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Morton Keller. *Regulating a New Society: Public Policy and Social Change in America, 1900-1933.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994. xi + 396 pp. $49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-674-75366-2.

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Regulating a New Society is the latest volume in Morton Keller's magisterial series of books on American public life and public policy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries [the first of which was *Affairs of State* (1977)]. Having already explored public policy relating to economic issues in the years from 1900 to 1933 [*Regulating a New Economy* (1990)], Keller now examines social policy in the same period. The range of his study is encyclopedic. In addition to discussing social welfare and family issues, Keller also considers public policy relating to religion, education, civil liberties, prohibition, prostitution, immigrants, African-Americans, Indians, and women.

Much of his focus is on policies adopted by states and localities, since most issues of social policy continued to be dealt with primarily at the state and local level. However, Keller also devotes considerable attention to federal initiatives in all areas of social policy, giving the greatest emphasis to prohibition, immigration restriction, and woman's suffrage.

As in Keller's earlier work on economic policy in this period, several themes stand out, most importantly his emphasis on the impact of traditional values and the pluralism of American society as "powerful counterforces" to the development of coherent public policy and a powerful state. Keller defines Progressivism as a diffuse reform movement, not identified with any single class, which sought throughout this period to use state power to establish social cohesion and a more efficient social order. However, "in issue after issue, the search for ways of enhancing social conformity ran head-on into the fact of American pluralism" and "the persistence–even strengthening–of traditional social values and beliefs [that] found expression in . . . localism, individualism, religious fundamentalism, laissez-faire" (p. 5).

A second underlying thesis of the book is that the years from the turn of the century until the beginning of the New Deal constitute a distinctive period in American history. Keller thus argues that the 1920s had more in common with the prewar Progressive era than they did with the New Deal era to follow. He acknowledges that the forces of persistence and pluralism grew stronger in relation to the forces supporting Progressive change in the postwar decade, and that there was a shift within the Progressive agenda from "structural concerns" to "ethnocultural" issues in the 1920s. Nevertheless, Keller contends that the antimodernist tendencies represented by the Scopes trial were by no means dominant during the 1920s and that "more liberated artistic and cultural values" began increasingly to trickle down into "middlebrow culture" (p. 110) in the years following the war. Progressivism did not disappear during the twenties, but as in the period before the war, it continued to exist in dynamic tension with the forces opposing change, so that reformers remained unable to impose on American society a single vision of a new social order.

It is impossible in a short review to do justice to the wide scope of Keller's study. *Regulating a New Society* could serve as a convenient one-volume reference work for anyone who wanted to be able to go to a single source to find a comprehensive summary of changes taking place in the early twentieth century in virtually any area of social policy. Keller thus presents extended surveys of changes in such diverse areas of public policy as marriage and divorce law, the selection of school boards, drug regulation, child labor, capital punishment, Indian land ownership, workmen's compensation, and a host of other issues.

Keller recognizes that most Progressive initiatives in the realm of social policy combined a quest for both "social control and social betterment" (p. 30), though he rejects the idea that any one approach to the search for social order was more important than any other. It is interesting, however, that Keller ultimately identifies the woman suffrage amendment as the "most lasting and substantial social policy achievement of its time," because unlike prohibition or immigration restriction, the Nineteenth Amendment sought to achieve greater social co-

hesion "not by exclusion or restriction but by inclusion in the democratic process" (p. 303).

Keller does not delve too deeply into any one subject. He makes no use of archival sources, relying instead on exhaustive research in the periodical literature of the early twentieth century. As a result, readers who are experts in a particular area of social policy may find Keller's treatment of their area of expertise somewhat superficial. Moreover, in contrast to *Regulating a New Economy*, in which Keller directly engages the interpretations of other historians and social scientists while explicitly stating his own "wariness" about the use of "social theories" in the study of history (p.6), in *Regulating a New Society* Keller prefers generally to let his narrative speak for itself.

Keller consistently comes back to the themes of "persistence" and "pluralism" throughout the book and concludes that the first decades of the twentieth century marked the emergence of the "modern American polity: not necessarily in terms of policy outcomes, but very much in terms of the issues at stake" (p. 307). The underlying message of Keller's work is once again the same as in the previous volume: American society is so diverse and the American political system so fragmented that any attempt by an historian to impose on America's past a notion of coherent development is misguided.

Keller's view of the American state as weak and undeveloped is persuasive. In the end, however, his interpretive approach to understanding American social policy is not fully satisfying. The detail and breadth of his work is both impressive and fascinating, but it is regrettable that Keller decided that a final conclusion of less than one page could do justice to the meaning of all that he surveyed in his account of American social policy in this critical era. Keller might argue that as an historian his task is to describe the past in all its particularity and complexity and that historians should leave to the social scientists all attempts to build theories and come up with grand generalizations that by necessity impose order where no order actually existed. Yet, even if one accepts the notion that historians must deal in contradiction and contingency, it is still possible for historians to seek meaning from, and to render judgments about, the past. Keller himself does not completely shy away from such conclusions, but for a full evaluation of the significance of each of the social policies he discusses, readers would be well advised to look beyond this book.

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