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Judith Sealander. *Private Wealth and Public Life: Foundation Philanthropy and the Reshaping of American Public Policy from the Progressive Era to the New Deal.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997. xii + 245 pp. $39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8018-5460-6.

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Scholarly writing on the foundations has been produced mainly by sociologists and political scientists rather than by historians. It is a "Manichean" literature, with the defenders of foundations claiming they are beneficent and their critics seeing them as sinister representatives of ruling-class elites. While enthusiasts praise the foundations' benevolent and creative uses of private wealth, scholars critical of foundations condemn their private power to shape public policy and view them as typifying the undemocratic and technocratic side of early twentieth-century reform. In this, they echo contemporaries' fears that foundations were "philanthropic trusts," carrying out the secret and undemocratic agendas of unelected elites.[1]

Serious historical consideration of the foundations begins with the work of Barry D. Karl and Stanley N. Katz, published in a series of articles beginning in 1981.[2]

In *Private Wealth and Public Life* Judith Sealander both builds on their work and challenges it in some important ways as she examines the activities of early twentieth-century foundations in a number of specific social-policy areas. She concludes that foundations were less powerful than either contemporary or later critics have claimed, and that their schemes were sometimes useful and farsighted but at other times ill-conceived or quixotic.

Private Wealth and Public Life provides a fresh and illuminating view of the work of several major foundations in the years before the New Deal. Claiming that too much emphasis has been put on the Carnegie philanthropies (comprising the Carnegie Foundation, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, and the Hero Fund),[3] and that Andrew Carnegie's contributions to modern philanthropy have been overemphasised, Sealander, a former Humanities fellow-in-residence at the Rockefeller Archive Center, focuses on Rockefeller philanthropies (the Rockefeller Foundation and the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial), as well as the Russell Sage Foundation, the Commonwealth Fund, and the Julius Rosenwald Fund.

The book is organized topically. Six chapters discuss specific areas of foundation involvement in policy-making. These are, rural life and vocational education; parent education; mothers' pensions; child-helping and the juvenile court system; the Bureau of Social Hygiene and sex research; and organized recreation. These chapters are uniformly well-written and are grounded in primary sources often overlooked by other scholars, notably the records of the Russell Sage Foundation.

It would be hard to overstate the difficulty of the task Judith Sealander has in hand. Most foundation histories are studies of a single foundation, sometimes of a foundation's activities in only one policy area.[4] To trace the activities of several foundations across a range of public policy areas is an ambitious project that most would find daunting.

Fresh, witty, and fearless, Sealander charges into the history of early twentieth-century policy-making slaying dragons as she goes. The theme of "rhetoric versus reality" provides a useful heuristic device that enables her to contrast the declarations of foundation-funded reformers with the activities they pursued and the policies they recommended. And the theme of "unintended consequences" serves similarly to compare intentions with results. On the way, Sealander seems to revel in poking holes in established interpretations. An example is this book's account of mothers' pensions, enacted into law in forty-six states between 1911 and 1930 amidst a chorus of praise for motherhood and partly as a result of the campaign for child welfare by social-work experts both in and out of the foundations.[5] Welfare-state scholars have been impressed with the rhetoric of motherhood generated by the reformers and the beginnings of a welfare-state some have called "maternalist." Sealander is unimpressed. Accusing these scholars of "ignoring

crucial questions" she claims they oversimpified the nature of support for and opposition to the pensions (106). Politicians were content to get the credit for sponsoring mothers' pensions legislation and thus for being "for motherhood," but they never funded these pensions at adequate levels, she points out, and the whole "crusade" for mothers' pensions was charcterized by sentimentalism among the supporters (mothers' clubs, magazine writers) and cynicism on the part of the politicians. Sealander takes welfare scholars to task for ignoring the contribution of Russell Sage Foundation expert Mary Richmond and the private charity organization experts who warned, correctly she believes, that welfare would corrupt the political process and that cash grants would "sow the seeds of dependency" (112)

Some of this criticism seems wide of the mark: feminist scholars have fully documented the shortcomings of the mothers' pensions, neither is their scholarship as monolithic as Sealander suggests.[6]

Unlike previous accounts of twentieth-century social policy which mention Russell Sage Foundation and COS (private charity) experts, if at all, as opponents of welfare-state provision, Sealander stresses the Foundation's role in shaping social policy toward children (the Foundation underwrote the White House Children's Conference in 1909 which led to the founding of the U.S. Children's Bureau), and the critical importance of RSF expert Mary Richmond in the establishment of modern, professional social work.

