

# The End of Welfare As We Knew It

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*[In the current budget debates, it is taken for granted that the welfare program for families has been a failure and its end has been a blessing. To remind people what the actual record has been, I offer here the section on welfare from a book that I co-wrote. I have added up-dated information.]*

Conservative policymakers have successfully dismantled the safety net for poor people, often using the media to turn the public and government officials against the poor, particularly welfare recipients. Think tanks such as the Heritage Foundation, the Manhattan Institute, and the American Enterprise Institute put out a stream of books and magazines and flooded the press with news releases.

## Press Coverage of Welfare

Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR), an organization that analyzes press coverage, conducted a three-month study of the media's coverage of welfare issues from December 1, 1994, to February 24, 1995, in the period leading up to enactment of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996.[1] Most of the people interviewed by the media were males; most were politicians and government officials; and most gave the official line that spending on the poor ought to be restricted. State and local officials most often interviewed were Republican governors who ran punitive programs, such as Tommy Thompson of Wisconsin and John Engler of Michigan. Few of those reports included any dissenters from the get-tough approach.

Welfare recipients were seldom interviewed, and when they were, they were given limited roles, and at worst they were attacked. In one vivid example, multimillion-dollar earner Diane Sawyer of ABC devoted a segment of *Prime Time* in 1995 to grilling a group of teenage mothers receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children.[2]

Explaining that "to many people these girls are public enemy No. 1," Sawyer harangued them on behalf of "taxpayers" who were "mad as hell." "Answer their question," she demanded: "Why should they pay for your mistake?"

Sixteen-year-old Lisa Wright, one of *Prime Time's* interviewees, tried to point out that when it comes to taxpayer dollars, AFDC is "such a small percentage now, you know, of the amount of money taxpayers send in. Most of the money is going for defense." But Sawyer was having none of it: She dragged the discussion right back to female "irresponsibility." [3]

Jonathan Alter in 1994 linked "lascivious teenagers" to "every threat to the fabric of this country." Alter harped on the theme of shame for poor young women, comparing them to drunk drivers.[4] When they attacked teenagers on welfare, neither Sawyer nor Alter pointed out that 70 percent of so-called teen pregnancies are the result of sex with men over 20. A study by sociologist Mike Males suggests that 50,000 teen pregnancies a year are caused by rape, and two-thirds of teen mothers have histories of sexual abuse by a perpetrator averaging 27 years of age.[5]

The welfare recipients that the media selected to be interviewed often reinforced stereotypes. In a *U.S. News & World Report* cover story, "six of the seven pictures were of women of color, mostly African-β Americans. The only white woman pictured was described as clinically depressed, as if poverty only affects white people who are in some way handicapped." [6] Recipients shown in the media often had several children, even though families on welfare have an average of 1.9 children,

slightly lower than the national average.

Reminiscent of much reporting on the AIDS crisis, stories on welfare drew a stark distinction between poverty's innocent and guilty victims. The acceptably innocent were children; the guilty were their moms. Although poor children certainly need defenders, poor children come from poor families. In the media, however, "innocent children" were often ominously separated from their guilty moms (just as "AIDS babies" were often described as more or less self-conceived).[7]

Research and advocacy groups made up only 9 percent of media sources during the period that FAIR studied. After participating in two hours of a *Firing Line* debate on welfare, Frances Fox Piven commented to the *St. Petersburg Times*, "I am struck by how little evidence matters in talk about welfare." [8]

Yet the stereotypes that conservatives had created returned to haunt them when they wanted to persuade businesses to hire welfare mothers. How could you ask a CEO to hire people whom you had previously described as lazy, undependable, and oversexed? A year after the Personal Responsibility Act had been passed, a *New York Times* article by Jason DeParle reported that "welfare recipients, last year's political pariahs, are shedding their outcast status." [9]

The NBC affiliate in Montgomery, Alabama, WSFA, had a weekly feature portraying a welfare family in favorable terms. On St. Louis radio, an advertising campaign praised those with the "guts to get off welfare." In Charlotte, North Carolina, there were billboards—paid for by the county and posted by the Chamber of Commerce—urging employers to give recipients a chance.

The effort to erase the stigma of welfare was coordinated by the Welfare to Work Partnership, which was established in 1997 with President Clinton's encouragement (President Clinton had signed the bill into law). It included corporate executives and aimed to persuade business leaders to hire welfare recipients. It conducted an advertising campaign with the slogans "Welfare mothers make responsible employees" and "Welfare to work is a program that creates independence." [10] Politicians and corporate executives, with the help of the media, were rehabilitating the welfare recipients that conservatives had demonized.

## **The End of Entitlements**

President Reagan's budget director, David Stockman, asserted that "there are no entitlements—period." [11] In his book *Losing Ground* [12], Charles Murray argued that illegitimacy, crime, and family deterioration are caused by AFDC (TANF) payments and rules, and he recommended the elimination of virtually all social benefits except Social Security. [13] Ten years later, in his book *The Bell Curve*, [14] Murray's racism was blatant. He argued that welfare should be abolished not simply because of the economic incentive it creates but because it encourages dysgenesis, the outbreeding of intelligent whites by genetically inferior blacks, Hispanics, and poor European Americans. [15]

In response to the conservative alarm about welfare dependence, advocates for the poor countered that the problem was an undependable state. The Catholic bishops, in their pastoral letter on the U.S. economy, claimed that poverty violated a sense of community, deprived people of citizenship, and left them powerless. It "assaults not only one's pocketbook but also one's fundamental human dignity." [16]

The bishops trumpeted their outrage like biblical prophets: "That so many people are poor in a nation as rich as ours," they wrote, "is a social and moral scandal that we cannot ignore." [17] And in response to the call to "put those welfare mothers to work," the bishops took an increasingly

unpopular stand in favor of giving mothers (or fathers) the right to stay home to care for their children and to be supported in this important work by welfare grants.

Charles Murray said that illegitimacy was the “single most important social problem of our time,”[18] despite the fact that teen pregnancy rates were had actually dropped to the lowest rate in sixty years.[19] Murray wanted to eliminate welfare for teenage parents, believing that when teenagers realize that there are no benefits that come to them when they become unmarried parents, they will stop having children. Not only would he deprive these individuals of AFDC grants, he would also deprive their children of child support from the father of the child. Children should receive support from the father only when the mother is married to him.

Of course Murray’s idea that cutting off AFDC benefits will prevent pregnancy is absurd. Instead, it will help to restigmatize having babies without getting married, which is what the right wing quite clearly says it wants to do. Title I of the Personal Responsibility Act, titled “Reducing Illegitimacy,” declared that “marriage is the foundation of a successful society” and went on to give a laundry list of so-called facts about illegitimacy that featured teenage mothers and linked criminality with absent black fathers. States have joined in this warfare against teen parents, passing laws restricting welfare and giving them rewards (dubbed “Bridefare” or “Wedfare” programs) if they marry any man, not necessarily the father of their child.

The Personal Responsibility Act was particularly tough on teen parents, requiring unmarried parents under the age of 18 to live with an adult and stay in school in order to receive benefits. About two-thirds of unmarried teen parents do live with their parents, but the ones who don’t may be required to live in a group home or institution sponsored by the state. This law has resulted in many teenagers being dropped from the welfare rolls.

President Clinton acknowledged that the best approach to birth control in developing countries is to educate the women, but he didn’t apply that insight to teenagers in the United States. Instead, he blamed the AFDC program for encouraging teen pregnancy.

