

# **“The Gentleman We’re All Talking About”: William Beveridge and the Idea of Postwar Social Planning in the United States during World War II**

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## Abstract

This report traces a 1943 trip to the United States by British economist William Beveridge, whose 1943 “Beveridge Plan” laid the foundation for the postwar British welfare state. Funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, the trip coincided with a period of intense debate in the United States over the future of the New Deal state and the role of social security and social welfarism in postwar planning. Drawing on previously untapped records at the Rockefeller Archive Center, I use Beveridge’s trip, and the reception that he received in the United States, to explore transnational ideas about social security and social and economic rights and how they were contested and debated in the United States. Beveridge’s trip to the United States sheds light on how domestic ideas about postwar planning shifted during the war against the backdrop of race relations, the wartime defense economy, and the evolving relationship between business, labor, and the state.

# **“The Gentleman We’re All Talking About”: William Beveridge and the Idea of Postwar Social Planning in the United States during World War II**

During World War II, many reformers, laborites, African American leaders, policymakers, and government officials in the United States helped to shape a transnational dialogue about social and economic rights. In particular, American actors championed the idea of “social security,” which throughout the war came to increasingly signify a unified system of social insurance and social assistance that would provide universal coverage to all workers and their dependents from all social risks – childbirth, unemployment, disability, sickness, and retirement. Undergirded by the Atlantic Charter and channeled through transnational bodies like the International Labor Organization and the Inter-American Conference on Social Security, social security planning emerged as both a response to the upheavals of war and as a war aim in and of itself – as a means for Allied powers to simultaneously distinguish themselves ideologically from fascism and to compete with the social states of Germany and Japan.

The American idea of “social security” would come to be foundational to postwar ideas about social and economic rights and the welfare state around the world, but in the end, it would come to have far more impact abroad than in its country of origin. The wartime culture of social security planning – with the United States very much at its center – gave rise to a host of social security plans, proposals, and pieces of legislation throughout the Allied world. Many of these plans formed the basis of numerous early welfare state-building projects from Europe to South America to Australia – but was ultimately diverted into the GI Bill in the US, a separate welfare program for (largely white and male) veterans.

Most significant of these wartime plans was the 1943 “Beveridge Plan” by economist William Beveridge, which laid the foundation for the postwar British welfare state. In 1943, the Rockefeller Foundation sponsored a lecture and study

tour by Beveridge of the United States. I use Beveridge's trip, and the reception that he received in the United States, to show how domestic ideas about postwar planning shifted during the war against the backdrop of race relations, the wartime defense economy, and the evolving relationship between business, labor, and the state.

In the months after the release of the Beveridge Plan, the administrators of the Rockefeller Foundation offered to fund a trip by Beveridge to the United States “for the purpose of the exchange of ideas with experts in the field of social security.” Beveridge agreed on the condition that the Rockefeller Foundation could guarantee his return journey – not a simple task under wartime conditions – and to guarantee that the Foundation would provide enough funding for his wife to accompany him. (He had recently been married – his first marriage at the age of sixty-four – to Janet Mair, his longtime friend, secretary, and widow of his first cousin).<sup>1</sup> He also expressed a desire to visit Canada, as well as to confer with the leadership of both the US labor federations, the AFL and the CIO. Perhaps already growing weary of the publicity generated by his report, Beveridge told the Foundation that while he was willing to discuss the topic of social security on his journey, he was interested in learning from American planning as much as promoting his plan. He was particularly interested in exchanging ideas regarding problems of full employment and international trade.<sup>2</sup> Shortly thereafter, in an address about his upcoming US tour, Beveridge reiterated these themes of international information-sharing and collaboration in employment policy as it affected postwar social security and living standards. He said in a speech at the American Outpost in London shortly before his visit that he was not traveling to America to foist his plan on the United States and, indeed, he did not regard his plan as something other nations should “copy slavishly.” Rather, “social security plans of each country are part of its national culture,” Beveridge said, and “should be adapted to its national tastes, like its houses, its education, and the shape of its women’s hats.” But social security and full employment, he argued in a continued sartorial analogy, were akin to a two-piece suit, inextricably related and interdependent, and that while the problems of social assistance and social insurance could and should be solved by individual nations, full employment required international collaboration.<sup>3</sup>

