

course of the book and threaten to unravel its main thesis.

White's description of the cultural performances she has located in the past as "cross-dressing" implies that Rouensa and the others lived much of their lives in costume and suggests that their lives were neither whole nor integrated nor, perhaps, even all that sincere. Was people's adoption of French (Canadian) material culture and faith an opportunistic performance? To appear French, White argues, was a strategy, an ideological pose, that people deployed to obtain goods, acquire legitimacy, and position their progeny for success. Left unsaid, however, is what such people remained beneath the clothing and behind the armoires. But if such people lived their lives not as actors in a colonial burlesque but simply as individuals and families in a multicultural context, then they participated in the ongoing reproduction of a hybrid Canadian culture that, wherever people practiced it, always blurred the stark lines that divided the "Indian" from the "European."

White identifies a collision between Native North America and France that afforded "Indians" and people of "mixed blood" (p. 40)—as well as French men and women—opportunities for strategic performances that challenged racial verities. If we grant Canadians a

distinct cultural identity from the French and accept as well that nothing about their way of life was "wild," then the story could be construed as simply the ongoing diffusion of a *Canadien* way of life that had begun in the St. Lawrence Valley before paddling into the Great Lakes, up the Ohio River, and then on down the Mississippi. In many ways such uncertainty about what is French in Louisiana perpetuates rather than resolves the historiography's tendency to confuse the colony's French political and diplomatic history with its primarily Canadian social and cultural history. At the same time, White's work challenges prevailing understandings about how ideas of race took hold and exemplifies how material objects, maybe even more so than archival sources, can tell a story that complicates prevailing notions about the multicultural societies that comprised colonial America. Until we know more about the Canadian foundations of Louisiana, however, arguments about its existence as a French colony or about the Frenchification of its inhabitants will hover uncertainly over a human terrain that was far more complex than an imperial identity we call "French" can ever convey.

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MONICA PRASAD. *The Land of Too Much: American Abundance and the Paradox of Poverty*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press. 2012. Pp. xiv, 327. \$39.95.

MICHELE LANDIS DAUBER. *The Sympathetic State: Disaster Relief and the Origins of the American Welfare State*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 2013. Pp. xvi, 353. \$25.00.

One of my favorite parts of Monica Prasad's new book is the story of the hypothetical American farmer who joined a sociological tour of Europe—one of those earnest excursions offered up to American reformers in the early twentieth century (as Daniel Rodgers's *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* [1998] has memorably explained) to display advances in social welfare in Western Europe that might serve as examples to the backward, benighted, laissez-faire United States. But rather than oohing and aahing, our farmer was struck by how *backward* Europe was in policies that spoke most directly to the concerns of farmers on the eve of the Depression: European governments lagged on progressive taxation, were stingy with credit, were soft on monopolies, and often let industry regulate itself. Why go abroad when you could enjoy all the benefits of a "strong" state at home?

While Michele Landis Dauber does not employ the same fictional conceit as Prasad, we might draw on her book to imagine European visitors on a reciprocal exchange. They figured a stop in Washington, D.C., might not be worth it—the swampy and provincial city was too

hot, and the national government was not up to much in the area of social welfare. But they had room in the itinerary, and by chance, they arrived shortly after the flooding of the Mississippi and Ohio River valleys in the spring of 1912. Visiting the Capitol, they were astonished to see Congress, with little debate or controversy, appropriate the seemingly staggering sum of \$1.2 million for "tents, rations, etc. for sufferers from floods" in the region, and to learn of similar and regular appropriations stretching back over a century. Was this the nonexistent national welfare state that they had heard so much about from their American colleagues?

Dauber, a professor of law who trained also as a sociologist, and Prasad, a sociologist, have written two very different books that are united in their concerns about the origins and extent of state power in the United States. These books are further evidence of the maturation of scholarship on the nature of the American state both on its own and in comparative dimensions—the historiographical and theoretical implications of which have been recently addressed in these pages by William Novak ("The Myth of the 'Weak'

American State,” *American Historical Review* [June 2008]), and elsewhere by Peter Baldwin (“Beyond Weak and Strong: Rethinking the State in Comparative Policy History,” *Journal of Policy History* [2005]), Brian Balogh (*A Government out of Sight: The Mystery of National Authority in Nineteenth-Century America* [2009]), Desmond King and Robert Lieberman (“Ironies of State Building: A Comparative Perspective on the American State,” *World Politics* [July 2009]), and others. At the heart of this literature has been the systematic demolition of scholarly and popular beliefs in the relative weakness of the American state, particularly in the nineteenth century. To summarize: there was no such thing as the weak American state. It had post offices, subordinated and contained Native Americans, financed robust internal improvements, mobilized various elements of civil society to accomplish public purposes, and so on. While it did so without generally constructing Weberian ideal-type centralized bureaucracies, there was nonetheless a lot of public power being exercised, some of it “out of sight” and some of it in plain view.

