

# The Mosaic Historian:

Roy Lubove's Contributions to the History of Professions,  
Social-Welfare History and More

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Few U.S. historians have been as productive and wide-ranging as Roy Lubove. Many well-known scholars are content to spend their careers elaborating themes first limned in their dissertations. A few at some point in their careers dare to shift their research focus from one domain to another. The essays in this issue of *Pennsylvania History* show how Lubove's historical interests changed over time. His maturation occurred amidst the growth of new subspecialties, which may have segmented his appeal to audiences.

Here, I will focus on two subjects that engaged Lubove—the history of social welfare and the development of social work as a profession—areas that he thought were intimately connected. Other experts saw things differently. Social-welfare history and the history of professions became distinctive subfields during the 1960s. Thus, when Lubove did much of his pioneering work, a split occurred in his area of interest. Networks took shape with their own modes of discourse, ones that increasingly diverged from Lubove's way of analyzing historical problems.

The works of Roy Lubove considered here represent a mosaic. They forms a coherent design out of patterns present in various publications. He returned again and again to certain themes — differences between the public and private spheres, the constraints of voluntarism, and the ironic consequences of bureaucratic innovations. Unlike scholars who try to cover the sweep of American history or who privilege *their* favorite political era, Lubove invariably anchored his analysis in an explication of trends between 1830 and 1940, a period that fortuitously proved critical in both social-welfare history and the history of professions. A master at relating facets of industrializing America, Lubove's scholarship has a mosaic-like durability.

The term "mosaic" applies in a second sense. Roy Lubove, in retro-

spect, resembles a latter-day Moses. To re-read his work from the 1960s in the context of some seminal studies published by others during the past three decades is to realize the man's prescience. For instance, he probably was the first Americanist to recognize that military pensions were a protean form of social insurance in the United States, a connection that did not become widely accepted until popularized in Theda Skocpol's award-winning *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers* (1992).<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, Lubove was ahead of his peers in identifying other trends, such as the limits of voluntarism. Nonetheless, like Moses, being far-sighted did not assure Lubove safe passage to the Promised Land of historical pastmasters.

### A Penchant for Prescience

Lubove subtitled *The Professional Altruist* (1965), his third book in three years, "the emergence of social work as a career, 1880-1930." Broad developments in American culture and society, argued Lubove, necessitated a reevaluation of volunteers' roles in assisting the sick and the needy. The fin-de-siècle professional altruist, utilizing the latest techniques of delivering social services, displaced the ideal of friendly visitors caring for their neighbors: "Scientific philanthropy implied a quest for function and organizational relationships, skills and techniques, and scientific knowledge base, within specific institutional settings."<sup>2</sup> Social workers by 1900 were claiming expertise gained through training and experience; they moved out of clients' homes into hospitals and public schools.

According to Lubove, social workers affirmed their professional status in several ways. Great emphasis was placed on "therapeutically oriented casework." They tried to impose order on the rank-and-file by establishing criteria for belonging to new social-work associations. Sometimes prospective colleagues were required to meet criteria set by credentials committees; at other times membership simply was limited to professionals who were paid for their services. Social workers channeled career opportunities and controlled interactions with ordinary citizens through agencies and federations. "Casework rooted in a psychi-

1. Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992). I do not mean to suggest that Lubove was the "first" to make this point. See William H. Glasson, *Federal Military Pensions in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1918).

2. Roy Lubove, *The Professional Altruist* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 35.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 121.

atric explanation of human behavior was a key, presumably, to a knowledge base and helping technique more 'scientific' and hence more professional than social diagnosis or social reform which exaggerated environmental and rational factions in behavior and its control."<sup>3</sup> By adopting psychological, scientific, and professional methods, social workers between 1880 and 1930 distanced themselves from earlier cohorts of self-proclaimed do-gooders. They also differentiated their collective stake in altruism from claims by physicians, public-health experts, and psychologists.

