

'Gender, stress and alcohol abuse' and Mark Jackson's 'Men and women under stress'), many authors explore how both experiences of stress and models of stress were influenced by assumptions about gender. Contributors highlight assumptions that women experienced stress differently to men, for instance the idea that women did not do anything important enough to become stressed about, or that they were inherently less resilient to any sort of strain. Assumptions about masculinity and stress are also explored, particularly in relation to psychosomatic disorders. Class is also a recurring topic. Experts variously argued that the lower classes were more susceptible to stress-related illness, often because they were inferior, or that middle-class managers were more susceptible because they were so diligent.

This book is a stimulating collection of essays that situate stress in a wider context whilst also providing the close analysis of a collection of case studies. It deserves to be very widely read.

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Dana Simmons, *Vital Minimum: Need, Science & Politics in Modern France* (Chicago, IL, and London: University of Chicago Press, 2015), pp. 243, \$45.00, hardback, ISBN: 13:978-0-226-25156-1.

'To posit a need is always a political act' (p.1). So begins Dana Simmons's incisive tour of 'the parameters of human possibility' (p. 2). Simmons's broad scope is paired with a deep analysis of myriad primary sources from eighteenth through mid-twentieth-century France. We hear directly from leading agronomists, chemists, doctors, anthropologists, economists, sociologists, amateur data gatherers, union leaders and technocrats, all of whom were grappling with new scientific knowledge, political upheaval wrought by the French Revolution and the subsequent rise of industrial capitalism, which together laid waste to feudal customs governing human need.

Simmons understates the book's achievement and undersells its potentially broad appeal when she humbly declares, 'my argument is that a science of human needs undergirded the modern wage economy and the welfare state' (p. 5) This reviewer happened to be simultaneously reading Michael Marmot's *The Status Syndrome* and came to imagine a wonderful dialogue between the renowned epidemiologist Marmot and the historian Simmons.¹ Both rely on economist Amartya Sen to further their cases in fascinating ways. And both are deeply concerned with nothing less than individual and social well-being in the modern era. Interest in Simmons's *Vital Minimum* should extend well beyond historians to include scholars of public health, economics and social policy. The book asks big questions about equality and inequality and provides historically grounded answers that illuminate pressing contemporary debates.

Simmons's book is composed of seven short body chapters, arranged chronologically, but constructed around themes. The first two chapters describe early to mid-eighteenth-century attempts to define human need in the wake of the French revolution of 1789. At the forefront were agronomists, whose field bridged the life sciences, natural sciences,

¹ Michael Marmot, *The Status Syndrome: How Social Standing Affects Our Health and Longevity* (New York: Henry Holt, 2005).

and social policy. Simmons focuses on the work of Jean-Baptiste Boussingault and Jean-Baptiste Dumas. We learn about Boussingault's 205-day imprisonment of two pigs, his precise measurements of their ingestion and excretion, and how the agronomist's findings were promulgated into models for managing scarce resources, not only on the farm but also for workers' basic needs. It must be remembered that poverty in the mid-nineteenth century was commonly perceived as a disease. Thus, the search for scientific remedies seemed only natural to researchers and political leaders alike.

In the subsequent chapter Simmons takes up the late nineteenth-century social survey. Just as the balance scale had proved indispensable to agronomists' earlier work to devise a minimum ration in hopes of preventing poverty, social surveys were similarly employed in search of the 'vital minimum'. Without doubt, notes Simmons, social surveys served as 'a foundational technology of the welfare state' but their creation and deployment were dominated by two opposing ideologies (p. 55). The first sought to divide the population into 'immutable social-medical types'. The second, authored by socialist economists and workers' associations 'favored a language of transformation and progress' (p. 56).

Indeed, a debate over the very nature of the vital minimum and to whom it should apply endured from the Third Republic (1871–1940), through the wartime regime based in Vichy (1940–1944) as well as the Gaullist Liberation government and the Fourth Republic (1944–1958). What components should it include? Should it apply to individuals? To women? Or should its goal be more racial-eugenic and pronatalist, and therefore be aimed at certain kinds of families, the larger the better? And what of its mutability? Should the vital minimum be modified in the face of societal change? And, if so, who should determine these modifications? Chapters 5–8 show us that all of these questions received varying answers between the late nineteenth and mid-twentieth century.

