



The Persistence of Victorian Liberalism: The Politics of Social Reform in Britain, 1870-1900 (Contributions to the Study of World History)

Robert F. Haggard

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The Persistence of Victorian Liberalism examines the question of where to locate the ideological break between classical liberalism and the underlying principles of the modern Welfare State. While most historians of 19th century Britain argue that such a shift occurred prior to 1900, Haggard challenges the contention that classical liberalism had been so undermined by this point that the modern Welfare State was largely inevitable. He considers the public discussion of progress, poverty, charity, socialism, and social reform, and he concludes that the vast majority of the Victorian middle and upper classes remained wedded to the tenets of classical liberalism up to the close of the century.

In contrast to traditional characterizations, Haggard argues that progress, individualism, and character continued to resonate within Victorian society throughout the late Victorian period. Private philanthropy grew increasingly active as a remedy to urban poverty. The London Socialist movement, the New Unionism, the Independent Labour Party, and the New Liberalism, each proponents of socialistic reforms, found themselves marginalized politically. The key to the social debates of the day was the concept of the deserving versus the undeserving poor. Although the deserving might expect some private or public aid, the undeserving were to be punished for their lack of character. Until this notion was overturned, the Welfare State would remain outside the realm of practical politics.

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