"Dr. Lubove's careful study is not a history of social welfare, but rather an analysis of social work's development as a profession," the eminent Harvard historian Oscar Handlin pointed out in his Foreword to *The Professional Altruist*. "He devotes particular attention to such influences as professional specialization, the formation of a professional subculture, and the impact of formal organizations and bureaucracy."<sup>4</sup> Lubove did not cite Talcott Parsons's chapter on "The Professions and Social Structure" in *Essays on Sociological Theory* until chapter five of *The Professional Altruist*. Still, the Parsonian functionalism informs Lubove's interpretation throughout, particularly in reference to how social workers fashioned their careers. "The awareness of group identity was reinforced by efforts to formulate values and norms... . The values conformed to the four cultural ideals which Talcott Parsons has postulated as a framework for professional action: rationality, universalism, disinterestedness, and specificity of function."<sup>5</sup>

Social workers eschewed paternalistic moralism for empirical analyses: detailed case studies exposed to the expert eye social conditions adversely affecting health and behavior. These altruists did not devalue nurses or other helping professionals, Lubove affirmed. Nor did they yield to rivals any competitive edge in the quest for clients. Proud of the scientific basis of their calling, social workers in the industrial era claimed to be uniquely capable of providing "psycho-social material" for reeducating those clients willing to heed authoritative advice and for enabling them to readjust to their environment.<sup>6</sup>

4. Oscar Handlin, "Foreword," in Lubove, *op. cit.*, p. viii.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 121.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23, 78. See also the way that Lubove anticipated theoretical concepts found in Magali Sarfatti Larson, *The Rise of Professionalism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1977); Gerald L. Geison, ed., *Professions and Professional Ideologies in America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1983); Andrew Abbott, *The System of Professions* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1988); and Rolf Torstendahl and Michael Burrage, eds., *The Formation of Professions* (Newberry Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1990).

Courtesy: Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh



*Boarding train for summer camp, 1906, Pittsburgh. From Kingsley Association Collection*

In Lubove's interpretation, social workers between 1880 and 1930 not only tried to differentiate themselves from other professionals, but they also sought to cultivate their group identity by establishing a subculture: "The profession was not only a career but a way of life which shaped personality by offering it a medium of expression."<sup>7</sup> New organizations were created. Besides the American Association of Social Workers, established in 1921, specialized organizations such as the Association of Professional Schools of Social Work and the American Association of Hospital Social Workers flourished. Urban-based federations mediated between professional social workers and business corporations. These agencies became bureaucracies that institutionalized responsibilities in ways unimaginable by friendly visitors imbued with the Protestant ethic.<sup>8</sup>

7. Lubove, *Professional Altruist*, p. 118.

8. Lubove, *Professional Altruist*, pp. 157, 197, 208.

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The antipathy between old-guard friendly visitors and the emerging cohort of scientific social workers paralleled a larger theme in American history. According to Lubove, "social work's emergence as a profession resulted not only in a devaluation of voluntarism but in a chronic tension between public and private welfare."<sup>9</sup> Professionals welcomed volunteers only to the extent that they were willing to accept a supporting role in the experts' agencies. So too, hypothesized Lubove, the new breed of professional altruists discredited public relief, which they believed "pauperized" welfare recipients, undermining the work ethic. Professional social workers preferred to operate in the private sphere.

Dualisms shaped the way that Lubove categorized choices in his model. He juxtaposed volunteer: expert::public assistance: therapeutic intervention. These conflicts, Lubove realized, occurred both between dichotomies and across clusters of values. Indeed, they recurred in other domains, as in the debate over social insurance in a democracy long accustomed to relying on the kindness of strangers. Lubove was not the first observer to recognize that voluntarism animated social exchanges in the United States. Americans "do not proffer services eagerly, yet they do not refuse to render them," observed Alexis deTocqueville during the Age of Jackson. But "they all feel themselves subject to the same weakness and the same dangers...[hence] all men are ready to be of service to one another."<sup>10</sup> Lubove updated deTocqueville's commentary about the importance of voluntary associations. By tracing voluntarism's historical development after the 1840s, he showed that it had become more retrogressive. Ironically, voluntary associations often limited the ways that experts and ordinary citizens responded "if some great and sudden calamity befalls a family." Lubove nonetheless saw in "voluntarism" a theme that linked social-welfare and the history of professions with other facets of the American experiences. This theme became central to his mosaic.