But even before he left England for the United States, Beveridge saw his vision of promoting international collaboration to advance economic security clash against the political realities of the contested New Deal state. The issue at hand was the National Resources Planning Board's *Security, Work, and Relief Policies*, which President Roosevelt had submitted to Congress immediately before Beveridge was scheduled to arrive. If Roosevelt and the NRPB had been willing to capitalize on the release of the excitement surrounding the Beveridge Plan to advance social security proposals, the political consequences of a visit to the United States by Beveridge himself seemed to be far too unpredictable from the viewpoint of many in the NRPB. Lawrence K. Frank, a social scientist at the NRPB, contacted Joseph Willits, director of the Rockefeller Foundation's Division of Social Sciences, as soon as he had learned of Beveridge's proposed tour. The Beveridge visit, Frank told Willits, had "raised some questions and aroused some concern" throughout the agency, and that the reception of the *Security, Work, and Relief Policies* by Congress, which was already a "ticklish" matter, could be highly complicated by Beveridge's visit. Unless Beveridge were "appropriately advised of the situation" in Congress, Frank said, he might "unconsciously further confuse and complicate an already difficult situation."<sup>4</sup> Frank didn't make the NRPB's concerns explicit, but it is likely that the board's members were concerned that congressional opponents of the NRPB might use the occasion to smear *Security, Work, and Relief Policies* as foreign import. Joseph H. Willits immediately contacted Chairman of the Social Security Board Arthur Altmeyer, Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins, and Eveline Burns, SSB consultant and economist, about the potential impact of the Beveridge tour on the reception of the National Resource Planning Board report and asked their thoughts about the prospect of delaying Beveridge's trip.<sup>5</sup> Altmeyer doubted that Beveridge would cause irreversible harm to the report's congressional reception, but his opinion was overridden by John Gilbert Winant (then the US ambassador to the United Kingdom), who persuaded Altmeyer to ask Beveridge to delay his journey "until a more propitious time."<sup>6</sup> Many in the British government, wary of offending its wartime ally, also had some reservations about the journey. British officials in the United States cabled Roger F. Evans, assistant director for the social sciences at the Rockefeller Foundation, to tell him "neither in fact nor in appearance" could such a journey be construed to mean that "the British Government is sponsoring or pressing on the American

people or government social proposals which it itself is not prepared to consider in detail.” In fact, British officials insisted that Beveridge was not to even seek accommodations at the British embassy in Washington to avoid any hint of impropriety.<sup>7</sup> Given the concerns among actors in both governments, Beveridge agreed to delay the journey until early May.<sup>8</sup>

But the result of this exchange caused Beveridge to dampen any enthusiasm he had for aggressively publicizing or promoting his social security plans in the United States. He wired Winant to assure him that he now had “no intention of commenting publicly on American security problems, nor of advertising British methods, nor of otherwise expressing my views on American problems.” As an “unofficial person” not attempting “intervention in any way in domestic politics,” Beveridge assured Winant that his visit would be “innocuous.” But in the runup to the 1942 midterm elections and increasing conservative resolve to dismantle the architecture of the New Deal state, even this struck one stateside foreign service officer as naïve. He scrawled in the margin of Beveridge’s letter to Winant, “He evidentially does not know what awaits him here.”<sup>9</sup>

Indeed, representatives from the Rockefeller Foundation, although they found the delay “baffling,” nevertheless found it necessary to compose, in advance, a sort of primer on the intricate politics surrounding postwar social security planning in the United States. Foundation representatives informed Beveridge to be particularly wary of “scoops” and “manufactured rumors” from a sensationalist and often reactionary American press. With Southern Democrats fiercely opposed to the Social Security Board’s efforts to extend federal oversight to unemployment insurance, the Foundation advised him to tread lightly on the “delicate” topic of states’ rights and federal-state relationships. Above all, he was advised to avoid followers of the highly controversial Townsend Movement, a campaign founded in 1933 by elderly physician Francis Townsend that demanded an old age pension of \$200 a month to be funded out of a national value added tax. Despite the fact that most economists and social security experts deemed the proposal to be unfeasible at best, the movement attracted a large and devoted following throughout the Depression, and pressure from the movement was partly responsible for the passage of the 1935 Social Security Act. The movement had

waned since then, but Rockefeller officials warned Beveridge that “Townsendism” was “far from dead or dying,” and that Townsend was now fashioning himself as the “Beveridge of America” and was clamoring to meet him.<sup>10</sup> All of these factors greatly complicated or compromised the ways Beveridge could present his plan in the United States.

It was not until May 3, 1943 that William and Janet Beveridge received final clearance from British and American authorities to begin their journey, and departed on the *Queen Mary* from Greenock, Scotland in route to New York. Charting a sharp southern arc to avoid U-boats, the pair shared the ship with 5,000 German prisoners of war (held in the hull), delegates to the upcoming landmark Hot Springs Conference on Food and Agriculture, and Winston Churchill, traveling on his third trip to the US, this time to confer with Roosevelt about the resolution of the African campaign.<sup>11</sup> Churchill invited the pair to lunch on the deck, the first meeting between the two since the release of the Beveridge Plan. Churchill, who Janet Beveridge recalled as being in a particularly ill humor, fretted about U-boat attacks and said little except to improvidently express doubt about the Beveridge Plan’s postwar prospects.<sup>12</sup>