## **Welfare Reform and Racism**

When Aid to Dependent Children was begun as part of the Social Security Act in 1935, the program was mainly for white widows, and it excluded most people of color. In the early years of the program, African American women were often excluded by rules that states imposed, such as “suitable home”[\*] and “man-in-the-house”[\*\*] rules, which were struck down by the Supreme Court in the 1960s. This was particularly true in the South. One Southern field supervisor summed up the prevailing attitude toward African-American women in the 1940s and 1950s by saying that the staff and board of the welfare department had a “unanimous feeling” that Negro women should continue to do their “usually sketchy seasonal labor or indefinite domestic service” rather than receive public assistance. They said that Negro women “have always gotten along,” and “all they’ll do is have more children.”[20]

In the 1960s, the civil rights and welfare rights movements resulted in the inclusion of many who had been excluded from the original AFDC program. Legal service lawyers challenged exclusionary rules and won many victories. As a result, the number of African-American women in the program increased by about 15 percent between 1965 and 1971. “The evolution of a right-wing critique of welfare in the early 1960s coincided with this shift in the racial composition of the AFDC population.”[21] Public officials, aided by the media, made people believe that AFDC was largely a program for African-Americans, even though, until recently, the highest percentage of people on AFDC were European-Americans.

President Reagan's image of the "welfare queen" going to the welfare office in a Cadillac instilled a vision of black women defrauding the welfare system. In fact, most welfare fraud is done by vendors—pharmacies, doctors, dentists, nursing homes, hospitals, and sellers of medical equipment. The government recovered \$2.5 billion in overpayments for Medicare in 2009 as the Obama administration focused attention on fraud enforcement efforts in the health industry.[22] A study in Massachusetts showed that more than 93 percent of the money recovered from welfare fraud came from vendors. In 2008, the Attorney General of Massachusetts recovered \$26.7 million in settlements and judgments in Medicaid fraud cases, the highest amount in three decades.[23] Two of the largest fraud cases in the nation were against for-profit hospitals for defrauding government health insurance programs. Three executives of the nation's biggest hospital chain, Columbia/HCA, were indicted in 1997 for conspiring to defraud government health insurance programs. The U.S. Attorney's office fined TAP Pharmaceutical Products of Illinois \$875 million in September 2001 for price manipulation, the largest settlement ever in health care fraud.[24]

However, as the welfare rolls continued to plunge, white recipients left the system faster than black and Hispanic recipients. In FY 2008 there were 1,629,345 families receiving TANF, 31.5 percent of whom were white, 34.2 percent African-American, and 28 percent Hispanic.[25] Minority welfare recipients were significantly more disadvantaged than their white counterparts. They face discrimination from prospective employers and landlords, and Hispanic recipients face the problem of learning English when there are not enough English as a Second Language (ESL) programs. The time limits imposed at the federal level and in many states are especially hard on African-American and Hispanic recipients.

A study in Wisconsin found that despite having higher education levels and higher job training completion rates, black welfare recipients did not fare any better than Caucasians in terms of employment. Black welfare recipients were more likely to be required to take preemployment and Alcohol and Other Drug Abuses (ACOA) tests than were whites.[26]

The assumption that AFDC was primarily for black Americans led to racially based policies based on stereotypes. Conservative views about the proper place of women being in the home might still apply to white women, but black women have always been expected to work outside the home, predominantly as domestic and agricultural workers. The 1967 amendments to the Social Security Act placed mandatory work requirements on AFDC recipients for the first time, and subsequent laws such as the Talmadge Amendment of 1971 and the Family Support Act of 1988 stiffened the requirements, culminating in the current draconian work requirements of the Personal Responsibility Act.

The restrictions placed on teen parents were also directed against minority teenagers, who are disproportionately represented in the teen parent population. Among many people, "teenage parents" has become a code word for minority women, and the attack on welfare has become an attack on them.

## **The War against Women**

Welfare is one of the battlegrounds of the war on women. The National Organization for Women says that not only does the Personal Responsibility Act inflict suffering on poor women and their children, it also heralds a broader effort to pressure all women into a repressive sexuality, limited reproductive choices, and conventional family arrangements. The radical right wing understands the connection between a safety net and women's autonomy. By withdrawing federal assistance for women without male support (and also by attacking affirmative action, Title IX, and college financing), by branding welfare mothers with demeaning racial stereotypes, and by pauperizing them and questioning their fitness as mothers, the right is forcing every woman to depend

economically on a man within a traditional marriage whether or not she wants to and whether or not the man is dependable. The economic alternative is made so harsh that women may find themselves unable to provide for their families and may have to give up their children to foster care or adoption.

Conservatives are worried about the decline of two-parent families. The 2000 census showed that the number of families headed by women who have children, which are typically poorer than two-parent families, grew nearly five times faster in the 1990s than the number of married couples with children. For the first time, nuclear families accounted for less than 25 percent of all households in the United States.[27]

The Personal Responsibility Act provides for an “anti-illegitimacy” bonus that gives extra federal money to states that lower their nonmarital birth and abortion rates. States have enacted a variety of programs to get this bonus. In Virginia, for example, cities conducted Marriage Before the Carriage contests, in which youth ages 12 to 21 could enter a drawing for a new car if they hadn’t fathered or conceived a child in the past year. Mississippi established an abstinence unit of the state government, even though numerous studies have shown that abstinence education alone is unsuccessful in lowering birthrates. States have a financial incentive to promote abstinence to the exclusion of other family planning education through federal “abstinence only” money available under the federal welfare bill. More draconian measures have so far been voted down, as was Arizona’s unsuccessful proposal to automatically make children of unmarried teen parents wards of the state and put the infants in the custody of the state’s protective service system. A private group in California offered \$200 cash rewards to vulnerable low-income or drug- or alcohol-addicted women who agree to have a Norplant implant or undergo sterilization.[28]

Everyone knows that if women are to enter the waged labor market, they will need child care. The right wing has always resisted public provision of day care on the grounds that a woman’s “natural place” is in the home; George Gilder[29] said that a woman finds dignity and security beneath the authority of her husband. President Nixon vetoed a bill providing for universal day care. One of his aides said that it would “Sovietize child care.” On the other hand, conservatives agree that a single-mother welfare recipient should be in waged work. The double standard for middle-class mothers and welfare mothers was revealed when Congress—soon after it passed the Personal Responsibility Act—passed a law in 1998 giving tax deductions to middle-class women who choose to stay home to care for their children.

All these policies limit the choices of poor women and further deepen the rift between poor women who have no choices and affluent women who do. These reproductive issues affect only poor women now, but they are related to the drive to limit reproductive choice for all women. The conservative talk about putting poor children into orphanages is not really about orphanages but about women: It is about reinforcing the sexual double standard.

Yet all the talk about taking their children away and putting them in orphanages serves to terrorize welfare recipients still further. The Latin root of *proletariat* means “people who have no other wealth but their children.” That took on a poignant meaning when Charles Murray proposed a policy of cutting off AFDC payments to teenage mothers and using the money saved to provide orphanages for their children. Shortly before Christmas 1994, Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich championed a bill that would have let states use federal welfare money for orphanages. Critics invoked Charles Dickens and Scrooge; Gingrich countered with nostalgic images of Boys Town and Spencer Tracy. By the time President Clinton denounced the plan as “dead wrong,” Mr. Gingrich was protesting that he had been misunderstood.[30]

## **Cycles in Welfare Reform**

I am using the term *welfare* in the way that the public generally understands it—Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF).<sup>[\*\*\*]</sup> If we called all government financial transfer programs “welfare,” then financial-aid grants to college students and veterans’ benefits would come under that category. Although the amount paid to the AFDC/TANF program has been relatively small—less than 1 percent of federal government spending and about 3 percent of state spending—it garners a huge amount of public scorn. Much larger welfare grants go to the middle class and rich.