### The Next Piece of the Mosaic

It is not surprising that Lubove's next book, *The Struggle of Social Security*, published three years after *The Professional Altruist*, opened with a chapter on "the constraints of voluntarism." Lubove asserted that the nation's ideology and institutions associated with voluntarism thwarted efforts to initiate federal programs. Social insurance advocates

9. Lubove, *Professional Altruist*, p. 52.

10. Alexis deTocqueville, *Democracy in America (1835-1840)*, ed. Phillips Bradley (New York: Vintage, 1945), II, pp. 185-186.

wanted to give Washington a greater role in protecting individuals from loss of income resulting from risks such as dependency, unemployment, accidents, disability, and old age. The struggle to secure workmen's compensation, support for maternity care, as well as the omnibus Social Security Act of 1935, moreover, occasioned national debates over the scope of the public sector and the Founding Fathers' intent in promoting "the general welfare."

Social insurance was introduced into an incongruous, inhospitable environment. The voluntary framework determined the limits of achievement, and even shaped social insurance theory and programs. In workmen's compensation, for example, private insurance companies were authorized to serve as carriers (in competition with each other or state funds), and merit rating systems were introduced as a stimulus to accident prevention. Thus, a collective public institution was partly administered through voluntary organizations and competitive pressures.<sup>11</sup>

Social insurance advocates such as I.M. Rubinow were only partially successful during the first three decades of the twentieth century in challenging traditions that pitted public concerns against private interests and voluntary commitments against compulsory mandates. Rationalizing the country's income-maintenance system, claimed reformers, hinged on transferring control to the public sector. They had to persuade a skeptical public and lawmakers that the vulnerability of modern-day workers necessitated such a change. In a wage-centered, profit-driven economy, "insurance was not an inferior substitute for prevention; it had a different function."<sup>12</sup>

Lubove devoted separate chapters to workmen's compensation, health insurance, mothers' pensions, unemployment, and old-age assistance in *The Struggle for Social Security*. He wanted to illuminate the incompatibility of voluntarism and social insurance. "It was difficult, if not impossible, for social insurance advocates to disprove the argument that voluntary institutions could expand and provide universal economic security," Lubove argued. "The historical experience of Europe served as the only counter argument, but it was dismissed as invalid because of the uniqueness of American civilization and was used to discredit social insurance as an alien importation."<sup>13</sup> Voluntarism was extolled as a truly

11. Roy Lubove, *The Struggle for Social Security, 1900-1935* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 4.

12. Lubove, *Struggle for Social Security*, p. 165.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

American mode of collective action. It had provided economic security for the pioneers; it still served essential "character-building functions." No wonder attacks on voluntarism were downright unpatriotic.

Voluntarism constrained innovation during the 1930s. The Great Depression in Lubove's view did not catalyze support for the social-insurance movement. Rather, he argued that after World War I advocates gained strength by appealing to enlightened self-interest. They wished businessmen, not the state, to take key initiatives. Reformers had to mask or strike provisions that redistributed wealth or challenged individual responsibility. "If the first phase in the evolution of the twentieth-century welfare state was the establishment of insurance programs related to employment, the second will be a system of predictable, non-punitive income maintenance for those who cannot participate fully in the labor force."<sup>14</sup>

*The Struggle for Social Security* remains a treasure trove of insights. I relied heavily on the book in the course of writing my dissertation.<sup>15</sup> Lubove taught me how instrumental the American Association of Labor Legislation was in developing both corporate pensions and old-age assistance plans. Others in my cohort borrowed ideas from Lubove's multidisciplinary analysis of the state: see the cross-cultural comparisons by historical sociologists and political scientists as different in focus as John Myles, Ann Shola Orloff, Jill Quadagno, and Stephen Skowroneck.<sup>16</sup> On the basis of the influence of this book alone, Roy Lubove became, along with Clarke Chambers and Walter Trattner, a "star" in social-welfare history.

