



Democracy Without Decency: Good Citizenship and the War on Poverty

William M. Epstein

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The conservative attacks on the welfare system in the United States over the past several decades have put liberal defenders of poverty relief and social insurance programs on the defensive. In this no-holds-barred look at the reality of American social policy since World War II, William Epstein argues that this defense is not worth mounting—that the claimed successes of American social programs are not sustained by evidence. Rather than their failure being the result of inadequate implementation or political resistance stemming from the culture wars, these programs and their built-in limitations actually do represent what the vast majority of people in this country want them to be.

However much people may speak in favor of welfare, the proof of what they really want is in the pudding of the social policies that are actually legislated. The stinginess of America's welfare system is the product of basic American values rooted in the myth of "heroic individualism" and reinforced by a commitment to social efficiency, the idea that social services need to be minimal and compatible with current social arrangements.

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