Welfare provides a good example of the cycles of reform. Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward<sup>[31]</sup> (1971), two of the leading proponents of opportunity theory, believe that welfare expands and contracts in response to changes in the economy and the political climate. The leading architects of the welfare rights movement, they believe passionately in political activism as a way to empower the poor.

Piven and Cloward argue that government officials expand welfare (public assistance) in times of civil turmoil. When the turmoil dies down, they cut back on welfare and use it to enforce work norms. They document the following cycles of expansion and contraction in welfare:

- Beginning of large-scale federal relief programs during the Great Depression as a response to civil turmoil.
- Cutbacks during the 1940s and 1950s after the turmoil of the 1930s subsided. Welfare was often withheld from people in order to force them into low-paid agricultural and factory work.
- Expansion during the 1960s as a response to civil turmoil (and as an attempt to build a new urban base for the Democratic party).
- Cutbacks from the 1970s to the present, after the turmoil of the 1960s subsided. During this period, welfare has been withheld to force women into the low-wage labor market.

As welfare and other safety net programs were cut back, the criminal justice system expanded. The United States has the highest incarceration rate on the planet—five times the world’s average. The United States has five percent of the world’s population, but 25 percent of the world’s prison population. By 2010, there were about 2.4 million people incarcerated in federal, state, and county prisons, or on parole or probation. Senator Jim Webb introduced the National Criminal Justice Act in 2010 to study the criminal justice system and make recommendations for reform. There has been no in-depth or comprehensive study of the entire criminal justice system since The President’s Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration and Justice, impaneled in 1965.<sup>[32]</sup>

### **The Downward Slide**

The upward climb of social welfare expenditures reversed in 1975. Expenditures then took a downward turn for the first time in three decades, beginning with the Ford and Carter administrations, moving down and even picking up roller-coaster speed during the 1980s. Congress and the Reagan administration conducted a massive assault on all entitlement programs for the poor and near-poor. Programs for the middle class suffered also.

Some states replaced the lost federal funds with state funds, but during the recession of the late 1980s and early 1990s, states raced to cut social welfare and implement punitive measures. Across the nation, state legislators and governors slashed benefits for low-income people more drastically than they had done since the 1980s. Fourteen of the thirty states with supplemental welfare programs, known as General Assistance, cut those budgets, affecting nearly half a million people.

At the same time that corporations were being restructured, social welfare programs were also being restructured. As wages went down, so did welfare payments—no coincidence. According to a principle known in welfare circles as the **principle of less eligibility**, welfare payments in the United States are almost always kept below the lowest wages in order to encourage people to take any low-wage job rather than go on welfare. Many people assumed that the welfare state would expand forever. But, as Mimi Abramovitz pointed out,

As long as investment in social reproduction meshed with the needs of profitable production and political control, social welfare programs remained intact and grew. But in the mid-1970s, changing economic and political conditions rendered the postwar social policies less conducive to the needs of business and the state, which then began to turn them around.[33]

Twenty-five years ago, the consumer advocate Ralph Nader warned that the Republicans were engaged in a campaign to undermine people's trust in government so they could dismantle it because government sometimes prevented the worst depredations of capitalism. Now we see how farsighted Nader was. When people can be stopped from thinking that the government owes them anything, the safety net of the welfare state, never very strong, can be shredded entirely. Then there is no buffer to protect people from having to take any low-wage job, or to protect women from having to stay in a bad marriage, or even to protect people from homelessness. It seems that we have returned full cycle to the nineteenth century in welfare reform.

Welfare is like society's lightning rod, attracting people's anxieties and ambivalence about dependence and self-reliance—about work, about race, about sex, about mothers living without husbands, about our responsibilities toward one another, and about the nature of a just society. It has been more of a politically hot issue in the United States than in any other industrialized country. Some Europeans say that following the welfare scene of the United States is like reading the musty historical pages of the development of European welfare.

### **Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)**

Politicians score points by being "tough on welfare" and "tough on crime." Sometimes they link the two issues, as if being on welfare were a crime. Temporary Assistance to Needy Families [TANF] has drawn fierce fire in the anti-welfare war. It is a program that provides income to families with dependent children, generally headed by a single parent but also available on a limited basis to two-parent families. About 95 percent of the single parents are women.

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996, signed into law by President Clinton, ended federal control over AFDC and gave the states block grants to run their own programs. By ending the entitlement status of AFDC, the federal government, for the first time in sixty years, no longer guaranteed that it would help families in need. Conservatives in Congress proclaimed a victory; liberal senator Edward Kennedy, who voted against the bill, proclaimed it "legislative child abuse." [34] Journalist Bob Herbert called it "officially sanctioned brutality." [35]

The state programs that were held up as models for other states to copy were the more punitive ones. The most outspoken advocate of dismantling welfare was Governor Tommy Thompson of Wisconsin, who was appointed director of the federal Department of Health and Human Services by President George W. Bush in 2001 (and resigned in 2003). He implemented the “W-2” program in Wisconsin, which called for replacing welfare with work. In this program, women are required to work when their children reach 12 weeks of age and there is a two-year time limit for supported work or community service.[36] The program was more successful at kicking people off the rolls than helping families. During the recession, 40 percent of Wisconsin’s children received food stamps.

The Wisconsin TANF program was sued in 2010 by Legal Action of Wisconsin, Inc., the American Civil Liberties of Wisconsin, and the Milwaukee branch of the NAACP, on the grounds of discrimination on the basis of race and disability in the administration of the W-2 program. A study found that there were significant racial disparities in sanction rates for alleged failures to comply with program requirements. Latino and African-American program participants both were sanctioned at a higher rate than white program participants. The settlement of the lawsuit required administrators of the W-2 program to ensure that qualified individuals with disabilities receive reasonable accommodations, which may include job training and supports for a longer time period than what is typically afforded, sign language interpreters, or in-depth services from the Wisconsin Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.[37]

### **Time Limits**

There was no time limit on AFDC, but the Personal Responsibility Act set a lifetime time limit of five years in which people could receive assistance. Some states set shorter time limits than the federal limit. The latest state to do this was Michigan. The Center for Budget and Policy Priorities said on August 1, 2011 that Michigan Governor Rick Snyder was expected to sign legislation that will reduce the time that individuals can receive TANF. The new 48-month time limit was expected to cause more than 11,000 people to lose benefits.[38]

States are free to set no time limit at all if they want to pay for the program out of state funds after the federal time limit is up, and Maine did that. The law does not require that assistance be in the form of cash. It can be in the form of vouchers. Some states even turned over the program to counties.[39] When states face a fiscal crisis, the first programs to be cut generally are programs that help the poor.

