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

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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.

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, po-
litical 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 Fam-
ilies or TANF program, welfare reform has become even more
prominent particularly in view of the program’s apparent suc-
cess. 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 Uni-
versity 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 199t legis-
lation while Black 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 conven-
tional, 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 deal-
ing 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 sum-
marizes 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 Heclo 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.