### Toward an Even Broader Historical Vision

Historians generally assess one another's intellectual contributions by the overall quality of their monographs. Except for scholars best known for their articles (such as John Higham and David Hollinger), we tend

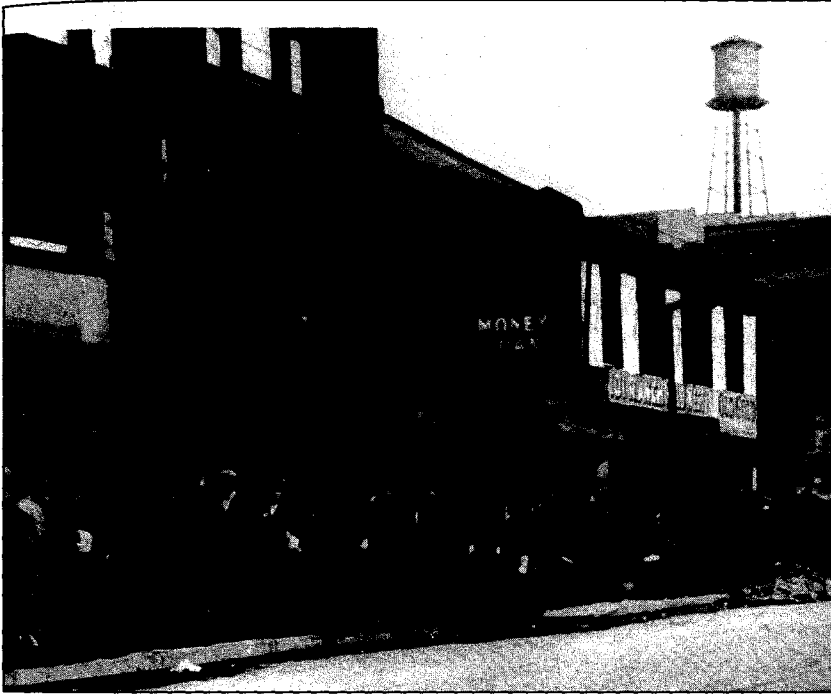
14. *Ibid.*, p. 180.

15. W. Andrew Achenbaum, "Old Age in the United States, 1790 to the Present," (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1976). A revised version appeared as *Old Age in the New Land: The American Experience Since 1790* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

16. I refer here to John Myles, *Old Age in the Welfare State: The Political Economy of Public Pensions* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1984); Ann Shola Orloff, *The Politics of Pensions: A Comparative Analysis of Britain, Canada, and the United States, 1880-1940* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993); Jill Quadagno, *The Transformation of Old Age Security: Class and Politics in the American Welfare State* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1988); and Stephen Skowroneck, *Building a New American State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982).



Courtesy: Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh



*Great Depression bread line, Pittsburgh. From the James R. Cox Collection*

to assume that essays published in journals or edited volumes afford historians opportunities for intellectual experiments subsequently refined and expanded in book-length manuscripts. Some of the articles that Roy Lubove wrote during his most productive period of scholarly activity, however, were more daring in scope and method than the two books we have examined. Ignoring these works of scholarship would be a serious mistake.

In a two-part essay, "Economic Security and Social Conflict in America: The Early Twentieth Century," which appeared in the first volume of the *Journal of Social History*, Lubove played with ideas that would appear in *The Struggle for Social Security*. Yet in the article Lubove stated his views on the obstacles to reconciling the aims of private initiatives, public welfare, and social insurance more provocatively than he would in his monograph:

The sponsors of social insurance found themselves embroiled in a violent cultural conflict. The issue, from their viewpoint, was predominantly economic, administrative, and actuarial in nature. They dis-

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covered that critics of social insurance invariably shifted the plan of debate, stressing the unique educational and social functions of voluntary institutions, their compatibility with American traditions, and the subversive implications of compulsory insurance. What social insurance experts regarded as technical issues were converted, in short, into moral issues and a sweeping defense of the American way of life....Public welfare bureaucracies could not duplicate their role. Social insurance, in the final analysis, had to be judged by noneconomic criteria.<sup>17</sup>

Lubove published material in the *Journal of Social History* that he did not include in the book. For instance, he devoted several pages to a discussion of commercial insurance schemes and to the relief programs established by five large rail systems as well as the accident relief and prevention plans developed by the steel industry. Lubove's analysis relied on his own archival findings; they were not a regurgitation of Murray Latimer's landmark studies of industrial and union pensions issued three decades earlier. Nor do his insights suffer in comparison with those offered later by Morton Keller on life insurance or Stuart Brandes's analysis of welfare capitalism.<sup>18</sup>