But a more enthusiastic reception awaited Beveridge in the United States. Janet Beveridge recalled that as soon as they disembarked in New York, a customs agent thrust a paper and pen towards Beveridge, who only realized after a moment of bewilderment that the official wanted his autograph.<sup>13</sup> Yet from the outset, Beveridge showed a high degree of caution in dealing with the press, and immediately made it clear to reporters that he was in the country as a private citizen and not a representative of the British government. Although working people in “all countries are liable to hazards of interruption of earnings through sickness, accidents, unemployment, old age, or death of breadwinner,” he said in an early press event, he was not interested in proscribing his plan to the American people.<sup>14</sup> When pressed to comment on comparisons between his report and that of the NRPB report, he was equally cautious. “It is a very remarkable and very able document and one of which any country should be proud,” he said of *Security, Work, and Relief Policies*. “It does not correspond to my report and it is not supposed to, but it is an argument for doing something.”<sup>15</sup>

Yet despite such reticence in dealing with the press, behind closed doors in Washington, Beveridge proved quite willing to collaborate quite closely with federal authorities, policymakers, and administrators on questions of social security planning. One of the most important of these collaborations was a late May meeting with thirty-five members of the powerful Bureau of the Budget, who were eager to learn about how universal social security would address regional wage differentials, the statistical methodology employed in the Beveridge Plan, the relationship between compulsory disability and medical insurance, comparative social security administrative costs, and why Beveridge chose flat rate taxation.<sup>16</sup> In a meeting with the Federal Security Agency, Beveridge further consulted with officials on the necessity of full employment to universal social security, the functioning of children's allowances, and the effect of unemployment benefits on subsistence levels.<sup>17</sup> Beveridge engaged in similar technical discussion with Altmeyer and the regional directors of the Social Security Board, the board of governors of the Federal Reserve, as well as with Eveline Burns and others at the National Resources Planning Board.<sup>18</sup> The pair also held informal meetings with the upper echelon of the executive branch and the president's cabinet, including Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins, whom Janet Beveridge described as "all in for the Beveridge plan," and Vice President Henry Wallace, who she remembered as a "humanitarian who savored the underlying philosophy of the Beveridge plan."<sup>19</sup>

Beveridge also conferred with a wide range of non-governmental organizations interested in social security and social reform. He held brief meetings with representatives from the CIO and the AFL, both of which were in the process of intense lobbying for social security expansion.<sup>20</sup> William Green, president of the AFL, announced that their draft social security bill received Beveridge's endorsement during a meeting with the AFL executive council on May 20, 1943.<sup>21</sup> On June 3, Beveridge spoke about the health aspect of the plan at a luncheon in New York, presided over by New York City Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, on the plan's "global import."<sup>22</sup>

In early June, in the midst of Beveridge's journey, a piece of legislation appeared in Congress that, like the NRPB's *Security, Work, and Relief Policies*, would come



to be known as an “American Beveridge Plan”: the Wagner-Murray-Dingell Bill. Based, in part, on a model bill prepared by the AFL and in part through the assistance of the SSB, the lead sponsor was Democratic Senator Robert F. Wagner of New York, one of the legislative architects of the 1935 Social Security Act, the 1935 National Labor Relations Act, and several other key pieces of 1930s New Deal reforms. While not quite “Beveridgite” in scope, the Wagner-Murray-Dingell Bill was unquestionably the most far-reaching major US social security proposal to date, and it reflected the agenda of the American Association for Social Security and many of the more progressive reformers in the SSB. The Wagner-Murray-Dingell Bill proposed to bring the entire working population of the country under coverage of social security, along with their dependents. This included sectors of the labor force that were currently excluded from coverage, including domestic and agricultural workers, as well as the self-employed, government employees, and those in military service. The bill would expand and liberalize existing benefits, such as old age and survivors' insurance. It would centralize the administration of the social security system, and while states would still receive federal grants for social assistance that would be administered by state governments, the bill would significantly extend federal oversight of the entire system. Like the Beveridge Plan, the Wagner-Murray-Dingell system would be financed by a single payroll contribution (financed by a joint contribution from the worker and employer, but not a contribution from the state, which was a hallmark of the Beveridge Plan). Unlike the Beveridge Plan, however, the Wagner-Murray-Dingell system did not propose a single rate of benefits, but rather an extension of the proportional benefits of the existing Social Security Act, albeit more heavily weighted towards those with lower earnings. Finally, and most importantly, the bill called for both temporary and permanent disability insurance and the inclusion of sickness and hospitalization insurance.<sup>23</sup>

As had been the case with the NRPB report, the domestic political environment was too fraught and contested for the Wagner-Murray-Dingell Bill to benefit from Beveridge's direct endorsement during his journey. Beveridge had hoped to testify before Congress on proposed social security legislation, and was particularly interested in contributing to discussions surrounding the Wagner-Murray-Dingell Bill. Wary of backlash from a reactionary Congress and of running afoul

of Beveridge's unofficial status, Altmeyer persuaded him against such involvement.<sup>24</sup> Still, Beveridge supported the bill in more indirect and informal ways: in early July, he gave a widely attended lecture on his plan at the Sylvan Theater on Washington's National Mall, followed by a panel discussion on the future of American social security with Altmeyer, Senator James E. Murray, and Representative John D. Dingell (two of the sponsors of the Wagner-Murray-Dingell Bill).<sup>25</sup>

