Ball (1900–1958), together with the extent to which it continues to provide a vehicle for challenging gender binaries, is touched on only briefly. Further attention could also be paid to the negative backlash, and official sanction, such transgressive dressing frequently excited—and can still provoke.

Nevertheless, this occasional lapse in specificity or depth is amply compensated for by the rich body of research that underpins Wilson's text, along with her ability to convey not simply the practical details of British production and participation in fancy dress, but also the excitement of wearing and examining these extravagant and extraordinary garments. While not pretending to offer a global or contemporary reflection on the evolving significance of fancy dress, Wilson has established a rigorous and fruitful foundation from which future researchers—across disciplines—can start to engage more fully with the cultural and political connotations of fancy dress, both within and beyond Britain.

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Eve Worth. The Welfare State Generation: Women, Agency and Class in Britain Since 1945

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Eve Worth conducted interviews with thirty-six women born in the United Kingdom between 1938 and 1952, for the most part, about their "life experiences" and argues that this cohort of women, specifically, should be understood as the "welfare state generation" (1). In *The Welfare State Generation: Women, Agency and Class in Britain Since 1945*, she argues that the United Kingdom's welfare state had such a formative impact on these women's lives that they should be considered a coherent generation, distinct from those that came before and after them. Using her interviews Worth concludes that the welfare state, particularly expansions and changes to secondary and tertiary education between the mid-1940s and the mid-1970s, was a key agent precipitating many of the major changes that this early postwar generation of women were the first to experience: not just working, but pursuing careers, and, relatedly, experiencing what she calls "non-linear" (55) social mobility.

Explicitly drawing from Carolyn Kay Steedman's comment that the welfare state's provision of milk and orange juice made her feel like she "had a right to exist" (1), Worth interrogates her participants' understandings of how different services, like passing or failing the eleven-plus, influenced their lives and made them aware of their place in Britain's class and gender hierarchy. One area where this works well is in her consideration of the women's middle age and later lives in chapters 6 and 7. Worth notes that both sociological and historical studies of, for example, the 1968 generation or second-wave feminists *and* memoirs and autobiographies written by women of the generation she is studying tend to stop around the age of young adulthood, leaving middle and older age unstudied. Worth also encourages us to rethink familiar periodizations when she argues that the 1970s, rather than earlier,

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were a "golden age" (67) of social mobility for women. In chapters 5 and 6, she discusses the expansion of further education under the Wilson government and the rise of the Women's Liberation Movement, arguing that the welfare state's very structure, as it grew and changed, encouraged women to act, individually and collectively, formally and informally, to fight for equal pay and equal treatment.

In the earlier chapters of the book Worth treads familiar ground. The symbolic importance of free-at-point-of-service health care from the National Health Service, the significant repercussions of passing or failing the eleven-plus exam, and alienation experienced by working-class girls in middle-class spaces from grammar school onwards have long been themes in modern British history. Similarly, despite her modification of its periodization, in her argument that the welfare state's own widening of employment opportunities was something of a poisoned chalice, as women were pressured into lower-paid and highly gendered occupations, like nursing, teaching, and administrative and secretarial roles, Worth echoes other accounts that have noted this dynamic.

Worth positions her book as part of the turn back to social history. She argues that the interviews she conducted can and should be used as evidence of "what actually happened in a material sense" (2). Unfortunately, however, Worth's authorial voice predominates so her subjects, who are given brief biographies in an appendix, seem largely interchangeable. Although Worth is keen to assert the agency of her subjects the reader gains little sense of the women involved as historical actors let alone what she calls the "glorious messiness" (3) of people's lives. The ordinariness of her subjects may also be questioned. Worth acknowledges that all the women she interviewed are white—because no women of color responded to her call for participants—and that in her sample women who passed the eleven-plus were overrepresented, while those who went to secondary modern schools were underrepresented. But those acknowledgements are not sufficient explanation for reproducing forms of exclusion that too often have structured social historical accounts of the past.

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