### **Workfare**

After two months of being on welfare, recipients are required to find a community service job if they have not found paid employment. Community service work is usually menial work, such as raking leaves, picking up garbage, or washing dishes in a school cafeteria. In some cities, workfare workers have replaced regular workers. Although the law prohibits the direct substitution of welfare recipients for currently paid workers, some localities have circumvented this requirement by not renewing expired employment contracts with paid workers. In many localities, low-wage workers have been displaced by workfare “trainees” working off their welfare benefits at less than the minimum wage—sometimes as little as \$1.50 an hour.[40] In Baltimore, 1,000 workers had lost jobs to welfare trainees by mid-1997, despite the fact that city workers had only two years before won a city ordinance guaranteeing a living wage to anyone employed under contracts with the city.[41]

In New York City, thousands of workfare participants did the work once done by higher-paid city workers.[42] They were exposed to hazardous working conditions, including limited or no access to protective clothing, toilets, and drinking water. They sued the city and in August 1997, a state



Supreme Court justice ruled that the city was obligated to provide these necessities. In July 2001, the federal government sued the Giuliani administration in New York City, charging it with doing too little to protect women in workfare jobs from sexual and racial harassment by their supervisors. The Giuliani administration said that welfare recipients in the city's workfare program were not employees and had no legal right to protection from sexual discrimination or sexual harassment in the workplace.[43] Unions fought this discrimination, and workers won some rights given to regular employees.

Four *New York Times* reporters looked at the Work Experience Program (workfare) in New York City and found the following: Workfare didn't lead to full-time jobs, many participants took the place of full-time workers, mothers faced acute lack of day care, and tough workfare rules were used as a way to cut welfare rolls.

A study of workfare programs in the United States, Canada, and Australia, found that "there is little evidence that workfare increases the likelihood of finding work. It can even increase unemployment by limiting the time available for job search and by failing to provide the skills and experience valued by employers. Workfare is least effective in getting people into jobs in weak labour markets where unemployment is high." [44]

The primary focus of TANF has been employment and "self-sufficiency," and the primary way of measuring this was work participation rates. Although the law generally required that a minimum of 50 percent of families receiving TANF cash assistance in each state participate in work related activities, about one-third of TANF families nationwide met these requirements. Some states met their requirements by cutting the rolls or spending their own funds on TANF-related activities. In 2009, 7 states met their rates for work participation, and when states' caseload decreases and additional spending were included in the calculation, 38 other states were also able to meet their required work participation rates that year.[45]

## **Education and Training**

Prior to the 1996 legislation, states were able to allow activities that helped prepare people for work, such as job training, education, or rehabilitation in substance abuse programs or disabilities. However, the 1996 legislation has a much narrower definition of what constitutes work-related activities. Only a year of education and training is allowed, and it must be directly related to a specific job that does not require a bachelor's or advanced degree. States could allow more education if they paid for it out of state funds. Maine used state funds in their "Parents as Scholars" program to support some TANF recipients in four-year college programs.[†]

No more than 30 percent of a state's recipients can be in education and training. Outside this 30 percent, mothers could still undertake training, but only if they first worked or looked for work at least 20 hours a week.

During the 1996 welfare reform debate, the majority of policymakers treated work and education as if they were entirely different concepts. Senator Phil Gramm of Texas put it this way:

Work does not mean sitting a classroom. Work means work. Any farm kid who rises before dawn for the daily chores can tell you that. Ask any of my brothers and sisters what "work" meant on our family's dairy farm. It didn't mean sitting on a stool in the barn, reading a book about how to milk a cow. "Work" meant milking cows.[46]

Senator William Armstrong of Colorado expressed the same sentiments a decade earlier, asserting:

People on welfare ought to work, work, work . . . because it is good for the soul, because it is fair to the taxpayers, because it rankles people who are paying taxes to support these programs to see people who are recipients not get out and work.[47]

Senator Gramm's comments indicate that he believes that work is hard, messy, maybe painful and involuntary; education, on the other hand, is pleasurable and self-directed. Congress and the executive branch "have continued to draw a tight line between work activities and educational pursuits. . . in part to show that they are tough on welfare and welfare recipients and that welfare is not simply a 'college scholarship' program that allows low-income people to leapfrog over the struggling middle class." In 2010, the conservative political scientist Lawrence Mead echoed Senator Gramm's sentiments when he testified before the U.S. House of Representatives that "the main thing the American people want out of welfare reform is for more adult recipients to go to work and stay there. They would oppose any policy change that allowed more recipients to go to school in place of work, especially when ordinary taxpayers not on aid lack the same opportunity. . . Advocates have to be reminded that the main point of the work test is not to help out the recipients. It is to discharge a debt to the society." [48]

It is an artificial division to draw a sharp distinction between work and education. Cooperative education combines the two by providing practical work experience with study. Community colleges, with their flexibility and responsiveness to local communities, embody the idea that work and education are intimately related. The influential educational theorist John Dewey subscribed to this approach to learning.

Only former recipients with at least a two-year postsecondary or vocational degree are likely to escape poverty by earnings alone. Since the Personal Responsibility Act was passed, there has been a precipitous drop in college enrollment among welfare recipients. This massive exodus of recipients from college does not bode well for their future ability to climb out of poverty. People with college degrees have less than a one in fifty chance of being poor compared to one in five for those without. One study of six states found that 87 percent of recipients who graduated from two- or four-year colleges were still off welfare six years later.

Very few TANF recipients have access to education and training. A 2010 study found that nationally less than 8 percent of "work-eligible" adult TANF recipients were engaged in education or training activities.[49] The training that recipients did get was largely very short-term training, often lasting three months or less. When Kentucky had more than 30 percent of recipients enrolled in vocational education, they faced penalties from the federal government. The Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 that reauthorized TANF increased their work participation rate targets for states and imposed a new and demanding requirement that all hours of participation be extensively verified and documented. The attendance and documentation requirements have proven so burdensome that TANF case managers are less likely to refer clients to education activities in general and college in particular.

### Case Example

I started going to school to get my GED two years ago, then started college classes. My DSHS case manager said that a degree in culinary arts wasn't acceptable, so I switched to an AA degree, working part time and going to school full time. My case manager said I could only get childcare for the time I was working, not in school, and that I would lose my TANF. I said that wasn't a possibility and we could not live off of food stamps and medical benefits. I had to be really persistent and very vocal to get the benefits my family needs.

I work 19 hours a week, but the requirement is 20, so I have to do one hour of community service. Here is my typical day. I get up at 5 a.m. and get my daughter ready and we are on the bus by 6 a.m. It takes 3 buses and 2 hours to get us to the daycare, then me to college. I work from 8 to 10 at the college, and then to class from 10 to 12. Instead of a lunch break I go to the work source office for an hour of community service and then back to school. If it's Tuesday or Thursday I go to class from 1:15 to 3:05; if it's Monday, Wednesday or Friday I go back to work from 1:30 to 3:30. The buses home take 3 hours, because of the afternoon schedule, so my daughter and I get home at 6:30, unless we have to stop at the store for groceries, then it's 7:30. We have dinner, bath time, and my daughter is in bed by 8. I stay up until 11:30 or 12:30 doing homework, then get up at 5 a.m. to start it all over again.

It's hard because I don't have support. Being a full-time student and working 20 hours a week is hard on me and not fair to my daughter. Single parents have the hardest time because we don't get the chances others have. Please remove the barriers to education so I can finish school and build a better life for my family.