But despite Beveridge's distance from the bill, its conservative opponents were quick to demonize the bill as a foreign import, one unsuited to American conditions. This was particularly true of the American Medical Association (AMA), which for years had been opposed to anything resembling what they saw as governmental meddling in the affairs of the medical profession. The AMA's B.D. McElroy, for example, charged that "the bill would create a dominant bureaucracy, end free enterprise, and alter the whole way of American life."<sup>26</sup> One AMA-affiliated publication suggested that the Wagner-Murray-Dingell Bill should not be considered an "American-made piece of legislation," but rather the "latest action taken by a member state of the International Labor Organization," which undertakes "world planning for compulsory social insurance...with the approval of the governing but usually without the knowledge of the governed." Altmeyer, Falk, Cohen, and others in the SSB were merely agents in this broader scheme. "No pipe dream, this plan is already responsible for the establishment of state medicine in Chile and in New Zealand."<sup>27</sup>

In fact, after Beveridge returned from his trip, he admitted that he found the Wagner-Murray-Dingell Bill to be deficient in many crucial respects. Beveridge regarded children's allowances to be a cornerstone of sound social security policy, and Beveridge noted that not only were they excluded from the Wagner-Murray-Dingell Bill, but they "had hardly yet risen above the horizon of discussion" in the United States. The lack of children's allowances, plus the cap on the amount of time that beneficiaries could draw unemployment benefits, led Beveridge to conclude that "even those who wish greatly to develop social security in the United States, as Senator Wagner does, do not feel able as yet to go the length of taking assured freedom from want as their aim."<sup>28</sup> There were other ways that the bill

proposed a less generous system than those planned in other countries. By tying health insurance to payroll tax deductions, the Wagner-Murray-Dingell Bill kept medical benefits, like the existing system of old age and survivor benefits, firmly rooted in the employment relationship. The poorest and most vulnerable citizens would be left to public assistance, which were still, even under the proposed bill, administered by the states. It is easy to see how the bill, even if it were enacted, would leave significant leeway for southern states to deny benefits to African Americans and poor whites, for example. Assuming that families were (and should be) lead by a male breadwinner, moreover, the bill largely made wives and children dependent on the employment of the primary beneficiary.

Moreover, the bill itself had slim prospects in a Congress populated by a growing contingent of increasingly emboldened opponents of New Deal reformism. The Wagner-Murray-Dingell Bill had the strong endorsement of both the AFL and the CIO, then at the height of their political power.<sup>29</sup> But as business redeemed itself from the taint of “economic royalism” through its contribution to war effort and as reactionary Republicans and Southern Democrats made significant gains in the 1942 midterm elections, the New Deal, on the whole, was on the defensive. Lawmakers were more likely to be inclined to curtail existing social legislation than enact sweeping new reforms. But the introduction of the Wagner-Murray-Dingell Bill was nonetheless a pivotal moment in the domestic social politics of the era. By proposing increased federal oversight, a move towards centralization and unification, and the introduction of health insurance, the bill was the clearest expression in the United States of transatlantic wartime social security planning. Introduced in some form every year for the rest of the decade, the Wagner-Murray-Dingell Bill remained for years to come a rally point for left-laborites in the CIO, and progressive New Deal reformers, and perhaps above all, for African Americans.

The question of the relationship between race and social security was indeed a fraught one in the early 1940s. In an example of what historian Ira Katznelson has memorably called the “southern cage” entrapping New Deal reformism: southern Democrats had succeeded in excluding from the 1935 Social Security Act old age and unemployment protections for domestic and agricultural workers.<sup>30</sup> The

exclusion of these workers, along with the self-employed, was ostensibly designed to avoid perceived difficulties in withholding earnings and administering benefits from a more transient and informal segment of the labor market. But in effect, these exclusions were disproportionately applied to African Americans, who comprised an overwhelming percentage of these workers.<sup>31</sup> “As a consequence,” Katznelson writes, “southerners could vote for the bill that brought much needed funding to their poverty-stricken region while protecting the character of its racial arrangements.”<sup>32</sup> Amending social security to include domestics and agricultural workers became central the broader wartime nationwide “Double V” campaign for equal protection and an end to lynching and segregation.<sup>33</sup> “If colored Americans get anything out of this war,” read one representative editorial in the *Baltimore Afro-American*, “it will be some assurance...that we as American citizens can move forward in security.”<sup>34</sup>

During his tour, Beveridge gained firsthand appreciation for how intricately bound social reform and race were in his host country. In the summer of 1943, Roosevelt summoned Beveridge to the White House, where he praised him for what he called his “particular interpretation” of the Atlantic Charter. Roosevelt was most interested in discussing with Beveridge the difficulties of more adequately incorporating the African American population into social security protection, a topic about which Janet Beveridge described him as speaking with “great feeling.”<sup>35</sup>

