

The Antivaccine Heresy: Jacobson v. Massachusetts and the Troubled History of Compulsory Vaccination in the United States. By Karen L. Walloch. University of Rochester Press. 2015. xi + 339pp. £80.00

The roadway to effective, accepted vaccines in American history is neither smooth nor straight. Vaccines naturally induce potent social, political, and economic responses. They raise questions about scientific authority and the production of medical knowledge. Even more, vaccines have challenged the physician's influence over patient-consumer choice in the medical marketplace, as anyone who watched Jenny McCarthy shape the discussion over autism and anti-vaccination can attest. With Karen L. Walloch's important new book, *The Antivaccine Heresy*, we are exposed to much earlier wrangling over vaccination – specifically, compulsory vaccination – in the United States. Set against the vivid, shifting backdrop of Progressive-era ferment and, more particularly, a modern paradigm of public health predicated on the rise of bacteriology, Walloch examines the landmark *Jacobson v. Massachusetts* decision of 1905, which upheld a state statute mandating vaccination. The decision established a “broad and sweeping state authority to compel citizens to undergo medical treatment in the interest of public health.” (2) As such, an analysis of the decision stimulates broader questions about “difficult medical and human rights issues.” (2) Even more broadly, the monograph is instructive for contemporary disputes over the use of vaccines, other contested medical technologies, and the specific rights of the individual to make health care decisions that run counter to scientific and medical orthodoxy.

Part of the Rochester Studies in Medical History, *The Antivaccine Heresy* is a tightly written monograph, containing fifteen illustrations and two appendices. It builds on previous research by Arthur Allen, James Colgrove, Nadav Davidovitch, and Judith Leavitt, yet it also constitutes part of a recent assemblage of books examining vaccines in America. Many of these texts – hastily rushed to print after widespread media coverage of Jenny McCarthy's campaign against vaccines – are aimed at a general audience, whereas others target more specialized academic and historical audiences. Two in the latter group include Elena Conis's *Vaccine Nation: America's Changing Relationship with Immunization* (Chicago UP, 2014) and Stephen Mawdsley's very recent *Selling Science: Polio and the Promise of Gamma Globulin* (Rutgers UP, 2016), both of which concentrate largely on the second half of the twentieth century and adopt a nationwide approach. Walloch seeks to achieve ends altogether different. Her goal is to “understand vaccination primarily from the perspective of the Boston and Cambridge citizens who were on the receiving end of public health policy,” which allows for a “more precise and nuanced characterization of antivaccination.” (4) In short, her narrative is more regionally focused and designed to unpack antivaccination ideas in a localized context.

*The Antivaccine Heresy* offers a lucid and stimulating portrait of antivaccination movements at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including the Anti-vaccination League of America, Anti-vaccination Society of America, and Massachusetts Anti-compulsory Vaccination Society, which functioned independently of any greater national organization. The book also provides absorbing sketches of key opinion leaders and colourful insurgents, such as pastor Henning Jacobson, John Mugford, and Albert Pear, among others. Here Walloch deftly traces the shimmering outlines of whole beings, with all their quirks and quiddities. This approach matters, especially since said individuals believed “they were fighting for a fundamental right to preserve individual health choices against a corrupt group of medical elitists who sought to establish a state-supported monopoly over medicine.” (7) Even more, this matters because these individuals – sometimes implicitly, other times, explicitly – advanced views of compulsory vaccination as un-American, anathema to individual liberty, and a by-product of both “scientific subterfuge and political shenanigans.” (9) Yet, Walloch avoids reflexive criticism of historical actors holding antivaccination agendas. “It is simplistic and inaccurate,” she writes objectively, to describe them as “irrational antigovernment cranks.” (216) The lesson she is trying to impart is clear. Resistance to immunization or other medical decisions is not borne out of singular ignorance, nor is it always a function of big government, anti-medical establishment paranoia. To be

sure, there are very real consequences of ignoring the best scientific evidence on inoculating agents. However, by treating the turn-of-the-century antivaccinationist views in Massachusetts coolly and objectively, and in seeking to appreciate why well-educated and reasonable people objected to medical innovation, we may develop more sophisticated responses to vaccine counter-narratives and counter-knowledges in the present.

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