

Lawrence A. Scaff. *Max Weber in America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011. 311pp.

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Max Weber is widely regarded as the founder of modern sociology, and his work has strongly influenced other disciplines, particularly in the social sciences. He was famously first among the theoretically-inclined Germans to incorporate observation and data collection in his works. Relatively obscure and coming off an extended period during which he was unable to work, Weber found the stimulus and substantiation for his theories at least in part from his wide travels during the months he was in the United States.

Max Weber in America contains two sections, both nearly independent from one another. The first deals with the 1904 tour, describing events and people, summarizing conversations and presentations, explaining how these influences affect development of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. The second section addresses the post-tour translation and spread of Weber's work. End matter includes an itinerary of the 1904 trip and selected correspondence.

Weber came to America in 1904 to attend a major conference of artists and social scientists. During and after the conference he reworked the basic theoretical underpinning of sociology and eventually other social sciences. He had a draft of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* finished at the time of his arrival, but as he traveled through the United States he added new sections, fleshed out ideas and incorporated new ones. He "americanized"

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his draft by adding empirical data to a European-style philosophical work. Weber added to his understanding of religion through discussions with William James, and he learned of American race relations from W.E.B. Du Bois, as well as industrious fieldwork. He turned down a meeting with Teddy Roosevelt for a chance to visit the Indian Territories for firsthand observation of the allotment process. Instead, he learned from observation in the environs of the Biltmore mansion about economic class in the South. In Chicago, Weber enjoyed firsthand exposure to emergent capitalism in its pure expression, i.e. the developing industrialism that would herald America's global status of economic superpower.

Scaff's intervention with *Max Weber in America* is first and foremost a correction of earlier works. The first section in particular is a critique of *Max Weber: a Biography*, the work Weber's wife Marianne wrote after his death. By rereading the primary sources, Scaff adds neglected data and removes distortions such as Marianne Weber's consolidation of separate visits with two sets of Weber's relatives into one short paragraph.

The second part of the book, which could be a couple of stand-alone essays, deals with the aftermath, the publication history of the work and the influences it had on the American intellectual scene – scholars, laypeople, and émigrés. This section spends a great deal of time on the first translations, noting the difficulties of the early American translators, their rivalries, their inability to find appropriate English equivalents for Weber's German, particularly his coinages and technical words that had a clear context in German social science but nothing in English. Rough approximations done in relative haste, even by those devoted to Weber's ideas, meant that often the first translation fell short. Later efforts were more successful.

Weber was a fairly obscure scholar, and his ideas spread slowly, mostly because the translation process was hampered by lack of a market, reluctance on the part of publishers, and

the fragmentary state of much of Weber's own work. Individuals translated or compiled sections of Weber's writing for use in specific courses, and these unpublished documents became the basis for the first publications of Weber's work. Highly selective, they neglected critical elements not germane to whichever courses. Now there are currently available solid works that expand Weber beyond *The Protestant Ethic*, one small element of his theory, albeit a widely used one. As Scaff notes, modernizing nations through the world are still turning to Weber for guidance on how to make the transition from agrarianism to capitalism, even post-modern global capitalism.

Each of the sections is self-contained, but the two sections tie together nicely to form a readable intellectual biography of a major work in social science as well as a fascinating discussion of the politics and personalities behind what seems after the fact an inevitable and unalterable stand alone work. Those unfamiliar with Weber may flounder at first, but the anecdotes about the various people and places should hold the reader until the rhythm of the work becomes comfortable and the ideas fall into place. A well developed and insightful presentation should maintain Scaff's status as a leading Weber scholar.