In reality, Roosevelt’s commitment to meaningful change was more tepid, both regarding African American access to social security provisions and civil rights, more generally. Responding to pressure from the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and the NAACP, Roosevelt had created the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) in 1941, which ended discriminatory employment in the federal government and defense work. In 1942, Edwin Embree, president of the Julius Rosenwald Fund, suggested that the White House form a special commission for long range planning on race that would include members of the FEPC, the War Production Board, and the Social Security Board. Embree’s concern was that the fact that African Americans were disproportionately shut out of social security provisions and defense employment was a “serious weakness” in

the war effort. It led to “low morale among the colored peoples” both domestically and among the nonwestern Allies, “especially the Chinese and the residents of Malaya, the East Indies, and the Philippines.” Roosevelt agreed that “long-range planning is of the utmost importance” with “first-line significance being consideration of the color and race problem.” Yet he felt that social planning could often become an “escape from the realities of war,” and concluded that it would “premature” to form such a committee country was still fighting the Axis.<sup>36</sup>

Yet by 1943, many African American leaders and their white liberal and leftist allies were hopeful that the transnational revolutions in postwar social security planning – and the Wagner-Murray-Dingell Bill in particular – would mark a shift in the system of racial exclusion built into U.S. social security.<sup>37</sup> “Negroes need social security protection as much if not more than other groups and they profit less from our present system than do other groups,” wrote Ruby Bryant Yearwood in the African American journal *Opportunity*. “The words ‘social security’ take on a new gleam and meaning for Negroes as a result of the Wagner-Murray-Dingell proposals.”<sup>38</sup> Tellingly, support among white congressional southern Democrats for social security began to further erode throughout the 1940s, as they grasped that plans like the Wagner-Murray-Dingell Bill had the potential to afford African Americans more access to the rights of social citizenship.<sup>39</sup> The Social Security Board acknowledged in 1942 that “Negro workers” would have been “the main group of beneficiaries of the [proposed] strengthened and extended program” of social security.<sup>40</sup> Caroline F. Ware, a contemporary white historian and civil rights activist, said that plans like the Wagner-Murray-Dingell Bill and the Beveridge Plan at last displayed the “logic of including the most economically depressed and insecure workers.” Ware hoped that the Wagner-Murray-Dingell Bill, if passed, would bring under coverage at least two-thirds of the African Americans then were then shut out.<sup>41</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, the renowned sociologist and Pan-Africanist, said the Wagner-Murray-Dingell Bill, the NRPB report, the Marsh Plan, and the Beveridge Plan were “extraordinary and epoch-making” and might someday be applied to the decolonization of Africa and Asia.<sup>42</sup> A. Philip Randolph, head of the largely African American Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters whose proposed 1941 march on Washington had forced Roosevelt to ban racial discrimination in defense industries, argued in 1943 that only a “cradle to

grave” system of social security would prevent the Black working class from being “ground to bits” by the “juggernaut” of the postwar economy.<sup>43</sup>

The Beveridges saw first-hand this enthusiasm from African Americans for the Beveridge Plan during the course of their journey. Paul Robeson, the internationally-renowned actor, singer, and civil rights activist, was among a group of prominent African Americans, “all deeply interested in the Plan,” who entertained Janet Beveridge at a party in New York.<sup>44</sup> Yet they found that enthusiasm was not confined to elite African American policymakers and intellectuals. Beveridge recorded in his diary that on an overnight train from Albany to Boston, a “Negro porter” recognized him as “the gentleman we’re all talking about.”<sup>45</sup>

During their meeting at the White House, Roosevelt suggested to Beveridge that he make a special effort to tour the southern states, so the president could get Beveridge’s opinion of the vast regional and racial differentials in wages and living standards, and how a more universalistic approach to social security could be applied to such a situation.<sup>46</sup> Beveridge agreed to Roosevelt’s suggestion to tour the South, and the Rockefeller Foundation supplied Beveridge with a guide – an education reformer named Jackson Davis who had helped found the United Negro College Fund – on the assumption that Beveridge would have difficulty interpreting southern conditions if he were to travel alone.<sup>47</sup> Beveridge arrived in Memphis from Chicago on June 2, 1943 (having traded his heavy Oxford tweed for a white “Palm Beach” summer suit on loan from Altmeyer).<sup>48</sup> Beveridge and Davis conferred with representatives of the Tennessee Valley Authority and toured a segregated housing projects, a Black liberal arts college, and a met with a group of prominent business leaders who heard Beveridge speak on his report and discussed social problems in the south, especially housing and education.<sup>49</sup>