In keeping with the new emphasis on social history, Lubove devoted several pages to the national fraternal system of relief that emerged after the Civil War. "In the immigrant community, at least, fraternalists often did perform an important social function," Lubove noted. "The conditions of immigrant life in the early twentieth century minimized, for a time, the inherent conflict between bureaucratic rationalization and small-group association. Organized along religious and ethnic lines, fraternal institutions served as a mediator between the individual immigrant and the incomprehensible, often alien, society which surrounded him."<sup>19</sup> True to his own predilections, Lubove wrote in institutional terms; insofar as he described the lives of ordinary people, he did so through that lens.

17. Roy Lubove, "Economic Security and Social Conflict in America: The Early Twentieth Century, Part I," *Journal of Social History*, vol. 1 (1967), pp. 65, 70. For parallel arguments, compare *The Struggle*, p. 24 with "Economic Security," p. 87.

18. Morton Keller, *Life Insurance Enterprise* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963); Stuart Brandes, *American Welfare Capitalism* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1975). See also Murray Webb Latimer, *Industrial Pension Systems in the United States and Canada*, 2 vols. (New York: Industrial Relations Counselors, 1932).

19. Lubove, "Economic Security," p. 84.

Lubove's politics sometimes echoed themes advanced by the New Left. His sympathy for "radical" politics, for instance, is plainly evident in an essay he contributed in 1966 to the *Nation*. Here, he sounded bolder in describing the relations between social workers and poor people than he appeared in *The Professional Altruist*. In both the essay and his book Lubove deplored how the evolving social work profession disengaged from dealing with the economic dynamics of poverty. The point is stated more bluntly, however, in the *Nation*: "The problem, historically, is not simply the literal detachment of social work from the poor, but a reluctance to concede (implausible as it sounds) that the commodity desperately needed by the poor is money," Lubove contended. "The main trust of social work, especially before the 1930s, must be understood in the context of the American work culture and a commitment to private and voluntary support of charitable enterprise. These decisively influenced the response of social work to the poor, and blocked efforts to deal with poverty as an issue of income maintenance and redistribution."<sup>20</sup>

In the last paragraph of his essay in *Nation*, Lubove brought home the lessons of the past. He appealed to readers who might not fully appreciate the extent of historical resistance to utilizing federal funds and invoking powers vested in the central government to mobilize the poor:

The American social welfare system—private and public—has never been equipped to deal with poverty that is a product of income deprivation, pure and simple. The poor might benefit if private social work devoted more effort to financial therapy, and if public agencies became less apologetic about the income-maintenance function as an end in itself. To face up to the economic realities which govern the life of the poor, however, is to confront the hard question of power and income redistribution which have been evaded historically by a stress upon social work's service role.<sup>21</sup>

Lubove did not mince words. He felt that Americans were not confronting the paradox of poverty amidst affluence. He challenged readers to give up their illusions. The War on Poverty would never be won, Lubove prophesized, as long as experts and citizens continued to com-

20. Roy Lubove, "The Welfare Industry: Social Work and Life of the Poor," *Nation*, vol. 202 (May 23, 1966), p. 609.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 611.

partmentalize the functions of public and private agencies.

There were analogs elsewhere (especially in western Europe), Lubove acknowledged, to the fallacious dualism that clouded thinking in the United States. "The economists and Social Darwinists failed to ask the right question. It should not have been whether public or private decision-making was preferable, but which activities were properly public in character, which were private, which were private but necessitating public regulation, and which were mixed."<sup>22</sup> False dichotomies confounded efforts to attend to the acute needs of poor people. Policy options, Lubove argued, rarely were dualistic. There were multiple choices.

