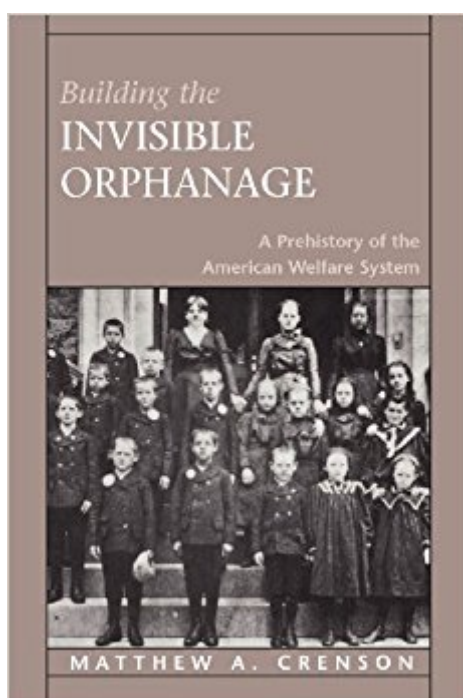


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Building The Invisible Orphanage: A Prehistory Of The American Welfare System



Synopsis

In 1996, America abolished its long-standing welfare system in favor of a new and largely untried public assistance program. Welfare as we knew it arose in turn from a previous generation's rejection of an even earlier system of aid. That generation introduced welfare in order to eliminate orphanages. This book examines the connection between the decline of the orphanage and the rise of welfare. Matthew Crenson argues that the prehistory of the welfare system was played out not on the stage of national politics or class conflict but in the micropolitics of institutional management. New arrangements for child welfare policy emerged gradually as superintendents, visiting agents, and charity officials responded to the difficulties that they encountered in running orphanages or creating systems that served as alternatives to institutional care. Crenson also follows the decades-long debate about the relative merits of family care or institutional care for dependent children. Leaving poor children at home with their mothers emerged as the most generally acceptable alternative to the orphanage, along with an ambitious new conception of social reform. Instead of sheltering vulnerable children in institutions designed to transform them into virtuous citizens, the reformers of the Progressive era tried to integrate poor children into the larger society, while protecting them from its perils.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The virtue of Crenson's book is that it is a close examination of the sea change that brought the welfare system into existence in the first place. (David Warsh Boston Globe) A valuable book, sure

to leave its mark as an important and scholarly examination of the roots of American social policy, not without implication for today. (Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan) Building the Invisible Orphanage is an extraordinary piece of scholarship. It is based on prodigious research and will doubtless alter debates about the origins and development of the American welfare state. It offers a stiff challenge to prevailing perspectives on the history of welfare in the United States. It will be roundly debated and future scholars will have to reckon with its findings. (Robert C. Lieberman, Columbia University)

A valuable book, sure to leave its mark as an important and scholarly examination of the roots of American social policy, not without implication for today. --Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Didn't even finish reading it but it was a great source for a term paper I wrote about the history of orphanages in the United States. Def recommend it, looking forward to finishing it.

You may have read Oliver Twist, Dicken's classic about the poorhouse and orphanages of early 19th century Britain. Grenson here provides the American analog, if you've ever wondered what the American experience may have been like. To be sure, Grenson's is not a work of fiction. But reading it gave rise [at least for me] to inevitable comparisons with Dickens. The book talks about the funding and organisation. It tries to span a vast nation and much of the 19th century. Hence it does not claim to exhaustiveness. But there is still a lot of details. Including some pathetic letters from the hapless orphans, describing why they had been whipped for sundry infractions.

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