But if African Americans and social security reformers were hoping for Beveridge himself to emerge as a vocal proponent of racial justice in social security reform, and to use his visit to the south as a platform to that effect, they would prove to be largely disappointed. To be sure, Beveridge seemed genuinely aghast at much of the structures of racial exploitation that he encountered in the South, calling Delta

planters the “legitimate descendants of the feudal system.”<sup>50</sup> Upon viewing a dilapidated segregated hospital in Scott, Mississippi, Beveridge also spoke to a meeting of local press representatives of the advantages of social medicine, and later met with a group of prominent Black academics and social workers at Atlanta University.<sup>51</sup> But many of Beveridge’s comments on his southern sojourn belied some strikingly racist assumptions. He noted with some satisfaction that the white southern population was comprised of a “homogenous people of British stock” who had “made progress in the effort to achieve equitable segregation.”<sup>52</sup> Moreover, the Black-run *Atlanta Daily World* quoted Beveridge as saying that “the Negro is peculiarly suited to southern agriculture and particularly to the Mississippi Delta, and should be kept here rather than permitted to migrate to Detroit, Harlem, and other industrial centers.” Beveridge argued that the southern states should stabilize the income of southern Black agricultural workers, but in the immediate interest of “hold[ing] the Negro on the Delta plantations.” The *Atlanta Daily World* pointed out that the Beveridge Plan had been produced with “knowledge gained from a study and observation of the condition of workers in the great cotton processing centers of England,” which were “similar in every respect, except for the racial question” to the conditions of Black Mississippi agricultural workers.<sup>53</sup> But Beveridge’s comments had made clear that the transnational movement for social security would stop short of firm commitments to advancing racial equity and equal access to social services and social citizenship in the United States. Nor did the topic hold Roosevelt’s sustained attention. When Beveridge returned to the White House and began to tell Roosevelt his impressions of his southern journey, the distracted president seemed to have forgotten about it entirely; he told a surprised Beveridge that he had secured a return flight for the couple, then abruptly ended their interaction to move on to other business.<sup>54</sup>

But Beveridge’s impressions would later take form in a speech Beveridge gave in October 1943 at the Royal Statistical Society in London called “Social Security: Some Trans-Atlantic Comparisons.” Now unencumbered by inadvertently sinking the prospects of reform or otherwise running afoul of the complex politics surrounding American social security, Beveridge could afford to be less circumspect in his opinions on social security in the United States. He noted that,



despite differences and financing and coverage, the NRPB report and the Wagner-Murray-Dingell Bill bore similarities to his own plan in that all three aimed to unify and expand social security to greater segments of the population. But compared with his own plan, he was less optimistic about the American plans' prospects for implementation, primarily because of race and federalism. He noted that on average, the Mississippi sharecroppers that he had met earned much in a day as white unionized shipyard workers in Oregon made in a single hour. These vast racial and regional income differentials and the federal-state system – the “delicate” topic about which Beveridge had been warned – made universalization and flat rates of benefits impossible.<sup>55</sup>

American reformer Eveline Burns was even more explicit about the ways that race limited the prospects for sweeping reform along a “Beveridgite” model. She wrote in 1945 that “there is a real technical obstacle due to the very great variations in levels of wages and standards of living in different parts of the country, between different occupation groups and, it must not be forgotten, between different racial groups.” It was questions of race above all, Burns wrote, that “obstruct adoption of any simple and single flat rate system such as Beveridge proposed for Great Britain.” The enforcement of a “standard of minimum adequacy of income” would “confer an especial benefit on Negroes in light of their generally lower living standards,” which would encounter “emotionally based opposition,” especially from the white southern public and southern legislators. “Here, as in so many other fields of social policy,” Burns wrote, “national progress may be held back by the unsolved social and economic problems of the south,” problems that were of a “fundamental and long-run character.”<sup>56</sup>

The emotional and intellectual appeal of the Beveridge Plan to publics on both sides of the Atlantic was in its simplicity and lucidity: a unitary system of flat contributions, regardless of income, and flat payout of benefits, regardless of income, for the entire population as a right of citizenship. This was why the Beveridge Plan had such a profound transnational impact, and why it captured the imagination of Americans in the months after its release. Eveline Burns said several years later that the “Beveridge Report had probably created an expectation that some equally simple and easily-grasped comprehensive social security plans



would be forthcoming for this country.”<sup>57</sup> But in reality, a flat rate of contributions and benefits, with southern African Americans drawing the same rate as northern industrial and clerical workers, would be “laughed at” in the United States, Burns said.<sup>58</sup> In this brief window of transnational enthusiasm for social security planning, the public might have responded to an elegant and digestible plan along the lines of the Beveridge and Marsh plans. Such a plan was impossible in a country with a federalized system, an economically and racially diverse population, and a powerful southern Democratic voting bloc in Congress that was viciously opposed to any direct or indirect threat to the racial prerogatives of state governments.

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<sup>1</sup> “Supplement to RA SS 4323” and Raymond B. Fosdick to William Beveridge, December 28, 1943, both in Box 65, and William Beveridge to Raymond D. Fosdick, January 13, 1943, Box 66, Rockefeller Foundation Records, RG 1.1, Series 401.5 (hereafter RFR), Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, New York. See also Janet Beveridge’s memoirs, which devotes three chapters to the trip. Janet Beveridge, *Beveridge and His Plan* (London: Hodder Stoughton, 1954);

<sup>2</sup> William Beveridge to Raymond D. Fosdick, February 7, 1943, Box 66, RFR.

