



# Mental Illness and American Society, 1875-1940

*Gerald N. Grob*

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“What caused deinstitutionalization? Why were psychiatricists and other mental health workers willing to allow responsibility for patients to be shifted from mental hospitals (largely public) that provided long-term custodial care to local communities? Gerald Grob’s excellent new book is the first to provide a convincing explanation for that transition. Unlike mental health journalists, Grob demonstrates that the basic forces for change were fully in place before the large shift of patient populations commenced at the end of World War II.” --Lawrence J. Friedman Reviews in American History “Gerald N. Grob has been exploring the history of American mental hospitals for nearly twenty years, with emphasis on public policy. This book, which brings the story up to the Second World War, has a broader compass than his previous work in being more deeply concerned with public attitudes and the evolution of the psychiatric profession. It is also a counter-revisionist work, a careful scholar’s answer to Michel Foucault, David Rothman, Andrew Scull, and other historians who are united, Grob says, in having ‘a critical if not hostile view of psychiatry and mental hospitals.’” - Norman Dain American Historical Review

Grob examines the complex interrelationships of patients, psychiatrists, mental hospitals, and government between 1875 and World War II. Challenging the now prevalent notion that mental hospitals in this period functioned as jails, he finds that, despite their shortcomings, they provided care for people unable to survive by themselves. From a rich variety of previously unexploited sources, he shows how professional and political concerns, rather than patient needs, changed American attitudes toward mental hospitals from support to antipathy. Gerald N. Grob is Professor of History at Rutgers University and has a joint appointment in the Institute for Health, Health Care Policy, and Aging Research. In 1986 he received the William H. Welch Medal of the American Association for the History of Medicine. Among his works are *Mental Institutions in America: Social Policy to 1875* (Free Press), *Edward Jarvis and the Medical World of Nineteenth-Century America* (Tennessee), and *The State and the Mentally Ill* (North Carolina).

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