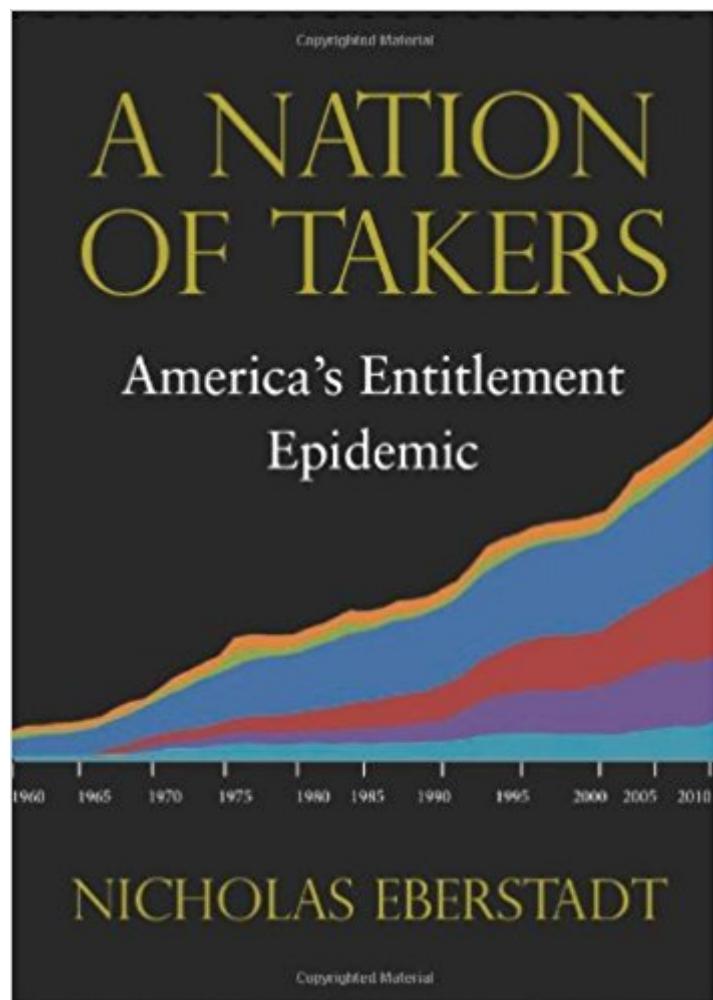


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A Nation Of Takers: America's Entitlement Epidemic



Synopsis

In *A Nation of Takers: America's Entitlement Epidemic*, one of our country's foremost demographers, Nicholas Eberstadt, details the exponential growth in entitlement spending over the past fifty years. As he notes, in 1960, entitlement payments accounted for well under a third of the federal government's total outlays. Today, entitlement spending accounts for a full two-thirds of the federal budget. Drawing on an impressive array of data and employing a range of easy- to- read, four color charts, Eberstadt shows the unchecked spiral of spending on a range of entitlements, everything from medicare to disability payments. But Eberstadt does not just chart the astonishing growth of entitlement spending, he also details the enormous economic and cultural costs of this epidemic. He powerfully argues that while this spending certainly drains our federal coffers, it also has a very real, long-lasting, negative impact on the character of our citizens. Also included in the book is a response from one of our leading political theorists, William Galston. In his incisive response, he questions Eberstadt's conclusions about the corrosive effect of entitlements on character and offers his own analysis of the impact of American entitlement growth.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Within a lifetime, the nature of government and societies' expectations of it have fundamentally changed. Once the realm of local communities, responsibility for the care of those in need has been transferred to distant government. This rapid, radical change is unprecedented in human history and

has resulted in a range of pathologies that undermine the foundation of our society. Things that can't go on forever stop. The question is how we avoid the catastrophic kind. The book I wanted would have discussed this problem, its implications and potential solutions. This was not that book, though it came tantalizingly close at points before frustratingly veering away. Instead, the short collection (144 pages) is a long data-heavy essay by American Enterprise Institute economist/demographer Nicholas Eberstadt followed by counter-points from each of Brookings Institute professor William Galston and former George W Bush White House adviser Yuval Levin. A final wrap up by Dr. Eberstadt closes the effort. It is a debate waged with compliments and much mutual admiration. Dr. Eberstadt understands the problem, but couldn't seem to escape the cold certainty of his data. This data is clear that government has fundamentally changed so that entitlement spending dwarfs all other roles, continues to grow in proportion and is already beyond the ability of our society to sustain. This point is made again and again and seems unassailable against the most determined critic. Indeed, serving as critic, Dr. Galston simply concedes the point and is reduced to arguing that the clear and fundamental shift in government has not had a corresponding impact on communities and social mores and that some way should be found to make the system sustainable.

I share author Eberstadt's point of view, that entitlements are a time bomb that will need to be drastically modified else they'll blow up the nation's future (i.e. make later generations live lives of privation compared to ours -- and curse us for it [I'm 66]). And the book is a fairly good review of the subject, mostly at the top level of overall budgets for entitlements in comparison to GDP (and their changes over the last five decades). There's one exception: The explosion in the use of Social Security's disability Insurance [DI] program is discussed in more detail and, naturally enough, follows immediately upon a section titled "The Male Flight from Work in the Entitlement Society." One point, in particular, sticks in my mind: "[T]he proclivity to rely upon government disability payments today is at least as much a 'white thing' as a tendency for any other American group." This conclusion (pp. 53 -55) is based upon the demography of regions that have high DI use compared to ones that don't. Eberstadt works at the American Enterprise Institute, and his views are consistent with that. The book also contains few-page-response sections from William Galston and Yuval Levin. Galston is at the Brookings Institution, and he politely disagrees with Eberstadt's theme that the huge surge in use of entitlements directly reflects a degradation in the civic character of American society. I come down on Eberstadt's side, but Galston's demurral is definitely worth considering. (Levin's remarks, largely in accord with Eberstadt's viewpoint, are tantalizingly

interesting but too terse for me to fully understand what he's saying.) I don't think this product is worth five stars, because I think it needed further polishing.

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