During the siege of Paris by Prussian forces in the winter of 1870–1871 only male 'citizen-defenders' (p. 79) were deemed eligible for food rations. Others – women, children and the indigent – were designated 'useless mouths' and were to rely on charity. This same terminology returned during the Second World War when Vichy leaders once again identified 'useless mouths' in the construction of welfare policy. The vital minimum should protect 'blood, flesh, nationhood, race, and bodily health' (p. 123). Architects and perpetrators of the contemporary Nazi racial hygiene programme employed similar language as they murdered many thousands. Never did such a programme exist in France, but Simmons demonstrates that Vichy's contribution to the development of a vital minimum varied only in degree from its Third Republic predecessor. 'The twentieth-century European welfare state was as much a racial-hygienic regime as a social-democratic one. Welfare logics and technologies passed from right to left and reached a historical apotheosis in the authoritarian regimes of the mid twentieth century.' (p.117)

The final body chapter takes up the post-war debate over the minimum wage. The French state attempted to mediate the conflict between employers and unions by championing the prowess of its statistical experts and technocrats, but to no avail. In the immediate post-war moment union leaders held the political high cards in French society. Too many employers had collaborated with the wartime Vichy regime or directly with the Nazi government in Berlin. In 1946, the government ceded to workers' demands, creating a state-enforced minimum wage. By 1951, sixty-five per cent of French workers lived on it. Even if the minimum wage did not survive the 1950s, the growth of the associated welfare state – health and disability insurance, family allowances and retirement pensions – served a similar purpose, 'to regulate the distribution of material wealth and well-being' (p. 162).

Simmons has not written another history of the French welfare state. Rather she has dashed down the welfare-state history curtains to reveal a historical window into human need in complex societies. *Vital Minimum* provides an explanation of need that immeasurably improves our understanding of the welfare state's past and our ability to speculate on its future.

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Matthew Smith, *Another Person's Poison: A History of Food Allergy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), pp. 280, \$29.95, hardback, ISBN: 978-0-231-16484-9.

In August 2009, fans attending an AC/DC concert at Commonwealth Stadium in Edmonton, Alberta were prohibited from bringing peanuts into the stadium. As Smith reveals, some fans were angered by the ban – either refusing to believe that peanut allergies could actually be this severe, or asserting that allergy sufferers needed to assume responsibility for their own health by carrying an epi-pen. In response, allergy sufferers highlighted the life-threatening nature of their condition. Smith argues that the relatively sudden emergence of anaphylactic peanut allergy has transformed our understanding of food allergies: while the possibility existed of a much broader understanding of the impact of food allergens on our overall health in the 1960s and 1970s, the emergence of anaphylactic peanut allergy gave orthodox allergists the upper hand and led us, as a society, to understand food allergy in narrower ways. While the peanut controversy lies at the heart of this well-written and engaging book, Smith also provides a broad and thoughtful history of food allergy that takes into account medical debates over what constituted food allergy, parent activism and the relationship between food, allergy and our environment. Along the way, Smith provides some intriguing comparisons between the history of allergy medicine and the history of psychiatry, arguing that both fields have been too driven by ideology and that a more pluralistic approach would be more useful for both historians and for patients.

Smith argues that prior to the twentieth century, the concept of food allergy did not exist, but physicians believed that idiosyncratic reactions to food could cause a host of conditions including: asthma, eczema and headaches. Smith takes the view that it is likely that people were allergic to foods, but because other food-related conditions such as malnutrition and food-borne pathogens were so much more severe, these idiosyncratic reactions to food were probably deemed of little consequence except to the wealthy. The field of allergy emerged in the early years of the twentieth century and Smith focuses on three researchers to demonstrate the diversity in the field. The term 'allergy' was first coined by the Austrian Clemens von Pirquet in 1906 to refer to 'any form of altered biological reactivity'. At roughly the same time, the French physiologist Charles Richet described anaphylaxis in dogs, winning a Nobel Prize for this work in 1913. Finally, the Irish physician Francis Hare, published *The Food Factor in Disease* in 1905. He argued that a variety of medical conditions including migraines, asthma, skin conditions and mental illness were caused by diet. Like the researchers that would follow in their footsteps, these researchers represented a range of views: some allergists would regard allergy as a relatively rare condition with severe symptoms, while others believed that food allergies caused a wide range of conditions and ailments. Smith points out that many of the more liberal theorists of the ubiquity of food allergy suffered from allergies themselves: one of the most enthusiastic