The changing structure of the economy over the last 20 years has placed a growing premium on education and training beyond high school. Those who have at least a two- or four-year college degree have seen their earnings hold steady (and for women, rise) while the earnings of those with only a high school diploma have dropped substantially—for men, by about a third. High school dropouts are the worst off—their earnings have fallen almost by half. A 2007 study found that 41.5 percent of adult TANF recipients have less than a high school degree, and more than half have exactly a high school degree. Less than 5 percent have any postsecondary education.[50]

### Case Study: It's Not Because We Made Bad Choices

I work as a home health aide and have to get up at 4:45 in the morning to be to work by 6:30, three days a week. I'm also trying to finish a program to get my associate's degree in nursing and am looking for an apartment so I can get out of the homeless shelter where I live. I'm looking for a place, but it's hard to find anything. I only make \$200 a week, and most two-bedrooms are \$700 a month. I tried to find a studio, but most landlords don't want kids in a studio. I also need to buy a car to be able to get back and forth to school (I've been borrowing a friend's car but can't for much longer) and welfare keeps giving me a hard time—telling me I don't need a car and I should be saving money. But I live in Lowell and go to school in Lawrence, and I have a 4-year-old! Do you know how hard that would be to get back and forth without a car and still do the housing search and all the other things we have to do at the shelter?

We have to turn in forms that list where we looked for housing each week, and we have to have twelve—no matter what. If the landlord doesn't return your call, it doesn't count. Even if there are only six listings in the paper, they tell you that's not enough—that you have to try harder. It's so degrading. You know, besides being homeless, we have other issues, and we should be treated with respect. I have low self-esteem, and it's really hard to keep myself going, but they just keep piling more things on us. There are all these mandatory meetings that you have to go to even if they don't have anything to do with you. Like going to these employment sessions on how to get a job. I already have a job! But I still have to go because it's mandatory. You know, anybody could end up in this predicament—it's not because we made bad choices. That's the way life is. Some people are lucky, and some are not. And a pat on the back would be so much better than constantly putting us down.[51]

## Child Support—“Deadbeat Dads”

States have always tried to get child support money from the fathers of children on AFDC, but in the 1990s, they became more aggressive about it.

The Personal Responsibility Act required states to impose harsh sanctions on families where the parent does not “cooperate fully” in collecting child support and establishing paternity. The definition of “cooperating fully” is subject to various interpretations. For a time, Massachusetts was dropping families from the rolls if the mother was unable to provide such information as the father’s Social Security number, his whereabouts, and place of employment, even when the mother did not have this information. A class action suit brought by legal services stopped the practice.

*The “cooperate fully” requirement may be life threatening for women who are fleeing from battering husbands or boyfriends. They may be in great danger if they give information about their batterer to the welfare department because there is no guarantee that the welfare worker will not inform him of her whereabouts.*

It is certainly reasonable to expect children’s fathers to support them, but it is not reasonable to expect to recoup large amounts of money from men who have little or no money. In 1989, the average *annual* child support award for poor mothers was only \$1,889.[52]

A high proportion of mothers on welfare have been subjected to domestic violence. In the general population, about 22 percent of women experience domestic violence at some point in their adult lives, while most studies estimate that 50 to 60 percent of welfare recipients experience violence in their lives.[53] Children are also likely to be abused when the mother is abused.

Men who batter women often prevent them from working or attending education and training programs, as illustrated by the following story:

When Bernice Haynes tried to get off welfare by enrolling in a job training program, her boyfriend tossed her textbooks in the trash. He refused to watch their two children while she was in class. And he would pick fights with her when she tried to study.

“Before the final exam, we fought all weekend from Friday to Monday morning,” says Haynes, 31, who lives on Chicago’s West Side. Haynes never got the chance to open her books over the weekend. “When I went in that Monday, I was exhausted—from the constant verbal abuse, the putdowns, from trying to keep myself alive—that test wasn’t on my mind.” She flunked. Haynes, who had been attending classes for a year and was trying to become a licensed nurse, was kicked out of the program—just twelve weeks before graduation.[54]

People disagree on the child support issue. Many people, including some middle-class feminists, believe that the state should force all fathers to pay support, regardless of the mother’s wishes. They assume that this would help reduce the need for welfare. Others believe that the choice of whether to enforce a support decree should be left up to the mother. Many mothers have begged the state to collect child support and have given all necessary identifying information, but the state has done nothing. In Sweden and Finland mothers have no anxiety about getting child support from their husbands because the government pays child support advance payments when the absent parent cannot or does not pay child support.

Voicing her opposition to mandatory paternity establishment and child support provisions,

Gwendolyn Mink said in 1998,

They mark poor single mothers as a separate caste, subject to a separate system of law. The system of law under which they live penalizes their moral choices, prescribes intimate associations that may be unwanted, and infringes rights guarded as fundamental to the personhood of all other citizens.[55]

Many believe that in their zeal to make fathers pay, Congress and the president subjected all fathers whose children are on welfare to police state tactics. "They are subject to liens, withholding of wages, credit investigations, and exposure to employers, among other sanctions. They further indenture poor fathers (as well as irresponsible ones) in work programs ordered by courts and state agencies." [56] Depending on what state he lives in, a delinquent father may lose his driver's, occupational, and recreational licenses.[57] If he owes more than \$5,000, he may lose his passport.

### **Behavioral Requirements**

Welfare reform not only aims to get people to work but also to enforce certain behaviors. These rules reveal a profound distrust of the parenting abilities and sexual behavior of the poor. The Family Cap policy prohibits cash assistance to a child born while the family receives TANF. "Learnfare" reduces the grant if a child truants from school and "Shotfare" reduces the grant if parents do not get their children immunized. Wisconsin was the first state to institute Learnfare. Yet, despite a study of the program that showed that the program "had no detectable effect on school participation," [58] Wisconsin continued the Learnfare program.

In a misguided effort to control substance abuse, the federal law stipulated that people convicted of drug felonies are prohibited from receiving a TANF block grant or food stamps *for life*. Congress removed that restriction for food stamps in 2009.

Policymakers and legislators believed that the Family Cap policy would reduce the birth rate of TANF recipients, but there is no evidence that it accomplished this. Instead, it led to children's malnourishment and higher rates of hospitalization for infants and toddlers. Dr. Deborah Frank, a pediatrician who studied the nutritional status of patients at a Boston City Hospital clinic, found that 14 percent of her malnourished patients were children from families that had been capped. "If there was a medicine that gave 10 percent of children failure to thrive, it sure wouldn't be approved by the FDA," said Frank, referring to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

Nearly half of states have a family cap policy. However, in view of the fact that the family cap failed to reduce additional births and in response to criticisms of the policy, some states have done away with the policy.

State officials seem so doggedly determined to defend these restrictive policies that they ignore research showing that they accomplish little. There is little evidence that marriage will pull substantial numbers of people out of poverty. A national study of unmarried parents "highlights the fact that for unmarried mothers living in poverty, economic stability is seen as a prerequisite to marriage. Helping single parents succeed requires policies aimed at boosting their educational and economic prospects. Once economic stability has been achieved, marriage may become a more attractive option." [59]

As for the illegitimacy bonus given to states, three of the five states that received the bonus didn't even have policies or programs to achieve these goals. In effect, they received a bonus for demographic changes that they had nothing to do with. And "abstinence only" programs were found

to be ineffective in changing sexual behavior.