Dauber’s work recovers a little-examined strand of federal public policy—disaster relief in the nineteenth century—and deploys it to make a larger argument about the origins of the welfare state, and, more importantly, to engage a central concern of twentieth-century American legal historiography: the debate over whether the Supreme Court’s ultimate approval of broad powers for the federal government in the 1930s represented a constitutional revolution, or whether these developments demonstrated more consistency and continuity with earlier precedent.

The main character in Dauber’s book is not a fictional farmer or social welfare tourist, and not a person at all—rather, it is a table of appropriations by Congress for disaster relief, first assembled in 1890, and reappearing in various forms in congressional debates and in legal arguments through the 1930s. The table documents that time and again, with some regularity prior to the Civil War and more frequently in the late nineteenth century, Congress appropriated substantial sums of money for the relief of victims of a variety of disasters, generally with very little controversy about whether it actually had the power to do so. Dauber discovered, as she says, “an expanding national welfare state, undisturbed by the courts” (p. 26). Its purpose then, as she shows, was to remind congressmen and jurists of the familiarity of this practice. The foundation of all of these appropriations, in the eyes of advocates, was the general welfare clause of the U.S. Constitution (Article I, Section 8) that grants Congress power to levy taxes, pay debts, and “provide for the common Defence and general Welfare.” Disaster relief for individuals suffering from calamity was justified as an exercise of the general welfare power to spend, due to their moral claim on the nation’s charity: the victims were faultless because the impoverishing event was beyond their control. Disaster relief was never challenged on constitutional grounds on the floor of Congress or in the courts,

and the practice was cited approvingly by none other than Rufus Peckham, who as a Supreme Court justice would go on to write *Lochner v. New York* (1905), which stymied government regulation of the workplace for a generation.

Dauber deserves significant credit for disinterring this strand of social spending from the dusty volumes of the *Congressional Record*, and her work has already helped inform a burgeoning literature on disaster history that has accelerated since Hurricane Katrina. However, some new research suggests that nineteenth-century federal disaster relief appropriations were narrower than a first glance at the list might suggest (Gareth Davies, “Dealing with Disaster: The Politics of Catastrophe in the United States, 1789–1861,” *American Nineteenth Century History* [2013]). If Dauber is indeed overstating a bit the scale of congressional disaster relief, it might be due to her desire to engage Theda Skocpol’s *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (1992), which pointed to Civil War pensions as the most significant prelude to New Deal federal social spending. But the bigger argument of Dauber’s book does not stand or fall on the pervasiveness of disaster relief; rather, it is that the spending was seen as legitimate, and that those precedents were used in buttressing the constitutional legitimacy of a much broader social welfare effort during the New Deal.

Dauber demonstrates that the view of a capacious general welfare clause percolated through the law schools where future leading New Deal lawyers (and their lesser-known counterparts) would learn case law. A more unlikely convert was George Sutherland, one of the “Four Horsemen” (the conservative jurists on the Supreme Court who formed a bulwark against the first wave of New Deal legislation in the mid-1930s). Even as the Supreme Court was ravaging New Deal legislation, notably by striking down the Agricultural Adjustment Act in *United States v. Butler* in 1936, the Court kept the door open to broad spending powers under the general welfare clause, which government lawyers had argued using, among other examples, a list of disaster relief appropriations. When the Court began to approve New Deal legislation, some of the decisions turned on the government placing the general welfare clause at the heart of its case. This was a move anticipated by lawyers such as Barbara Armstrong, who worked on the Committee on Economic Security (CES) that drafted the various elements of what became the Social Security Act. Indeed, Dauber’s exploration of the inner workings of the CES make a good case that some of the self-imposed limits on the unemployment insurance program, an awkward federal-state construct, were not, as traditionally held, because of concerns over the Court’s possible rejection of a fully national (and presumably more generous and effective) program; rather, the limits were political, as the Roosevelt administration tried to dilute southern Democratic opposition to national relief standards.