Besides urging his contemporaries to liberate themselves from artificial distinctions and anachronistic vocabularies, Lubove urged readers to exercise a freedom of choice wider than they imagined themselves to have. Citizens should not be afraid of redistribution, Lubove asserted. In his reading of the past it was significant that Americans generously gave Civil War veterans pensions and, if necessary, shelter. The mother's pension movement demonstrated, moreover, that income-maintenance plans could be initiated by the federal government.<sup>23</sup> Despite partisan rhetoric and conventional wisdom, U.S. public-welfare programs did not fit neatly into a model of the workfare state.

Similarly, many of Lubove's most pungent opinions about health care appeared in journals rather than monographs. His calls for reform meshed with his analysis of social-welfare initiatives in a nation constrained by its own institutional inertia and ideological blinders. Just as the struggle for Social Security was only slowly and partially won in an "incongruous" environment, so too efforts to broaden the public's access to affordable, decent health care was stymied by "an irrational response to impersonal forces" that were suspicious of government involvement and loath to inhibit physicians' professional autonomy: "Opposition to a national health program in the 1930s grew out of intangible fears concerning the freedom and status of the physician. The greater the degree of federal involvement, implicit in any large-scale financing of medical services, the less presumably would remain of the traditional entrepreneurial individualism."<sup>24</sup>

22. Roy Lubove, "Preface," in *Social Welfare in Transition: Selected English Documents, 1834-1909*, ed. Roy Lubove (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1966), pp. v-vi.

23. In addition to Skocpol's *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*, see Patrick J. Kelly, *Creating a National Home: Building the Veterans' Welfare State, 1860-1900* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

24. Roy Lubove, "The New Deal and National Health," *Current History*, vol. 45 (1963), p. 86, 107. The phrase quoted above appears on p. 78.

Here, as in the other articles in the 1960s, Lubove delved quickly and assuredly into the historical record in order to criticize current practices. He deplored the tentativeness of Social Security legislation. He decried the American Medical Association's long history of self-interested rhetoric. Lubove was convinced that historical insights were indispensable in addressing present-day problems. People had to understand the deeds, good and ill, done by earlier cohorts of reformers. Lubove tried to get beyond the historical milieu in which issues arose in order to establish terms that made sense now.

Thus Lubove's articles on social welfare history and the history of professions added new facets to his mosaic. He conjoined topics and trends, emphasizing historical patterns of ideological conservatism, organizational conflict, and structural contexts that limited reformers' ability to seize on class differences. Lubove's interests in current affairs, especially social insurance and health care reform, influenced his choice of historical topics. His contemporary analyses, in turn, were presented with an historian's eye to details. But while he wrote "current history" in a decade of upheaval, Lubove did not share Oscar Handlin's confidence that "Truth" would prevail. Convinced that historical facts did not always speak for themselves, Lubove tried to develop a way for sharing insights from his search for a usable past. His mode of interpretation was not always satisfying.

### **The Limits to Lubove's Historical Analysis**

In the 1960s Roy Lubove was one of the most creative scholars in the profession. He created a historical mosaic that reflected his understanding of industrialization's impact on American society and culture. Lubove harnessed his understanding of the past, in turn, to deal with several contemporary social welfare and health care issues that aroused intense concern during the Great Society. Because of his willingness to link past trends with present-day issues, he served as a model for those who in subsequent decades would find "public history" a suitable venue for nurturing their political concerns and intellectual interests.

That said, Roy Lubove was hardly an archetypal "applied historian." Others more deservedly fit that genus. Consider, for instance, the career of Michael Katz, born five years after Lubove. Both men were at Harvard in the early 1960s: Katz earned all his degrees there, and Lubove taught in Cambridge between receiving his Ph.D. from Cornell and coming to the University of Pittsburgh in 1963. (Katz, like Lubove, put

down roots – in his case, at the University of Pennsylvania).

Similarities abound in both scholars' ways of writing history. Katz attracted a following on the basis of his contributions to social welfare history. Like Lubove, Katz distinguished himself in other fields, such as the history of education. Each scholar appreciated the ironies that emanate from the untidiness of the historical process. Both seemed to delight in teasing insights out of the most stultifying of bureaucratic minutiae. Lubove and Katz understood that the words that lawmakers used in some instances reflect successfully negotiated compromises and, in other cases, embodied inherent contradictions. More than most historians of their cohort, the pair drew on comparative data to explicate distinctive patterns in the American welfare state.