In 2002, the Bush administration decided that the federal government needed to promote heterosexual marriage and proposed a new federal program—the Healthy Marriage Initiative—dedicated to that purpose. In 2005, the Republican-controlled Congress authorized the program and appropriated \$500 million for it over five years. A rigorous evaluation of the program, published in 2010, showed that the program was a failure. The researchers found that the program had no effect on the likelihood of couples staying together or getting married, and no effect on relationship quality.[60]

## **Charitable Choice**

The PRWORA contains a “Charitable Choice” provision that requires states, if they contract with nonprofit organizations to provide social services, to include religious organizations as eligible contractees. Charitable Choice has been a hot political issue. President Bush wanted religious organizations to be exempt from antidiscrimination laws in hiring. The opponents of Charitable Choice fear that it will lead to religious proselytizing, discrimination in hiring, a lowering of professional standards, a loss of tax money, and further erosion of public social welfare provisions. They fear that it will undermine the strong U.S. tradition of separation of church and state. Its proponents claim that faith-based social services are more effective, but there is no research evidence to support this claim. Mark Chaves, a sociologist at the University of Arizona who has conducted numerous national surveys of church-based social programs, says, “It can’t be said strongly enough how little we know about whether religion makes a difference in the effectiveness of delivering services.”[61]

The Charitable Choice bill exempts faith-based programs from the state education and training requirements applied to all secular providers. Many people fear this will create a dangerous two-tiered system. The former director of the National Association of Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Counselors, expressed his concern about this. He said, “Because this is a disease, and it is in the proper domain of public health, and if you are out there promoting what you are doing as treating addiction, you should be properly licensed.”[62]

Although Congress has mandated that there must be a nonreligious alternative offered to recipients of services who don’t want faith-based services, states need not inform beneficiaries of their right to seek an alternative. Some areas may not have any alternatives. Already there have been lawsuits that raise constitutional questions. Among these are a case involving state funding for a Bible class in Texas and another involving a Christian twelve-step course for addicted fathers in Wisconsin.[63]

On the national level, conservatives have largely backed Charitable Choice and liberals and progressives have expressed deep concern about the provision. At the grassroots level, however, there is a confusing set of alliances. One study of more than 1,200 churches shows that congregations that are already engaged in social outreach programs seem more likely to apply for government funds, while those that keep to themselves are less likely to apply. Overall, politically conservative congregations are much less likely to apply for government funds than are middle-of-the-road or liberal congregations.

In addition, race and class affect which congregations are most interested in applying for government funding. Predominantly minority congregations are substantially more likely to be willing to apply for government funds than are white congregations. “It is no surprise that African-American and Latino churches, which have historically served their own community in an effort to augment limited government services, would be more comfortable taking on broader social service

responsibilities.”[64] However, because their resources are limited they are not likely to extend themselves to serve a broad range of people. Minority congregations are likely to be poor and poor congregations have a far more limited access to money, volunteers, and social capital. They are unable to help welfare recipients to find employment because few of their members are in a position to hire anyone or know anyone who does.

### **Immigrants and Linguistic Minorities**

The current anti-immigrant sentiment has resulted in repressive immigration laws and severe cutbacks in funding for welfare. The PRA was most severe toward legal immigrants, cutting off their access to any benefits except emergency health care. They were denied SSI, food stamps, and Medicaid. (Illegal immigrants never had access to those benefits.) Several states pay for immigrant benefits out of state funds, but state benefits are usually lower than federal benefits. In July 1997, Congress voted to change the law to restore some of the benefits to people who entered the country before the law was passed in August 1996, but they did not restore food stamps or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) to most immigrants, and legal immigrants have to wait five years after they enter the country in order to receive free medical care. The number of legal permanent residents subject to that restriction on medical care reached some 4 million by 2001.

This law has resulted in severe hardship for immigrants, forcing them to forgo medical care and even food. Despite working full time, immigrant families cannot take part in programs that were created for working poor families, and immigrant women’s weekly earnings have been falling since 1970.

Immigrants who are applying for a green card (a permit to work and reside here) must document a constant work history during their stay in the United States, making it all the more imperative that they find work. Many are in a bind because they couldn’t get authorization to work due to the multiple-year backlog at the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

Many welfare offices and other social service and health agencies do not provide translators. Human service staff of community-based organizations often have to accompany clients to appointments at the welfare office, where waits are long and language barriers high. Workers often do not refer people to ESL classes. One community service worker said, “We have a lot of clients who don’t know English so that they’re not able to complete forms and attend training and things so they’re not really at a level where they’re even able to take advantage of the few things welfare is offering.”[65]

### **The Effects of Welfare Reform**

The main message of TANF was to downsize the rolls, and states downsized dramatically. Officials who supported the Personal Responsibility Act point to how well it has been working because it has drastically reduced the welfare rolls. In 1994, there were 14.2 million recipients; in 2007, there were 4 million.[66]

Peter Edelman was assistant for planning and evaluation at the Department of Health and Human Services in the Clinton administration, resigned in protest when Clinton signed the PRWROA. This is how he described the implementation of the Act:

These are the techniques of radical reduction: shut the front door almost completely, staff the back door with the equivalent of a tough nightclub bouncer; and, in between, hassle applicants to the point where they just give up and go away.

At the front door many states just say no, evoking memories of the pre-1960s period, when unbridled discretion rules. Some cloak the turndown with the euphemism of “diversion,” which means, “You look able-bodied. Go out and look for a job.”

At the back door there is sanctioning — kicking people off the rolls because they were late to a work assignment (no excuses for sick children, late buses, or car breakdowns) or didn't show up for an appointment at the welfare office (no excuses for failure to receive notice of an appointment or inability to understand English). In some states multiple infractions of this sort can result, legally, in lifetime disqualification.

In between there are requirements to bring an entire dossier of documents in order to navigate the application maze, intrusive questions about the applicant's private life, assignments to demeaning work programs that sometimes ask people to work without necessary protective equipment, regular and irregular summonses to come in for redetermination of eligibility, and much more. Many needy people refuse to undergo the indignities associated with asking for help.[67]

The goal of the law was not to reduce poverty. In fact, it increased poverty dramatically. During the expansive economy of the 1990s, many former recipients found jobs, although about half the jobs paid less than the poverty level. And two out of five former recipients ended up with neither jobs nor welfare. During the recession of 2008, only 22 percent of poor children were in families receiving cash assistance, down from more than 60 percent in the mid-'90s. And six states had caseloads of 10 percent or less of poor families with children.[68]

Since the start of the recession in 2007, the number of Americans receiving TANF has increased less than 10 percent, even though unemployment has nearly doubled and the number of people receiving food stamps has grown more than 50 percent. Carmen R. Nazarlo, the assistant secretary of Health and Human Services in charge of welfare policy, said that some states with some of the worst economic conditions are not seeing significant caseload increases. The Government Accountability Office an investigative arm of Congress, said, “We found no clear association between the change in the number of families receiving cash assistance in a state and its unemployment rate.”[69]

Child abuse and neglect have increased. Between 1995 and 2001, there were steady increases in the number of children with substantiated reports of abuse and neglect and in the number of children referred to foster care services. An increasing proportion of children remained in foster care for more than one year. Family income is related to the speed with which children return home; children whose mothers had higher incomes went home more quickly than did children whose mothers had lower incomes.[70]

Since welfare reform, there has been a reversal of long-term downward trends in black and Hispanic infant mortality.

