Settlers, and the Origins of American Social Policy, by Laura Jensen. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003. xii, 244 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$60.00 cloth.

Reviewer James W. Oberly is professor of history at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. He is the author of *Sixty Million Acres: American Veterans and Public Lands Before the Civil War* (1990).

This is an intriguing book that contributes important background investigation and analysis to a present-day policy debate: What are the historical origins of the American welfare state? Most would answer that question by pointing to the New Deal of the 1930s with its federal programs to alleviate poverty and suffering, whether in the form of old-age pensions, aid to mothers with dependent children, price supports for farmers, or protections for workers trying to organize for the purposes of collective bargaining. In 1992 the sociologist Theda Skocpol, in *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*, sought to push the answer to the question back to the post-1865 period, especially the 1890s, when the Republican Party became closely tied to the Grand Army of the Republic and the call for pensions to all Union Army veterans, simply on the basis of their service in the War of the Rebellion. Skocpol further pointed to the program of federal "mothers' pensions" started before World War I as another benefit program in which the federal government paid money to individual citizens on the basis of their belonging to a group. Now, University of Massachusetts-Amherst political scientist Laura Jensen wants to push back the point of origin to the years after the War of 1812, when Congress and the Monroe Administration adopted two broad policy strands. The first was embodied in the Pension Act of 1818, which granted old-age pensions to veterans of the Revolutionary War. That law and a supplementary one in 1832 made the granting of pensions an entitlement based on service, rather than a case-by-case matter based on special acts of Congress. The second broad policy strand was the set of public land policies adopted after the Panic of 1819 to make the public lands cheaper and more

available to actual settlers. Jensen points to the various preemption laws that forbade whole classes of trespassers on the public lands. She also offers the case of the obscure "Armed Occupation Act" of 1842, which offered land bounties to settlers willing to occupy by force of arms tracts in Seminole Country.

Of interest to readers of the *Annals of Iowa* is Jensen's treatment of the 1850s conflict between her two groups of entitlement beneficiaries, veterans and frontier settlers. She reports on the sometimes contradictory public land policies in the 1850s. She sets support for a large set of bounty land grants to veterans of the War of 1812 and various Indian wars against the simultaneous consideration by Congress of a general Homestead law that would open the public lands to actual settlers. The veterans' lobby fought the Homestead bills on the grounds that making the public lands free to settlers would severely depress the price of land warrants to their veteran owners, few of whom had the slightest interest in settling in Iowa or other frontier states and territories. The claims of the veterans won out, at least until 1862, and Iowa was by far the leading state for the location of land warrants. More than fourteen million acres of public land in Iowa passed from the public domain to private ownership via the use of land warrants. Far fewer Iowans used the Homestead Act to acquire a farm. By contrast, settlement in Kansas and Nebraska coincided more closely with the aftermath of the Civil War, and the use of the Homestead Act by settlers in those two states was more common than in Iowa.

Jensen has shown conclusively that after the War of 1812 the federal government extended general benefits to two broad groups of citizens: veterans and settlers on the public domain. Yet the relatively small number of people in the two groups shows how limited the concept of the national polity was. Old-age veterans enjoyed a special sort of martial citizenship, and settlers on the frontier furthered the U.S. policy of extending the size of the republic. As Jensen observes, the special entitlements based on the perceived social worth of veterans or white frontiersmen served mainly to divide and fragment the nation into haves and have-nots. Poor relief remained a matter for local government and private alms until the 1930s. The alleviation of poverty did not become a national goal until well into the twentieth century, and even then proved unpopular among broad segments of the electorate.

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