

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-35766-1 - Social Security: Visions and Revisions - A Twentieth Century Fund Study
W. Andrew Achenbaum

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Social Security: Visions and Revisions

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-35766-1 - Social Security: Visions and Revisions - A Twentieth Century Fund Study
W. Andrew Achenbaum

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

The Twentieth Century Fund is an independent research foundation that undertakes policy studies of economic, political, and social institutions and issues. The Fund was founded in 1919 and endowed by Edward A. Filene.

Board of Trustees of the Twentieth Century Fund

Morris B. Abram	Georges-Henri Martin
H. Brandt Ayers	Lawrence K. Miller, <i>Emeritus</i>
Peter A. A. Berle, Chairman	P. Michael Pitfield
Jonathan B. Bingham, <i>Emeritus</i>	Don K. Price, <i>Emeritus</i>
José A. Cabranes	Richard Ravitch
Joseph A. Califano, Jr.	Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.
Alexander M. Capron	Albert Shanker
Edward E. David, Jr.	Harvey I. Sloane, M.D.
Brewster C. Denny	Theodore C. Sorensen
Charles V. Hamilton	James Tobin
August Heckscher, <i>Emeritus</i>	David B. Truman, <i>Emeritus</i>
Matina S. Horner	Shirley Williams
James A. Leach	

M. J. Rossant, Director

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-35766-1 - Social Security: Visions and Revisions - A Twentieth Century Fund Study
W. Andrew Achenbaum

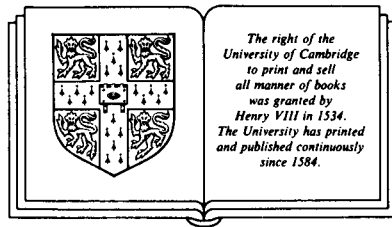
Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Social Security: Visions and Revisions

A Twentieth Century Fund Study

W. ANDREW ACHENBAUM



CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge
New York New Rochelle
Melbourne Sydney

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-35766-1 - Social Security: Visions and Revisions - A Twentieth Century Fund Study
W. Andrew Achenbaum

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521328661

© The Twentieth Century Fund, Inc. 1986

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without the written
permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1986

First paperback edition 1987

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Achenbaum, W. Andrew.

Social security.

“Twentieth Century Fund study.”

Bibliography: p.

Includes index.

1. Social security – United States – History.

I. Title.

HD7125.A34 1986 368.4'3'00973 86-4145

ISBN 978-0-521-32866-1 hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-35766-1 paperback

Transferred to digital printing 2007

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-35766-1 - Social Security: Visions and Revisions - A Twentieth Century Fund Study
W. Andrew Achenbaum

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Contents

<i>Foreword</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xi
Introduction	I
Part I Social security comes of age	
1 Social security: the early years	13
2 Social security matures, 1940–1972	38
3 The mid-life crisis of American social security	61
4 Social security gets a new lease on life	81
Part II Current social security issues in historical perspective	
5 Retirement under social security	103
6 Social security and the modern American woman	124
7 Universal coverage: an either/or proposition?	142
8 Federal health care programs and social security	161
9 A vision renewed: individual needs and mutual responsibility	179
<i>Notes</i>	197
<i>Index</i>	279

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-35766-1 - Social Security: Visions and Revisions - A Twentieth Century Fund Study
W. Andrew Achenbaum

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

To Emily and Laura

Only where love and need are one,
And the work is play for mortal stakes,
Is the deed ever really done
For heaven and the future's sakes.

Robert Frost,
"Two Tramps in Mud Time"

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-35766-1 - Social Security: Visions and Revisions - A Twentieth Century Fund Study

W. Andrew Achenbaum

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Foreword

It has seemed in recent years as if the nation's social security system is in a state of permanent crisis. But from its very beginnings almost fifty years ago, when it was a very different system, it has been under stress. Over the years, it has been gradually reshaped – expanded, broadened, and strengthened – to meet changing conditions and needs. Today, it enjoys a large measure of immunity from political attack. In fact, when the system was in the midst of yet another crisis just a few years ago, a bipartisan commission recommended new reforms that, once again, saved the system. In the last presidential election, both of the leading candidates made solemn vows to maintain its benefits.

