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The Welfare Experiments: Politics and Policy Evaluation.
Robin H. Rogers-Dillon.

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policy and social work educators. The book not only provides much useful and relevant information but is enjoyable and very readable.

Robin H. Rogers-Dillon, *The Welfare Experiments: Politics and Policy Evaluation*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004. \$55.00 hardcover, \$21.95 papercover.

The idea that social science knowledge can be applied to inform and even shape public policy is an old one. Inspired by the positivist belief that the methods of the natural sciences can be effectively employed to study social phenomena, 19th century American social reformers engaged in scientific "fact gathering" to reveal the extent of poverty and deprivation in the country's rapidly growing cities. The hope that their discoveries would foster progressive social change succeeded and paved the way for the more extensive application of social science knowledge in the 1930s when the New Deal implemented policies that reflected decades of policy relevant social science research. During the 1960s, research played a major role in social policy formulation, and it appeared that social scientists had attained widespread respect for their dispassionate efforts to provide politicians with sound data and information on which to base policy making.

These developments have fostered what Robin Rogers-Dillon believes is the myth that social policies are rational, non-ideological and largely based on carefully formulated research. In her erudite and readable book, she shows that the waiver experiments carried out by many states and evaluated by a variety of think tanks, universities and research organizations during the late 1980s and early 1990s to test "what works" in welfare, were in fact shaped by political agendas. The welfare experiments conducted under these waiver programs negate the view that social science research informs policy making in a technocratic and neutral way. Indeed, the waiver programs turned out to be an effective way of promoting a partisan policy agenda in the face of Congressional intransigence. Rogers-Dillon points out that attempts to significantly alter the AFDC program through legislative action had repeatedly failed, and there seemed little prospect that the system could be reformed through the Congress. The introduction of waiver projects during the late 1980s at the behest of the

National Governor's Association effectively bypassed Congress creating an administrative mechanism for testing conditionality ideas such as regular school attendance for welfare children, job training and time limits. As politically savvy governors claimed success for their pilot projects, the waivers (and the social science research which supported their claims), undermined the institutional basis for welfare and resulted within a relatively short space of time in radical changes to the nation's federal social assistance program. To elaborate on this argument, Rogers-Dillon focuses on Florida's Family Transition Program showing in great detail how this particular demonstration project was used to support the political goal of ending the AFDC program.

There is much in this book which will be of interest not only to those who have studied the changes that have been implemented in the American welfare system in recent years but to anyone concerned with the social policy making process. The author presents her argument in a clear and incisive way and provides a rich source of information about how the waiver projects gradually evolved to shape a coherent political agenda. She also makes good use of theory adding a new twist to the historical institutionalist perspective which has placed much store on the path-dependence of social policy. By providing an opportunity for politicians to use administrative rather than legislative mechanisms to achieve their goals, the waiver projects produced rapid results. These insights are important not only for scholarly purposes but to inform those dedicated to identifying and implementing a future progressive social policy agenda.