

Cybellé Fox; *Three Worlds of Relief. Race, Immigration, and the American Welfare State from the Progressive Era to the New Deal*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2012. (393 pp.)

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In a flowing narrative, supported by a plethora of archival sources, Cybellé Fox's *Three Worlds of Relief* provides what is destined to become a useful reference book for both welfare and migration scholars. This work broadens the horizons of previous literature primarily focused on blacks and whites' relation. Fox compares the incorporations-- across the North, the South, and the South-West--of Mexicans, European immigrants, and blacks into American social welfare system from the Progressive Era to the New Deal. In so doing, this comparison exposes the myth of the bootstrapping white ethnics who made it in America without government help and, ultimately, argues that white European immigrants, despite rampant nativism, fared much better than blacks and Mexicans.

The different racial, political, and labour market systems of these three racial worlds explain in part such disparities. The disenfranchised black tenant farmers of the South relied on the private paternalistic assistance of white Southern planters. The white Southern and Eastern European immigrants—mostly skilled or unskilled workers in the industrialized Northern and Midwestern cities— exercised their votes in the political machine systems. In the South-West, the precarious conditions of the Mexican seasonal migrant labourers—white by law but treated

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as non-white in practice— depended on relief. Mexicans' presence on the charity rolls, supported by Western growers because it allowed Mexicans to remain nearby between harvests, contributed to the creation of what Fox calls the Mexican dependency problem.

By the 1920s, the role played by social workers as "gatekeepers to relief and as intermediaries with the Immigration Service" (286) forged an image of Mexicans as a dependent and undeserving group (73). By cherry picking data social workers and reformers—especially in the South-West—scientifically sanctioned Mexicans' assumed inability to assimilate. Fox also explores the tight cooperation between welfare and immigration officials. This cooperation, neglected by previous welfare scholars, was sanctioned by the Immigration Act of 1917 and, in its extreme cases, transformed welfare office in an "extralegal arm of the Immigration Service" (124). For instance, Los Angeles local welfare authorities took the lead in repatriation and deportation. Even when New Deal Welfare programs did not ask for formal citizenship as a requirement, Southern and South-Western relief officials exploited the qualifications of citizenship to prevent Mexicans from being socially integrated into American society.

Apropos of citizenship, the chapters dedicated to the New Deal State offer Fox the possibility to substantiate her claim that "formal citizenship was not a prerequisite for social citizenship" for most of the twentieth century (5) and to historicise contemporary universal assumptions that immigrants "should be the first to be cut from the social welfare rolls when budgets are tight" (1). Famous New Deal programs—such as the FERA and the WPA—did not discriminate on the basis of citizenship. The requirement of citizenship for access to welfare state programs, Fox opens her readers' eyes, started only in the 1970s and grew more restrictive since then.

Fox fluidly transitions between national, state, and local archives to present vivid sketches of the personalities involved, such as Emory Bogardus, director of the University of Southern California School of Social Work, or Frances Perkins and Harry Hopkins, key figures in the inclusion of non-citizens in New Deal federal policies, just to cite a few. Occasionally the breath of her narrative showcases personal immigrant stories: exemplar is Fox's accounts of some Mexican repatriates in the seventh chapter.

Fox's narrative presents also a few weaknesses. To emphasize the distinctiveness of the Mexican experience, Fox stressed the comparison between European immigrants and Mexicans to the detriment of the blacks' conditions. Moreover, the desired national scope suffers from the overwhelming attention given to Los Angeles and Chicago. Notwithstanding her caution in reminding that the Midwest was not immune from anti-alien and more specifically anti-Mexican sentiments (Gary and Detroit's county-sponsored Mexican repatriation programs are cases in point), Fox does not provide more specific examples of pro-European immigrants' legislations or attitudes in the South and South-West.

Apart from these *lacunae*—consequences of such an ambitious project—this is an irreplaceable work which showed crystal clear the United States' difficult task, in the past as today, to use foreign arms for its undesirable jobs while avoiding the social economic costs that follow. In sum, Fox's history talks to the present. FDR's ambiguous political strategy to win immigrants' American spouses and children's votes without alienating his nativist supporters sounds, in the light of the last presidential race, more contemporary than ever.