So the system survives. Yet it is clear that its long-term solvency is far from assured. Indeed, the resort to short-term tinkering to shore it up means that facing the basic funding problem of the system has once again been postponed rather than resolved. For that reason, the Twentieth Century Fund decided that what was needed was a searching examination of how the system has evolved, an examination of its economic and social development and the ways in which it has managed to transform itself from a controversial political idea into a permanent – and still growing – institution with widespread support.

The Fund has had a long and continuing interest in the problems of security for retired Americans. Its first study in the area, *The Townsend Crusade*, looked at the movement that dramatized the plight of the aged during the Depression. It was followed by *More Security for Old Age*, a 1937 book that commended the “immense social advance marked by the passage of the Social Security Act,” and evaluated various plans for carrying it out. Then, in the mid-1950s, the Fund, “in the face of still unresolved economic problems of aging and retirement,” embarked on another investigation that reexamined the system and its problems. Our own history suggests that the quest for a permanent solution is elusive. But it

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-35766-1 - Social Security: Visions and Revisions - A Twentieth Century Fund Study

W. Andrew Achenbaum

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

x

Foreword

also suggests that there is something to be learned from each new study.

Certainly that is the case with our latest effort, this book by W. Andrew Achenbaum. He brings the special skills of a historian to bear in his analytical account of how and why the system has developed in the ways that it has. In doing so, he has squarely faced the major difficulty in achieving effective and permanent reform, which is just accepting the fact that the system has become a form of welfare rather than a means of insurance. As such, it has attained the status of a political sacred cow.

We think Achenbaum's intriguing historical treatment is a major contribution to understanding the system, which after all is essential to its reform. His recommendations for change are also worthy of consideration. We at the Fund are grateful to him for his thoughtful and thorough study of the system in the context of the sweeping changes that have taken place in the past half century. We think the public, politicians, and policymakers should be too.

M. J. Rossant, Director
The Twentieth Century Fund
November 1985

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-35766-1 - Social Security: Visions and Revisions - A Twentieth Century Fund Study
W. Andrew Achenbaum

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Acknowledgments

I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to the Twentieth Century Fund, especially for the opportunity to collaborate with three historians in the writing of this book. James A. Smith, my program officer, nurtured the project from beginning to end. With his steady encouragement, I gained a deeper appreciation for the powers of historical analysis and narrative in addressing contemporary social issues. William L. Bischoff showed me how a supportive but tough-minded editor can enable a writer to find his voice. Edward D. Berkowitz shared archival gems and offered good advice while doing his own research. I also wish to thank M. J. Rossant for keeping faith; Wendy Mercer for keeping me fiscally sound; and Marcia Bystryn, Ron Chernow, Nettie Gerduk, and Beverly Goldberg for their help. Frank Smith and Russell Hahn at Cambridge University Press greatly expedited the actual publication of this Twentieth Century Fund Study.

I also received considerable support from people at other institutions. A National Endowment for the Humanities fellowship underwrote a year of research. Administrators, professors, librarians, and students at Carnegie-Mellon University provided resources whenever I asked for them. Pamela Holcomb, Brian Wells Martin, Michael Santos, and Forrest Jewell were tireless research assistants. I particularly benefited from criticism and suggestions made by receptive audiences at the University of Michigan and the Chautauqua Institution, by participants in Yale University's social security seminar, and by those mentioned in the endnotes to Chapter 4. I am grateful to Alan Pifer and Lydia Brontë of the Carnegie Corporation of New York for inviting me to serve on the advisory council of their Aging Society Project; I gained far more than I contributed to the success of that important venture.

Friends assisted in important ways. Peter N. Stearns, Lenore Epstein Bixby, and Robert J. Myers at different times read drafts of the work in progress; they caught many factual errors and tried to spare me from intellectual blunders. Louisa Cunningham, William Kelly, Jan Lewis,

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-35766-1 - Social Security: Visions and Revisions - A Twentieth Century Fund Study
W. Andrew Achenbaum

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xii

Acknowledgments

Daniel A. Nichols, and Tom Ramsay offered me hospitality and food for thought on my research sojourns. As always, members of my family helped me to keep the truly important dimensions of social policy uppermost in mind.