Yet there are important dissimilarities in these men's careers, which went beyond differences in temperament. Early on, Katz displayed a greater penchant for risk-taking than Lubove: he spent a dozen years in Canada, because he (rightly) saw extraordinary opportunities for doing cross-disciplinary research. The gamble paid off. Furthermore, unlike Lubove, Katz has remained prolific throughout his career. Committed to doing work that has policy relevance, even if it does not necessarily proffer solutions, he has written and edited several books on the "under-class" and "the undeserving poor." Katz knows his way around foundations: his *vita* attests to his connections to the Social Science Research Council and the Rockefeller, Russell Sage, and Spencer foundations, among others. Finally, aware of the importance of "personal politics," Katz has offered illuminating critiques of himself and his scholarship.<sup>25</sup> It is hard to imagine Roy Lubove being comfortable with such self-disclosure in print.

And that is the point. Lubove's later work merits attention, but he was unwilling or unable to make his ideas appealing to an ever widening audience. Let me cite an example. I urged the editorial board of the University of Pittsburgh Press to reissue *The Struggle for Social Security* in 1985, to coincide with the Golden Jubilee of that landmark legislation. I recommended that Lubove write a lengthy preface or afterword to bring his narrative up to date. To be sure he substituted a new longer conclusion. But rather than discuss incremental changes in the program's first half-century or analyze the financial woes that beset it in the

25. See, for instance, the autobiographical details in three of Katz's works: *Poverty and Policy in American History* (New York: Academic Press, 1983); *The Underserving Poor* (New York: Pantheon, 1989); and *Improving Poor People* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).

1970s, Lubove instead chose to write about the pertinence of Elizabethan poor laws and the Speenhamland system on the enactment of the New Deal legislation.

Lubove's commentary was quite scholarly. I am sure that experts found the new conclusion fascinating, but undergraduates and ordinary readers found it hard to follow. Lubove did not bother to share elementary details about the history of U.S. Social Security. As a result, those who did not remember the original provisions of the Act, or did not know when the disability program began, or forgot when hospital insurance planks were added to basic coverage, would still not know these critical facts from reading Lubove's book.

A similar opaqueness colored other pieces that Lubove crafted. Consider his contribution to Sam Hays's *City at the Point*, a collection of essays on the social history of Pittsburgh. Invoking Clarke Chambers's characterization of "the generally marginal status of social welfare history," Lubove with palpable bitterness suggested that there is little hope of making the subfield more than "a kind of salvage operation."<sup>26</sup> Contemporary historians, contended Lubove, were preoccupied with issues that seemed (to him) unrelated to "welfare." So as to underscore his point, Lubove itemized the topics that merited pursuit – class factors, elites and gender, recreation, social reconstruction, and the social settlement. Rarely did he allow himself to insinuate themes from the new social history into welfare history. Lubove asserted, but did not illustrate, that studying welfare might facilitate our exploration of children's personalities and neighborhood organizations. Rather than convey the pleasure he himself obviously derived from studying the network of public and private institutions in Allegheny County that aided immigrants in the age of Carnegie, Lubove chose to carp about the disregard for a field he dearly loved and felt was grossly neglected.

### The Challenge of Public History

Roy Lubove would chafe at the suggestion that his contributions advanced the cause of "public history." He once told me that applied history was a fad. Lubove may have had a point: some of what passes for "relevant" current historiography has little bearing on contemporary

26. Roy Lubove, "Pittsburgh and the Uses of Social Welfare History," in *City at the Point*, ed. Samuel P. Hays (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989), p. 295.



events. But Lubove probably underestimated his own contribution to public history, a subfield that he disesteemed. His mosaic history style of doing history was an impressive achievement in its own right. So, too, was his orientation to solving the problems of modern America.

Scholars such as Roy Lubove, capable of seeing in contemporary affairs a range of issues that have long bedeviled policy-making, must endeavor to link past and present. It is important that historians focus, as did Lubove, on how reformers sometimes made life more intolerable for the disenfranchised through their good deeds. In the end, however, Lubove's solid scholarship will endure beyond superficial efforts to apply the lessons of the past in the inchoate swirl of current events.