The thread of the general welfare clause, brought to

life by disaster relief spending, ties together Dauber's challenge to Barry Cushman and other legal historians who argue that the Supreme Court's "switch in time" to uphold key New Deal legislation in 1937 amounted to a judicial revolution. Dauber posits this long history of disaster relief under the general welfare clause as an alternative tradition that was brought to bear without requiring that the Supreme Court countenance a radical break with the past. I find Dauber's argument here largely convincing, although I think that while some New Dealers like Alger Hiss believed they were well within precedent in this interpretation of the general welfare clause, it was clear that others felt that they were trying to "stretch" (p. 161) or encourage a "broad" (p. 172) reading of the clause. But the near-constant presence of disaster relief in the briefs and arguments was clearly a powerful analogy for the type of social welfare spending (as well as other policies, such as public power) that New Dealers worked to pass constitutional muster.

Two other chapters, which explore how the unemployed portrayed themselves and were portrayed as victims of disaster, are interesting in their own right but do not seem to have a direct causal effect on the shaping and defense of New Deal legislation. But Dauber's recovery of this history of disaster relief and her new reading of the significance of the general welfare clause are both fascinating and impressive. Even if the disaster welfare state of the nineteenth century was not quite the proto-welfare state she at times implies it might have been, the lineage of congressional appropriations for disaster victims clearly figured strongly in how New Deal lawyers, and even some conservative jurists, thought about the constitutional legitimacy of the expanding welfare state. But successful as the disaster victim motif may have been in attracting congressional and juridical support, Dauber concludes, it embedded the deserving versus undeserving dichotomy deep into American welfare policy.

Prasad begins with the question that Dauber more or less ends with: Why is it that capitalism in the United States has been relatively ineffective in addressing poverty when compared to Western Europe? Disasters do not figure in Prasad's story, but farmers have a lot to do with it, although not quite in the ways one might expect. The problems of farmers in the "land of too much," and the particular set of political interventions they advanced to deal with agricultural overproduction during the interwar period and Great Depression, in her view hobbled the ability of the United States to develop a welfare state that would be resilient into the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries; as she puts it, "the unusual productivity and disproportionate political power of American farmers during this period had crucial effects on political economy that resound to this day" (p. 94). While neither weak nor exceptional, Prasad argues that the United States has pursued a distinctive path of state development over a century, the consequences of which have been on full display in the financial crisis of 2007.

In a nutshell, she sees America as unique in the nineteenth century, and again in the early 1920s, due to the fabulous productivity of the agricultural sector. American farmers flooded world markets and depressed prices globally. The shock wave of declining prices reverberated across Europe, where governments erected protectionist barriers against American farm produce, but tariffs had little to offer American farmers facing diminishing returns for their efforts. Instead, they pursued alternative explanations for their situation: the maldistribution of wealth inhibited purchasing power and resulted in surpluses; large monopolies such as the railroads imposed unfair rates; banks charged high interest rates; and so on.

The political response of these "agrarians," Prasad argues, ultimately has made the United States less successful than Western Europe at ameliorating poverty. The contrast on taxation, for instance, is striking. We often assume that Europeans are more highly taxed in order to support their welfare state programs, but as Prasad shows, the United States had, from the 1930s until at least the 1980s, a much more steeply progressive national income tax than most European countries; in contrast, European countries came to rely more heavily on national sales taxes (more recently, value-added taxes or VATs).

Prasad's farmers are at the center of this story. Building on Gøsta Esping-Andersen's argument about the role of southern agricultural interests in explaining the contours of the American welfare state (*The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* [1990]), as well as Elizabeth Sanders's work on agrarian politics (*Roots of Reform: Farmers, Workers, and the American State, 1877-1917* [1999]), Prasad argues that agrarian populists were the most important political force for advancing income tax policies aimed at redistributing income and increasing consumption. While nineteenth-century Populists had sought a progressive income tax, figures in the 1930s such as Huey Long helped propel steeper tax progressivity into the political mainstream. A similar constituency mobilized against proposals in the 1920s and 1930s to implement a national sales tax, arguing that it would be regressive and would inhibit consumption. While other groups joined forces with agrarian populists, Prasad argues that they were best situated politically in these periods to advance or retard these policies. Once in place, these tax regimes took on a life of their own during World War II and beyond, embraced by different groups but with the politics surrounding them more or less fixed in place.

