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Nobody's Burden: Lessons from the Great Depression on the Struggle for Old-Age Security

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Nobody's Burden: Lessons on Old Age from the Great Depression is the first book-length study of the experience of old-age during the Great Depression. Part history, part social critique, the contributors rely on archival research, social history, narrative study and theoretical analysis to argue that Americans today, as in the past, need to rethink old-age policy and accept their shared responsibility for elder care. The Great Depression serves as the cultural backdrop to this argument, illustrating that during times of social and economic crisis, society's ageism and the limitations in old-age care become all the more apparent.

At the core of the book are vivid stories of specific men and women who applied for old-age pensions from a private foundation in Detroit, Michigan, between 1927 and 1933. Most applicants who received pensions became life-long clients, and their lives were documented in great detail by social workers employed by the foundation. These stories raise issues that elders and their families face today: the desire for independence and autonomy; the importance of having a place of one's own, despite financial and physical dependence; the fears of being and becoming a burden to one's self and others; and the combined effects of ageism, racism, sexism and classism over the life course of individuals and families. Contributors focus in particular on issues of gender and aging, as the majority of clients were women over 60, and all of the case workers - among the first geriatric social workers in the country — were women in their 20s and early 30s. *Nobody's Burden* is unique not only in content, but also in method and form. The contributors were members of an archival research group devoted to the study of these case files. Research was conducted collaboratively and involved scholars from the humanities (English, folklore) and the social sciences (anthropology, communications, gerontology, political science, social work, and sociology).

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