

Acknowledgements

In discussions on the future of European welfare states, many observers have focused on ethnic heterogeneity and multicultural structures: to what extent has ethnic homogeneity been a precondition for the making of strong welfare states in Europe, especially in the Nordic countries? Contributing to this discussion by means of critical historical research was one of the main objectives of the Nordic Centre of Excellence NordWel (The Nordic Welfare State – Historical Foundations and Future Challenges), an international research project and network funded by the Nordic research funding organisation NordForsk in 2007–2014. The present book had its point of departure in this endeavour.

A comparative approach, notably examining European and American experiences, proved important. One source of inspiration was *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, a path-breaking book by the Swedish economist and social engineer Gunnar Myrdal, published in 1944. Myrdal's book had a significant impact on thinking about race in the United States and about the relationships between racial and ethnic structures and the welfare state more broadly. Many studies have argued that the United States failed to develop a robust welfare state because of its ethnic and especially its racial heterogeneity. Current debates on the challenges of European and Nordic welfare states indicate that the kind of 'dilemma' that Myrdal identified no longer appears to be solely an American one. However, the historical contexts and routes to the dilemma were different.

We found it useful to look at how Myrdal's book came to be written, how it shaped subsequent thinking about race in the United States, how European and, especially, Nordic populations and governments are currently approaching the strangers in their midst, and what social citizenship looks like from a global perspective. The plan for a book on these questions began in 2009, when NordWel invited a multi-disciplinary group of leading US and European scholars to a conference at the University of Southern Denmark, Odense. Most of the participants agreed to contribute to the book project, and we invited several other scholars to bring in additional perspectives. We editors have found it inspiring to collaborate with all of the authors, who, while representing different

disciplines and approaches, have been ready to write and revise their texts as chapters in a coherent thematic whole.

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