1920s. Here is an intriguing discussion of how Montgomery Ward established rapport with rural buyers; the importance of parcel post; the rise of chain stores; the reordering of rural geography by the automobile; the custom of Saturday night trading and movie attendance; and the ways farmers and the radio industry affected one another. Farmers bought radios, thus entering consumer culture, but when they did, their listening preferences in turn shaped radio programming. This interchange brought about not the displacement of farm values by urban values but rather “a hybrid rural version of that culture,” WLS Barn Dance and so on—a sort of mass rural culture.

Farmers thus reaped a “mixed harvest,” one of “resistance and accommodation and of change as well as continuity” (p. 245). Barron’s conclusions are particularly refreshing in that he does not consign farmers to the victim culture so fashionable in recent decades. Farmers made their choices, he says, and lived with them.

A final note on Barron’s method: it reprises the approach of Earl Hayter a generation ago in *The Troubled Farmer*, drawing general insights from a set of related, topical essays. As opposed to the new social history, which postholes specific topics in a small area, the essay approach follows the connecting strands across the countryside. It is a good method, as well as a readable one, and Barron proves it so in this exemplary work.

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Although Joanne L. Goodwin’s book joins a long list of works published in the past decade on the Progressive era origins of welfare “as we knew it,” her Chicago study is the first to focus on the local implementation of “mothers’ pensions,” state level programs to aid single-mother families that were adopted by forty states between 1911, when Illinois passed the first law, and 1920. Unfortunately, mothers’ pensions case records in Chicago were destroyed; so Goodwin depends principally on institutional reports and contemporary research, much of which was undertaken to justify and bolster the program. Consequently, there are few glimpses of the way the program was administered in specific cases. Instead, Goodwin concentrates on the ideas and interests of the groups promoting and opposing mothers’ pensions in Chicago, their struggles for power, and the ways compromises shaped the program.
Goodwin's story is essentially a familiar one: Chicago mothers' pensions failed to provide adequate, dignified public assistance to poor single-mother families. Despite popular rhetoric that stressed the social value of maternal nurturance and the economy of supporting mother-only families in their own homes, fears of runaway costs, runaway fathers, and big government undermined public support. Chicago's politicians were hostile and stingy in providing funding because there was no political payoff for them: the juvenile court administered the program and controlled the jobs. Charities professionals rejected the law's social insurance philosophy and demanded restrictions limiting pensions to citizens and to the "worthy" poor and required ongoing supervision of recipients. Administrators also used racist criteria in enrolling families. Goodwin argues that the pensions did not even keep single mothers out of the workforce, so that they could rear their children full-time. She points out that administrators expected most mothers to work for wages, at least part-time. She argues that this policy devalued both mothers' work as childrearers and as wage-earners, since the "mother-work" was seen as less important than wage-earning, yet the wage-earning was poorly remunerated and part-time.

Goodwin is more sympathetic than some other scholars to the Hull House intellectuals (Julia Lathrop, Sophonisba Breckinridge, and Edith Abbott) who provided the research underpinnings to mothers' pensions. While she judges them to have been wrong in supporting legislation based on women's difference from men, she concludes that they were at least social justice feminists (committed to women's equality with men) rather than maternalists (who believed mothers had special claims on the state).

Some of Goodwin's critiques seem ahistorical; e.g., she criticizes mothers' pensions supporters because they required "the achievement of certain standards" of mothering for women to qualify for maternal entitlement (p. 185); but, since those supporters thought entitlement was justified by mothers' service to the state in producing good citizens, standards were inevitable. The model institution for Progressives was the juvenile court, in which professionals evaluated parenting in a confidently interventionist spirit; without that spirit, the mothers' pensions law would never have been passed.

Indiana, though quick to adopt the juvenile court, was the last state in the Midwest to pass a mothers' pension law, which seems not to have been put into effect, despite the attention of women's organizations in the state. Therein lies a tale?

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