Sealander gives equal attention to foundation initiatives that, like these, had a long-term impact on policy and to those that were passing fads or ludicrous fiascos. John D. Rockefeller Jr.'s support of sex-research provides an example of the vagaries of foundation funding. Early experiments with inmates at the Rockefeller-supported Bedford Hills Reformatory proved disastrous. But in 1917 Katharine Bement Davis became head of the Rockefeller-funded Bureau of Social Hygiene and the Bureau began to produce important iniatives in sex-education. Frank and well-written manuals were distributed in the millions through the state boards of public health. Rockefeller funding also underwrote fundamental research in normal sexuality that Sealander calls, "years ahead of its time." The effort was abandoned in 1928, however. Davis was "retired," and even the documentation of this research was destroyed.[7]

Foundation policy-making was often marked by impractical goals, doubtful theory, and inadequate means. Foundation planners were muddled, not all-powerful (142), "hopeless romantics," not social scientific boffins, Sealander claims. "Demonstration" projects funded by foundations that were intended to be picked up and implemented by public authorities were often instead abandoned. For example, the foundation-spearheaded initiative to improve schools for blacks and poor whites in the South was insufficiently persuasive to legislators only interested in funding public education for white children. In other cases, such as foundation initiatives to persuade local governments to fund recreation programs and facilties, foundation-sponsored policy proved more lasting. (197)

Sealander concludes that historians have been misled by contemporaries' bitter opposition to foundations (rooted in Populist and antimonopolist fears). She both explains away the fears and dismisses them. Because the foundations were "new institutions moving at a far faster pace than many other parts of the polical structure, and because they were not yet synchronized as a part of American polity, they first inspired confusion and fear," she observes. "That fear, however, was largely unfounded" (217). Not everyone will agree with Sealander's "contentious history." Responses from some of those targeted in her book have already begun.[8] The resulting discussion will surely be useful in reviving scholarly interest in the foundations' important but often overlooked role in early twentiety-century policy-making.

Notes:

[1]. "Benevolent trusts" was coined by John D. Rockefeller in his 1909, *Random Reminiscences of Men and Events* (New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1909), p. 186-88. He used it to indicate that combinations were occurring in philanthropy as in business.

Critical of foundations are Sheila Slaughter and Edward T. Silva, "Looking Backwards: How Foundations Formulated Ideology in the Progressive Period," in Robert Arnove, ed., *Philanthropy and Cultural Imperialism: The Foundations at Home and Abroad* (Boston, 1980); and Magali Sarfatti Larson, "The Production of Expertise and the Constitution of Expert Power," in Thomas Haskell, ed., *The Authority of Experts: Studies in History and Theory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984). See also the exchange between Martin Bulmer and Donald Fisher. Donald Fisher, "The Role of Philanthropic Foundations in the Reproduction and Production of Hegemony," *Sociology* 17 (1983); idem, "Boundary Work: Toward a Model of the Relation of Power/Knowledge," *Knowledge* 10 (1988): 156-76; Martin Bulmer, "Philanthropic Foundations and the Development of the Social Sciences: A Reply to Donald Fisher," *Sociology* 18 (1984): 572-79; Donald Fisher, "Philanthropic Foundations and the Social Sciences: A

Response to Martin Bulmer," *Sociology* 18 (1984): 581-87.

[2]. Especially, Barry D. Karl and Stanley N. Katz, "The American Private Philanthropic Foundation and the Public Sphere, 1890-1930," *Minerva* 19 (1981): 236-70; "Philanthropy and the Social Sciences," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 129 (1985): 14-19; "Foundations and Ruling Class Elites," *Daedalus* 116 (1987): 1-40.

[3]. These have been the subject of two studies by Ellen Condliffe Lagemann, *The Politics of Knowledge: The Carnegie Corporation, Philanthropy, and Public Policy* (Wesleyan University Press, 1989); *Private Power for the Public Good: A History of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching* (Wesleyan University Press, 1983).

[4]. Examples are, John Ettling, *The Germ of Laziness: Rockefeller Philanthropy and Public Health in the New South* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981); Steven C. Wheatley, *The Politics of Philanthropy: Abraham Flexner and Medical Education* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988).

[5]. A recent study is Kriste Lindenmeyer, *A Right to Childhood: The U.S. Children's Bureau and Child Welfare* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

[6]. See Theda Skocpol, "The Trouble With Welfare," *Reviews in American History* 24 (1996): 647-51. Major treatments are, Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Harvard, 1992); Sonya Michel and Seth Koven, *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States* (Routledge, 1993); Linda Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare* (Free Press, 1994); Gwendolyn Mink, *The Wages of Motherhood: Inequality in the Welfare State, 1917-1942* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell, 1995); Sonya Michel and Robyn Rosen, "The Paradox of Maternalism: Elizabeth Lowell Putnam and the American Welfare State," *Gender and History* 4, 3 (Autumn 1992): 364-86; Molly Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work: Women, Child Welfare and the State, 1890-1930* (Illinois, 1994); Joanne Goodwyn, *Gender and the Politics of Welfare Reform: Mothers' Pensions in Chicago, 1911-1929* (Chicago, 1997).

[7]. See Ellen Fitzpatrick, *Endless Crusade: Women Social Scientists and Progressive Reform in America, 1830-1930* (New York, 1990); and Ellen Fitzpatrick, ed., *Katharine Bement Davis, Early Twentieth-Century Women and the Study of Sex Behavior* (New York, 1987).

[8]. For a strong response see, Barry D. Karl, "The Troublesome History of Foundations: Correcting a Contentious History," *Reviews in American History* 25, 4 (December 1997):

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