When she was asked how welfare mothers manage when they are cut off welfare, Sharon Hayes, author of *Flat Broke With Children: Women in the Age of Welfare Reform*, said:

They get by in the same way the poor of New Orleans and Haiti are getting by, by cobbling together every available source of aid and support, and then trying to learn how to adjust to constant suffering and insecurity Increasing rates of domestic violence are just one hidden story here.[71]



According to the recently released Census Bureau data on poverty in 2010, people in single mother families had a poverty rate of 42.2 percent and an extreme poverty rate of 21.6 percent. Poverty means an income less than the official poverty standard, \$14,570 for a family of two in 2010. Extreme poverty means an income less than half the poverty standard. Over one-quarter of U.S. children under age 18 reside with only one of their parents, and as many as half of U.S. children may reside in a single parent family at some point in their childhood. The vast majority — over 85 percent — of single parents are single mothers.[72]

Some people claim that mothers who have jobs provide good role models for their children. However, that depends on the stability of work and the amount of wages. A study by the Upjohn Institute for Employment Research found that when work is stable and well paid or leading to higher income and brings about regularity of life, it provides a good role model for children. However, low-wage work available to lower-skilled individuals coming out of welfare does not usually fit such a bill. Children whose mothers experienced greater job instability, particularly due to being laid off or fired, have consistently worse behavior problems and poor academic progress. Fluctuating work hours and full-time employment in jobs with little wage potential are strongly associated with the probability that the child will repeat a grade. The researchers concluded that a child's behavior is determined by the quality and quantity of time a mother spends with her child.

Welfare recipients have always been in and out of the workforce, often because of their child care responsibilities. They have traditionally used AFDC as a substitute for unemployment insurance, for which they are usually ineligible because much of their work is temporary or part time. Unemployment insurance is popularly thought to be for "deserving" workers who are out of work for no fault of their own. Some people believe that if unemployment insurance were expanded to include those low-wage workers who are not now eligible for it, it could provide a more dignified income supplement to women who would otherwise have to go on welfare.[73] Some states have put programs on the agenda to extend either temporary disability insurance or unemployment benefits to workers with caregiving needs.[74]

### **Not Enough Child Care**

The law does not provide enough money for child care for working parents, and most states do not add enough of their own money to provide the necessary child care. Under the TANF program, there is no entitlement to child care, even though it is an absolute necessity if parents are to enter and stay in waged work. The cost of child care is a major drain on a working parent's income. Patching together safe, reliable, and child-positive care is a job in itself.

Many of the jobs the mothers get require part-time, before-school, after-school, evening, swing-shift, and weekend schedules. Mothers often have to make many arrangements, combining formal care with family neighbors and sibling care. These arrangements often break down. Children are often left in the home alone. Many of the older girls in families are pressed into service to care for the younger children while their mother works, which of course impedes their own schooling and development.

Quality of child care is another problem. Parents who are unable to find or afford good quality child care are often forced to make do with inadequate arrangements. A study done by the Families and Work Institute of children cared for in about 225 homes of relatives and nonrelatives in Los Angeles, Dallas, and Charlotte, North Carolina, rated only 9 percent of the home-based care as high quality. More than half, or 56 percent, of the care was rated as merely custodial and 35 percent was judged harmful to the children's social and educational development.[75]

### **Not Enough Transportation**

Under the Family Support Act of 1988, anyone in education and training was provided with transportation costs. This is not required under PRWORA, and lack of transportation is a major barrier to getting a job. The majority of recipients do not have cars, and those who do have unreliable ones.

*Two-thirds of all new jobs are in the suburbs, but three-fourths of welfare recipients live in rural areas or central cities.* A study of transit service from a point in Boston in which a high population of welfare recipients lived to the high-growth areas for entry-level employment found that more than 66 percent of existing jobs could not be reached within two hours—even though most of the city’s welfare recipients live within one-half mile of public transit.[76] Furthermore, public transportation services offer inadequate hours of operation and infrequent service. And it is expensive.

The problem with transportation in rural areas is also severe. An article in the *Boston Globe* by E. Barry said that in many parts of Maine, for example, there are no buses. One woman regularly hitchhikes nine miles to a training program.

Poor women . . . find themselves stranded, unable to scrape up enough money to buy or maintain cars. Pressed by welfare deadlines to seek employment outside their home, they are relying on bicycles, or squandering their money on taxicabs, or walking for miles in the dead of winter, or missing their appointments.[77]

## **Welfare and Health**

Both the mothers on welfare and their children have a high rate of disability. This interferes with the mothers’ ability to get a paid job, both because of their own health problems and because they need to stay home to care for disabled children.

About half of TANF recipients have a disability themselves or have a family member with a disability. Food Stamp recipients have similar prevalence of disability as TANF recipients. Low-income single mothers generally have disability rates that are higher than all adults, but lower than TANF and Food Stamp recipients.[78] Some states exempt disabled parents and parents caring for a disabled child from the work requirement, but there are stiff requirements for proving disability. Emotional and cognitive disabilities are especially hard to prove.

Most of the parents have disabilities that do not qualify them for SSI but still restrict their ability to work. If the TANF program used the definition of disability included in the Americans with Disabilities Act, many more women would qualify for assistance. The federal welfare law expressly provides that the ADA applies to all activities funded with TANF funds, and these standards are the ones that states should use. The definition of disability under ADA rules is a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities of the person, while SSI is for severe disabilities that are expected to last at least twelve months or result in death and which prevent substantial gainful activity.

The most common mental health problems are depression, posttraumatic stress disorder, and general anxiety disorder. According to one study, about 42 percent of heads of households receiving TANF meet the criteria for clinical depression—more than three times the national average.[79] What appears to many people as “laziness” is actually depression.

Many parents have learning disabilities, up to one-half of recipients in the state of Washington. In many cases, women are not aware of their learning disabilities and in most states there are few attempts to diagnose and help women to overcome their disabilities.

## The Future of TANF

The Personal Responsibility Act had an expiration date of October 1, 2002. By then—five years after states were required to have new welfare policies in place—Congress was supposed to decide whether to reauthorize the existing law or replace it. Congress had extended the law several times, but the reauthorization effort became trapped in a political tug of war between conservatives (who wanted tougher work requirements added to the law) and liberals (who wanted increased federal money for child care).[80] Grassroots welfare activists were in the odd position of fighting to keep the existing law, which they don't like, because they feared that a new law would be worse. TANF was extended until April 2005 without changes. It was reauthorized in that year as the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, which contained stricter work requirements.

On September 8, 2011, the Subcommittee on Human Resources of the House Ways and Means Committee held a TANF hearing "On Improving Work and Other Welfare Reform Goals." Several groups submitted testimony documenting the need for a more liberal bill, including NOW, 9 to 5, AAUW, Women of Color, Shriver National Center on Poverty Law, Diane Romero, CUNY School of Public Health, Feminists for life of America, and Legal Momentum (the Women's Legal Defense and Education Fund). Legal Momentum has been in the lead of informing people on the internet about TANF.

The law was due to be reauthorized again by October 2010, but Congress deferred full reauthorization until September 30, 2011, when it extended the program without including funding for TANF supplemental grants aimed at 17 mostly poor states. In many of those states there were very high levels of poverty and, in many states, "deep poverty" (incomes below *half* the poverty line). The Center for Budget and Policy Priorities gives the following explanation:

Congress created the Supplemental Grants as part of the original welfare reform law to give poorer states and states with growing populations a better opportunity to achieve the goals of the 1996 law. The grants reduce the large disparity between poorer and wealthier states in TANF funding per poor child under the basic TANF block grant funding formula.

