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*Review of Working Mothers and the Welfare State: Religion and the Politics of Work-Family Policies in Western Europe and the United States.* Kimberly J. Morgan. Reviewed by Katherine Van Wormer.

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## Book Reviews

Kimberly J. Morgan. *Working Mothers and the Welfare State: Religion and the Politics of Working-Family Policies in Western Europe and the United States*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006. \$22.95 papercover.

The seeds of American democracy, as well as the social welfare system, were sown in the religious ethos of the early settlers. Many of us are aware of the role of the Pilgrims and Puritans in laying the groundwork for a harsh criminal justice system. What we might be less aware of is the fact that religious forces also played a role in shaping the dimensions of the welfare state in European nations as well. Whether or not mothers of small children should be encouraged by the state to work outside the home is the key question with which this book wrestles. Comparing the policies of four countries—France, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the United States—political scientist Kimberly Morgan shows that the differences derive from differences in cultural value orientations.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the politics of women's employment and argues for a temporal perspective on the welfare state. This perspective enables us to understand the political actions that affect social policies and how they evolved out of the political cleavages of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. We learn that in France and Sweden, religious authorities were subordinated to secular ones while in the Netherlands and the United States, social conservatives gained influence over politics and developed policies consistent with the espousing of the traditional gender roles. In the former two countries, secular state authorities held full sway. Approval was greatest for wage-earning mothers to thrive through the acceptance of

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an activist role of the state in providing the resources such as high quality child care to enhance active work roles for mothers of small children. On the other hand, in the Netherlands and the United States, religious influence favored the male-breadwinner and female-caregiver ideals. The Netherlands favors a system in which the women in question work part time but, like all Dutch workers, are provided with wages and benefits comparable to that of full-time workers.

Chapter 2 analyzes politics and policies historically, tracing the origins of policies to the role of religion in the society. In the nineteenth century, public provision of social welfare was minimal. To the extent that help for mothers was espoused, the focus was on enabling the woman to stay home. The expansion of mass education, which occurred at this time, aroused opposition from the churches. The way this conflict was resolved had significant impact on the early structures of the welfare state. In France, the conflict between the Catholic clergy and secular forces was resolved in favor of the secular with the result that family policy became oriented most strongly around the needs of the child. Generous maternity leave benefits and family allowances were provided. In Sweden, in contrast, there was no such conflict: the Lutheran Church simply became an extension of the state apparatus with clergy becoming mere civil servants of this apparatus. Later the strong role of the government was duplicated in the areas of social welfare. When Sweden's birthrate became too low to be sustainable in the 1930s, a wide variety of family supports was developed.

Unlike Sweden, Dutch society was divided into Protestant and Catholic constituencies. Schools were often administered by religious organizations. The impact on social welfare was that privately funded services became the norm for other social services as well. Religious divisions in the American colonies had a unique outcome: church and state were separated back in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Public schools were placed under local control. An effort to prevent single motherhood led to the stigmatizing of welfare programs and to little state assistance for most poor families.

Chapter 3 takes us into the 1960s and 1970s, a time of rapidly growing social awareness and expression of discontent. We learn from this chapter that a shift from the

male-breadwinner model was evidenced as labor shortages, rising rates of women seeking higher education, and value changes began to propel more women in all of these countries into the work force. While the U.S. pursued its own path toward privatization, Sweden moved toward a universal breadwinner model. France, meanwhile, favored support for women's employment and mothers at home. Dutch society was slow to change until the 1990s.

The focus of the fourth chapter is on child care in Sweden and France. As Morgan reports, a major policy development came in 1989 in Sweden with an expansion of parental leave to 15 months at 90% pay for 12 months. Parents of young children were then allowed to work a six-hour day. Swedish men were included in the parental leave policies. In contrast, the focus in France was on mothers, not fathers.

Chapter 5 discusses developments in the United States such as unpaid family leaves while chapter 6 describes the system of child care that evolved in the Netherlands.

Child care in the U.S. is mostly provided through the private sector. The influence of the evangelical religious groups and a market-based approach to work and family are key defining characteristics. The focus is on forcing mothers on welfare to work. In the Netherlands, on the other hand, instead of developing an extensive child care program, the government passed measures to encourage mothers of young children to engage in part-time work, mostly to stay at home.

Morgan summarizes her main arguments in the conclusion of the book. She states that it contributes to providing a cross-cultural perspective on the welfare state and in showing how religion has shaped the foundation of this state. These are the strengths of the book. The value of her contribution is chiefly as a reference book for scholars pursuing an investigation of this topic. References are up to date and wide-ranging. Although exhaustively researched and written, the book, in my opinion, is too narrowly focused to serve as a textbook or for supplemental readings in a college course. Its major findings, in fact, could be summarized in far fewer pages. Moreover, the fact that the religious history only goes back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century can be considered a major shortcoming, inasmuch as the attitudes that differentiate the U.S. from Europe probably have

their origins in the Reformation. The contemporary material will probably be of considerable interest to the reader. One suggestion that might have made the reading more enjoyable is for the author to have interjected the description of national policies with personal narratives and interviews, newspaper clippings, and the like. Women who had lived in more than one system—Americans who moved to France, for example, or Swedes who moved with their young children to the United States, could relate their experiences; such accounts would have livened up the content and made it more relevant and meaningful for the reader.

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Delbert S. Elliot, Scott Menard, Bruce Rankin, Amanda Elliot, William Julius Wilson and David Huizinga. *Good Kids from Bad Neighborhoods: Successful Development in Social Context*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006. \$80.00 hardcover, \$30.99 papercover.

Although youth development is a highly investigated topic, research into youth in poor neighborhoods has often focused on relative disadvantage and negative outcomes. There has been substantial work outlining the difficulties youth from these neighborhoods face as they transition through adolescence and into adulthood. Low educational attainment and high rates of problem behavior have become common characteristics associated with youth from low income neighborhoods. Researchers have focused on how contextual factors related to neighborhoods, family, school, and peer group contribute to these outcomes; however, seldom has anyone examined these contextual influences in tandem.

In this important work, Delbert Elliot and his colleagues attempt to understand the multiple contextual influences on youth development. They address how youth manage to succeed given the difficult circumstances of their disadvantaged neighborhoods. The book extensively describes the results of a multi-site study examining youth development in neighborhoods in Denver and Chicago. The initial chapter