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Welfare in America: How Social Science Fails the Poor. William
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emergence of statutory social welfare in the United States. Although the federal government initially insisted that the needs of disabled veterans should be met by charitable enterprises, persistent pressure from organized groups of veterans and their advocates resulted in the creation of what was known as the National Home. Today, its successor, the Veteran's Administration, manages the largest network of hospitals and related health care services in the country.

Kelly's book is easy to read, highly informative and scholarly. It builds on Skocpol's pioneering work and will be an essential reference for anyone concerned with the historical evolution of social policy in the United States.

William Epstein, *Welfare in America: How Social Science Fails the Poor*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997. \$ 45.00 hardcover, \$ 19.95 papercover.

Although social welfare policies originate in political processes, government policy making has long been informed by the ideas of social scientists. At the turn of the century, Social Darwinism and an obsession with 'feble-mindedness' in social science circles fostered the emergence of social programs that favored institutionalization and the sterilization of many needy people. During the 1930s, Keynesianism and related interventionist ideas provided an intellectual basis for the social policies of the New Deal. Communitarian populism exerted a similar influence on the formulation of President Johnson's War on Poverty Programs in the 1960s. In more recent times, the theories of Charles Murray, Lawrence Mead and Marvin Olasky have shaped the Republican Party's approach to social welfare, and contributed substantially to what many experts today regard as the demise of the welfare state.

In this useful book, William Epstein examines the contribution of contemporary social science thinking to American social policy formulation. The book is both a compendium and a critique. While documenting the ideas of a host of thinkers who currently inform social welfare policy, Epstein also berates the lack of rigorous efforts to test the veracity and usefulness of these ideas in policy implementation. While social science knowledge continues to inform the policy making process, he argues that

its application in major social programs seldom results in careful performance assessments. Where assessment are made, their claims of effectiveness are seldom dependable. Inaccurate data, inappropriate methodologies and weak scientific designs negate assumptions about the efficacy of policy approaches based on social science theories. The depressing result is that social science knowledge does not drive the policy making process but tends rather to support the ideological preconceptions of the proponents of particular approaches. The result is a failure to formulate policy interventions that will effectively address the needs of the poor.

While some readers may view Epstein's critique as unduly pessimistic, this should not detract from the major contribution he has made to documenting, in an encyclopedic way, the vast body of social science literature that has accumulated in recent years to illuminate many complex aspects of social welfare policy. His summaries of social science contributions to welfare reform, employment, family disintegration and other issues are comprehensive, informative and incisive. This excellent book will undoubtedly be widely consulted.

Joseph Wronka, *Human Rights and Social Policy in the 21st Century*.

Langham, MD: University Press of America, 1998 (revised edition). \$ 52.00 hardcover, \$ 25.00 papercover.

As reports of civil strife and government oppression in different parts of the world continue to dominate the popular media, the issue of human rights remains at the forefront of public consciousness. But, as Joseph Wronka points out in this revised edition to his informative book, the notion of human rights has social as well as civil and political dimensions. The emphasis placed on social rights in the United Nations *Declaration of Human Rights* and similar international instruments is seldom mentioned, and yet it is as important as the civil and political freedoms which are more frequently referred to. This has created a double standard which focuses attention on civil rights abuses in many poor nations but ignores the way industrial countries such as the United States have avoided their obligation to ensure social rights for all. The fact that the United States has still not ratified the United Nations *Declaration on the Rights of the Child* suggests that much more