<sup>3</sup> William Beveridge, “On Going to America,” March 10, 1943, in *The Pillars of Security and Other War-Time Essays and Addresses* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1943), 196 – 201.

<sup>4</sup> Lawrence K. Frank to Joseph Willits, February 7, 1943, Box 65, RFR.

<sup>5</sup> Joseph H. Willits to Lawrence K. Frank, March 4, 1943, Box 65, RFR.

<sup>6</sup> Memo from Joseph H. Willits, March 18, 1943, Box 65, RFR. Curiously, Altmeyer would later take responsibility for this delay in his memoirs, claiming that he had asked Beveridge to wait so he would be in a better position to testify to congress about proposed legislation. Altmeyer, *The Formative Years of Social Security*, 144.

<sup>7</sup> Memo by Roger F. Evans, April 12, 1943, Box 65, RFR.

<sup>8</sup> B.C. Thomas to Raymond Fosdick, March 18, 1943, Box 65, RFR.

<sup>9</sup> William Beveridge to John G. Winant, undated, Box 185, John G. Winant Papers, FDRL.

<sup>10</sup> Memo, “Brief Notes for General Orientation and Consideration of Sir William Beveridge,” May 11, 1943, Box 66, RFR; Russell Saville to Rockefeller Foundation, March 16, 1943 and W. J. Hinton to Roger F. Evans, April 26, 1943, both in Box 65, RFR; Arthur Johnson to William Beveridge, May 14, 1943, 11/31/1, William Henry Beveridge

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<sup>11</sup> For Churchill's own account of the voyage, see Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War, Volume IV: The Hinge of Fate* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1950), 482 – 484.

<sup>12</sup> William Beveridge, "Diary of the Visit to the USA and Canada, 2 May – 15 July 1943," 11/36, WHBC; Janet Beveridge, *Beveridge and His Plan*, 154 – 163.

<sup>13</sup> Janet Beveridge, *Beveridge and His Plan*, 163.

<sup>14</sup> William Beveridge, "Notes for Press Conference," Box 66, RFR.

<sup>15</sup> "Partial Notes of Q and A Part of WHB's Press Conference," May 15, 1943, Box 66, RFR.

<sup>16</sup> Stuart A. Rice to William Beveridge, May 18, 1943, Box 66, RFR; Stuart A. Rice to William Beveridge, May 20<sup>th</sup>, 1943, 11/31/1, WHBC.

<sup>17</sup> Roger F. Evans to William Beveridge, April 22, 1943, Box 66, RFR.

<sup>18</sup> Charles E. Merriam to William Beveridge, May 6, 1943, Box 66, RFR; "Revised Washington Schedule" [undated] and Chester Morrill to William Beveridge, May 15, 1943, both in 11/36, WHBC.

<sup>19</sup> Janet Beveridge, *Beveridge and His Plan*, 176 – 177.

<sup>20</sup> Florence C. Thorne to Joseph Willits, February 26, 1943, Box 66, RFR; Congress of Industrial Organizations, "Memo, May 21<sup>st</sup>," 11/31/1, WHBC.

<sup>21</sup> Nicholas P. Gregory, "A.F.L. to Offer Own Plan for Social Security," *New York Herald Tribune*, May 21, 1943.

<sup>22</sup> William Beveridge, "The Health Aspects of Social Security in Britain," speech at a Luncheon in Honor of Sir William and Lady Beveridge, New York, New York, June 3, 1943, 11/31/1, WHBC.

<sup>23</sup> US Congress, Senate, A Bill to Amend the Social Security Act, S. 1161, 48<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, introduced in the Senate June 3, 1943; Donald E. Spritzer, *Senator James E. Murray and the Limits of Post-War Liberalism*, (New York: Garland, 1985), 123 – 138; Alan Derickson, *Health Security for All: Dreams of Universal Health Care in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 84 – 87.

<sup>24</sup> Arthur Altmeyer to Roger F. Evans, April 23, 1943, Notes of Interview of Arthur

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Altmeyer with Roger F. Evans, May 5, 1943, William Beveridge to Arthur Altmeyer, June 2, 1943, Arthur Altmeyer to William Beveridge, June 4, 1943, William Beveridge to Arthur Altmeyer, June 7, 1943, and Memo by Roger F. Evans, April 12, 1943, all in Box 66, RFR; Memo by Roger F. Evans, April 12, 1943, Box 65, RFR.

<sup>25</sup> “Beveridge Explains Plan to D.C. Throng,” *Washington Post*, July 6, 1943.

<sup>26</sup> B.D. McElroy, “Weighing Mr. Wagner’s ‘Baby,’” *Medical Economics* 21 (October 1943).

<sup>27</sup> “Labor’s Program to Socialize Medicine Internationally,” *Medical Economics* 23 (November 1945).

<sup>28</sup> Beveridge, “Social Security: Some Trans-Atlantic Comparisons,” 319 – 320.

<sup>29</sup> Congress of Industrial Organizations, Press Release, May 25, 1945, Box 327, Robert F. Wagner Papers, Georgetown University Library Booth Family Center for Special Collections, Georgetown University, Washington, DC.

