



**WESTERN
MICHIGAN**
UNIVERSITY

The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

Volume 30
Issue 2 *June*

Article 21

June 2003

The New World of Welfare. Rebecca Blank and Ron Haskins
(Eds.).

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw>



Part of the Social Work Commons

Recommended Citation

(2003) "*The New World of Welfare.* Rebecca Blank and Ron Haskins (Eds.).," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 30 : Iss. 2 , Article 21.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol30/iss2/21>

This Book Note is brought to you by the Western Michigan University School of Social Work. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.



invaluable resource for anyone interested in the issues attending faith based social welfare today.

Rebecca Blank and Ron Haskins (Eds.), *The New World of Welfare*.
Brookings Institution Press, 2001. \$22.95 papercover.

Welfare reform has dominated social policy debates in the United States over the last decade. Since the late 1980s, when the Reagan administration passed the Family Support Act, political leaders, federal officials, state governments, private think tanks, academics and journalists have devoted a great deal of time and effort to this issue. With the enactment of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, which introduced the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families or TANF program, welfare reform has become even more prominent particularly in view of the program's apparent success. By the end of the decade, the numbers of people receiving cash benefits through the TANF program had fallen dramatically and politicians of different political persuasions claimed that the problem of welfare dependency had finally been solved.

This book provides a compendium of valuable information about welfare reform. Based on a conference hosted at the University of Michigan in 2002, the book is compiled by Rebecca Blank and Ron Haskins—two leading experts on the subject with rather different views. Haskins was a key policy Congressional maker who assisted the Republican majority craft the 1996 legislation while Blank served as a member of the Clinton Council of Economic Advisors. While Haskins approaches the subject from an approach that some might describe as 'compassionately conservative', Blank's perspective is grounded in a more conventional, welfare statist tradition. In the book's opening chapter, the two editors summarize the key issues attending welfare reform, presenting their own views and supporting them with plausible arguments.

In addition, the book contains no less than 18 chapters dealing with a wide range of topics related to welfare reform and most of them are written by the luminaries working in the field. Charles Murray addresses the issue of family formation focusing on illegitimacy and single family life while Lawrence Mead summarizes what is described as a conservative approach to welfare.

Bob Greenstein and Jocelyn Guyer address the role of medicaid and food stamps while Irv Garfinkel writes about child support. LaDonna Pavetti and Dan Bloom discuss sanctions while Doug Besharov and Nazanin Samari address the issue of child care. Wade Horn and Isabel Sawhill write about the importance of marriage and Hugh Hecllo traces the political history of welfare reform debates. Commentaries are provided by Glen Lourie, Eloisie Anderson, Wendal Primus and many other leading figures in the field.

The book is undoubtedly one of the most comprehensive and informative accounts of welfare reform currently available. Although it will soon be dated, it offers a rich amount of detail and it should be an important resource for scholars working in the field for many years to come. However, its focus on statistical, historical, legislative, administrative and other factual aspects fails to address in sufficient depth the ideological nature of the issue. While welfare reform is ostensibly about poverty and social need, a more critical account would show how it has provided both political parties with a convenient electoral tool, how it has coded racism and sexism, and how it has exploited human misery for ulterior purposes. The book does not address these issues nor does it give voice to those who are the recipients (or, some would argue, victims) of welfare policy making. Despite its valuable contribution, this book focuses on the 'facts' of welfare reform and one cannot help thinking that has somehow missed or down played the whole point of the welfare 'reform' project.