It is hard to think of a government policy less out of sight than progressive income tax (and relatively steep corporate taxes as well), and one would think it would be conducive to social spending. But its very visibility, in contrast to European VATs, which were widely adopted after World War II, made it more fragile as a source for social spending when the financial crisis of the 1970s set in. The relative invisibility of European sales taxes, though regressive, made them easier to sustain and the social policies less vulnerable to attack.

Thus, the push by agrarians for a state that would actively address the problem of poverty in the land of plenty had the perverse consequence of undermining the long-term viability of the welfare state.

Prasad traces several other stories that originate, in her view, with the economic problems of farmers and their political consequences. Suspicion of concentrated capital led to support for regulatory commissions much more adversarial than their European counterparts, and to supporting the prohibition of branch banking, which left the American banking system fragmented and weak, and to a desire for easy credit, which led to a variety of farm loan programs during the 1910s and 1920s and culminated in agrarian support for New Deal policies such as the Home Owners' Loan Corporation. As with tax policy, agricultural interests exit stage left after the New Deal, but the chain of events they helped set in motion had significant consequences. With a less generous public welfare state, the easy extension of credit became one of the primary interventions in the United States to sustain consumers in the market. When the financial crisis of the 1970s hit the United States and arguments for deregulation began to mount, there was no natural constituency for regulation and maintaining the welfare state, since neither seemed central to maintaining the standards of living of the average American consumer. The subsequent financialization of the American economy and the risky lending at the heart of the 2007 crisis can thus be traced back to farmers in the 1890s and 1930s.

While Prasad's book is informed by substantial research in primary sources, it is explicitly theoretical, and she spends a chapter disposing of alternative arguments for distinctive American political development, including those that focus on labor politics, "varieties of capitalism," national culture, and racial fragmentation. Will this convince partisans of these other approaches? It is hard to say. Like the theories she grapples with, and perhaps even more, given the path dependence that her argument is built on, her ambitious claims require a whole series of tumblers falling

into place at the right time and in the right sequence. For instance, one of the crucial elements of Prasad's case is lumping the agrarian politics of the 1890s and the 1920s together into one more or less undifferentiated whole. Although Huey Long in the 1930s certainly shared concerns and rhetoric with the Populists of the late nineteenth century, as Michael Kazin has shown, Long does not strike me as a wholly satisfactory embodiment of 1930s agricultural politics, despite sharing a common set of enemies with the earlier generation of agricultural radicals. (The singular focus on Long, the only individual treated at length in the book, is also an odd stylistic shift from the remainder of the work.) But while the centrality of overproduction to the origins of the American state might be somewhat overstated, Prasad has crafted a highly original and counterintuitive portrait of the distinctiveness of American state building.

So what do these books tell us about the state of the American state in historical perspective? Both exemplify the emerging consensus among historically oriented social scientists and historians that the idea of a weak or laggard American state is a dead letter, and both, I think, move in the direction that Novak and others would like to see. Dauber's work is evidence for how the day-to-day understanding of state power in Congress, and the deference given these ideas by the courts, were much more expansive than the stereotypes of the crabbed Constitution of the *Lochner* era. Prasad's comparative study reminds us that the American state's distinctiveness does not lie in its relative weakness but is one of a variety of ways that state intervention has originated and is organized within modern Western nations. Both start out by turning the myth of a weak American state on its head; both end by demonstrating the weaknesses of the American state in addressing poverty. Both offer innovative material for the broader project of reconceptualizing the history of governance in the United States.

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JUDITH R. WALKOWITZ. *Nights Out: Life in Cosmopolitan London*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press. 2012. Pp. xiv, 414. \$40.00.

Judith R. Walkowitz's *Nights Out* provides a bookend of sorts to her last monograph, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Victorian London* (1992). Both engage cultural theory as they excavate the dynamic formation of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century metropolis. The two differ methodologically, however, reflecting a larger shift in historical studies of the last decade. Whereas *City of Dreadful Delight* emphasized narrative and highlighted contemporary representations of sexual danger in Victorian London, *Nights Out* reconstructs early twentieth-century

Sohoites' material conditions of life in an attempt to understand the myriad ways they created imaginative worlds from those conditions. In a sense, *Nights Out* makes a corrective intervention in a historiography Walkowitz herself has done much to inspire, contributing to a redefinition of culture as dialectic between system and practice.

To achieve this, Walkowitz has given her research a rich and diverse foundation befitting her subject. Perusal of her bibliography offers inspiration to any scholar interested in the sources of cultural history.