<sup>30</sup> Katznelson, *Fear Itself*; for African Americans’ *de facto* exclusion from the Social Security Act, see Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005), especially 48.

<sup>31</sup> Herman A. Gray, “The Negro and Social Security,” paper for the Conference of the Status of the Negro in a Fighting Democracy, Lincoln University, Pennsylvania, May 8 and 9, 1942, Box 6, AASSR; Jill Quadagno, “From Old-Age Assistance to Supplemental Security Income: The Political Economy of Relief in the South, 1935–1972,” in Theda Skocpol, et al., ed., *The Politics of Social Policy in the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); Robert C. Lieberman, *Shifting the Color Line: Race and the American Welfare State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); Mary Poole, *The Segregated Origins of Social Security: African Americans and the Welfare State* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

<sup>32</sup> Katznelson, *Fear Itself*, 260.

<sup>33</sup> Daniel Kryder, *Divided Arsenal: Race and the American State during World War II* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Dona Cooper Hamilton and Charles V. Hamilton, *Dual Agenda: Race and Social Welfare Policies of Civil Rights Organizations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), chapter 4.

<sup>34</sup> Edward Smith, “Social Security: Sees Bitter Fight on Cradle-to-Grave Plan; Thinks Roosevelt Has Plenty of Fight Left,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, March 27, 1943.

<sup>35</sup> Janet Beveridge, *Beveridge and His Plan*, 174.

<sup>36</sup> Social Security Board Memorandum, February 3, 1942, Box 2, Franklin D. Roosevelt Official File 1710 (hereafter FDROF) at FDRL.

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<sup>37</sup> See, for example, Edward Lewis, "The Beveridge Report on Social Security," *Baltimore Afro-American*, December 19, 1942; Orlie H. Pell, "Reviewing the Beveridge Plan: Freedom from Want," *Bags and Baggage*, April 1, 1943.

<sup>38</sup> Ruby Bryant Yearwood, "The Wagner-Murray-Dingell Bill," *Opportunity: Journal of Negro Life* 22, 1 (1944).

<sup>39</sup> Lee J. Alston and Joseph P. Ferrie, *Southern Paternalism and the American Welfare State: Economics, Politics, and Institutions in the South, 1865 – 1965* (New York: Cambridge: University Press, 1999), chapter 3.

<sup>40</sup> Quoted in Geyer, "Social Rights and Citizenship During World War II," 157.

<sup>41</sup> Caroline F. Ware, "Implications for Negro Americans of the Post-War Planning Activities of the U.S. Government," *The Journal of Negro Education* 12, 3 (Summer 1943), 551.

<sup>42</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, "A Chronicle of Race Relations," *Phylon* 4, 2 (1943), 164 – 165; for somewhat later commentary in the African American press on the applicability of the Beveridge Plan and US social security proposals to postwar decolonization, see "World Labor Unit to Air Race Issues," *Baltimore Afro-American*, April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1944.

<sup>43</sup> "Randolph Says That Negroes Should Support Cradle to the Grave Social Security Program," *The Black Worker*, March 1, 1943.

<sup>44</sup> Robeson regaled her with a rendition of *Water Boy*, her favorite of his catalogue. Janet Beveridge, *Beveridge and His Plan*, 181.

<sup>45</sup> William Beveridge, "Diary of the Visit to the USA and Canada, 2 May – 15 July 1943," 11/36, WHBC.

<sup>46</sup> William Beveridge to Franklin D. Roosevelt, July 2, 1943, Box 66, RFR; William Beveridge "Schedule of USA and Canada Visit, 1943," 11/36, WHBC.

<sup>47</sup> William Beveridge to Franklin D. Roosevelt, June 2, 1943, and William Beveridge and Jackson Davis, "Trip Report," both in Box 66, RFR.

<sup>48</sup> Altmeyer, *The Formative Years of Social Security*, 144.

<sup>49</sup> Beveridge and Davis, "Trip Report," 8; Beveridge, "Schedule of USA and Canada Visit, 1943."

<sup>50</sup> Beveridge and Davis, "Trip Report," 8.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 10, 19.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

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<sup>53</sup> “Sir William Beveridge and the Negro Problem,” *Atlanta Daily World*, July 1, 1943.

<sup>54</sup> Janet Beveridge, *Beveridge and His Plan*, 191.

<sup>55</sup> The preceding two paragraphs are based on William Beveridge, “Social Security: Some Trans-Atlantic Comparisons,” *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* 106, 4 (1943), 305 – 332.

<sup>56</sup> Eveline Burns, “Social Security,” in Seymour E. Harris, ed., *Economic Reconstruction* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1945), 393.

<sup>57</sup> Eveline Burns, “Social Security Planning in the United States,” *Agenda* (1943), 11, copy in Box 2, EBP.

<sup>58</sup> American Association for Social Security, “Minutes of the Saturday Afternoon Session: Implications of Beveridge Report and American Proposals.”