The Supplemental Grants ran out earlier this year after Congress cut funding in December. The bill passed last week extends TANF for only three months, but the bill's omission of Supplemental Grant funding makes it unlikely that Congress will include the grants in future TANF extensions.[81]

The TANF Contingency Fund was created in welfare reform to help states respond to increased need during hard economic times, but legislation was passed in 2010 that will essentially end funding for the Contingency Fund for fiscal year 2011. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (also called the stimulus bill) allocated \$5 billion to a new Emergency Fund under the TANF block grant, which provided 80 percent reimbursement for increases in TANF-related expenditures in three specified areas, including subsidized employment. States used these funds to support a range of subsidized jobs programs, including transitional jobs, summer jobs, programs for youth in low-income families, and supported work models for individuals with disabilities in low-income families. These programs were not limited to workers in families receiving TANF. If the state didn't make the necessary spending, it didn't get the money. Some state legislatures said they didn't have the money to pay the 20 percent matching funds. This fund was not renewed in 2010.

When the TANF Emergency Fund expired on September 30, 2010, tens of thousands of people lost subsidized jobs supported by the fund.[82]

## Organizing for Change

Advocates are organizing to try to get a more humane law when it is reauthorized. The U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Ways and Means held a hearing on education and training in TANF on April 22, 2010. Several organizations and individuals testified.[††] Everyone except Lawrence Mead argued for expanding education and training opportunities. Gwendolyn Mink made the most far-reaching proposals for change in TANF. Her proposals are as follows:

End marriage/fatherhood promotion with TANF.

- Get rid of time limits.
- Broaden the definition of work. Guarantee academic and vocational freedom to all recipients who engage in work-related activities. Recipients should not be tracked into certain majors/training programs or prohibited from others based on the government's view of what field of study/training is appropriate.
- Broaden the definition of work to include a) education; b) caregiving for one's own children; c) substance abuse and mental health treatment activities; d) overcoming barriers and time constraints imposed by efforts to escape domestic violence.
- End mandatory cooperation with paternity establishment and child support enforcement for all custodial mothers—take it out of TANF altogether.
- Guarantee immediate access to TANF income assistance to those who are fleeing domestic violence.
- End immigrant exclusion.
- Restore and improve the child care guarantee for recipients who are engaged in labor market work activities (including preparation for the labor market).
- Increase TANF benefit levels to 150 percent of the federal poverty line and provide a transportation subsidy to any TANF participant who must travel more than 5 miles to a job. Continue TANF as a wage supplement for those who work part-time.
- Get rid of all surveillance of recipients. Fix/end barriers to participation in TANF, including diversion programs, discretionary application denials, arbitrary case closings, all sanctions.

Organizers agree that the first step toward getting a more humane law is to change attitudes toward the poor. Peter Edelman said,

We have been reduced to the politics of the waitress mom. She says, all too legitimately, "I bust my tail. I don't have decent child care. I don't have health coverage. Why should

‘these people’ get what I don’t have?” Advocates say to this waitress, “You are right. You deserve to have a job that pays enough to support a family, and you deserve good child care and health coverage. Join us in working for these things for everybody.”[83]

As Gwendolyn Mink says, we do indeed need to end welfare—“but as poor mothers experience it, not as middle class moralizers imagine it.”[84] The means-tested AFDC/TANF program has always been stingy and punitive. The late British social welfare scholar Richard Titmuss said that programs for the poor are poor programs. Whatever programs we work for should be universal ones, inclusive of all people; otherwise they take on the stigma that is always directed at poor people. Examples of such universal programs are:

- A family allowance granted to every family with children;
- A guaranteed annual income for all citizens;
- Refundable tax credits for children;
- Individual Development Accounts for families and children, in which individuals save money in an account which is matched and can be used to accomplish life goals such as getting an education, buying a house, or starting a business. This program exists on a limited basis in a few localities.

We need to create a real safety net, including restoring entitlement to financial assistance, establishing a minimum level of cash assistance that is high enough to meet basic needs, and providing all benefits to immigrants, including undocumented immigrants.

We also need to work on improvements for all workers—an increase in the minimum wage, paid family leave, guaranteed child care, comparable worth policies, decent unemployment compensation, universal public health care, a full employment policy, investment in education and vocational training, and aggressive enforcement of anti-discrimination laws. “This end to welfare will take us down many paths, all leading to gender justice.”[85]

Most Americans would not feel that welfare reform has been a success if people were still in poverty after leaving the welfare rolls. The public might be ready to support stronger job supports and removal of time limits that are forcing large numbers of people into poverty if they are better informed about the effects of welfare reform.[86]

Universal welfare programs such as Social Security have powerful constituencies who fight to retain their benefits and have won major victories against government cutbacks. Means-tested programs such as TANF have little political support and must join with powerful allies. The National Welfare Rights Organization achieved significant victories in the 1960s and early 1970s because they were allied with the Civil Rights and anti-war movements. Countries where women have strong political power, such as Sweden and France, have strong women-friendly services such as universal day care and generous family leave provisions.

Unions have occasionally become involved in welfare issues, as in New York City, where workfare took away jobs from unionized workers. Many unions have won family-friendly benefits for their

members. Service Employees International Union (SEIU) organized 604 former welfare recipients in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, who care for their parents, employed by the nonprofit agency New Health Services (NHS). These workers were paid at the rate of \$7.10 an hour, with no benefits of any kind. After their union was certified, they went on to negotiate a contract for higher wages, improved training, health insurance, and pension benefits.[87]

Churches have given strong support to the welfare struggle, especially the Catholic Church, Unitarian Universalists, the American Friends Service Committee, and the United Church of Christ.

Many welfare recipients and their allies have fought to liberalize welfare rules on both the state and national levels. Lawyers have brought many lawsuits against repressive and discriminatory practices. They have used Title VI, which prohibits federally funded programs from discriminating on the basis of race, color, or national origin, to file administrative complaints. Grassroots activists and legal advocates have also used Title VI to bring about meaningful access to public benefits and related services for individuals with limited English proficiency.[88]

Joan Blades, who, with her husband Wes Boyd, founded the liberal Internet site MoveOn.org, founded an Internet site called MomsRising.org. The group made a documentary called *The Motherhood Manifesto* about the obstacles facing working mothers. The group is organizing to get universal child care, paid maternity and paternity leave, and to end workplace discrimination against mothers.[89]

## Notes

[\*] "Suitable home" rules excluded a woman from AFDC if officials decided that her home was not suitable in some way. These rules were most often used against mothers who were not married.

[\*\*] "Man-in-the-house" rules stated that women were forbidden to have a man in the house. Welfare workers often conducted midnight raids to try to find a man in the house.

[\*\*\*] States have given different names to TANF. In Massachusetts, for example, the program is called Transitional Assistance to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC).

[†] The Patsy Takemoto Mink Fellowship each year gives scholarships of \$2,000 to assist low-income women to achieve an educational objective. The fellowship is named for the woman who represented her native Hawaii in the U.S. Congress. She fought against welfare reform in Congress. Her daughter Gwendolyn Mink, author of *Welfare's End*, established the fellowship, along with Patsy Mink's husband, to honor her deceased mother.

Gwendolyn Mink believes that welfare should go beyond helping low-income mothers care for their children. It should also open opportunities to education at all levels, and provide child care as well as assistance in overcoming personal barriers to employment. Mink explained that the Fellowship is a small nonprofit and reaches only a handful of women a year. The Foundation can be reached at <http://www.patsyminkfoundation.org/>.

[††] Some of the organizations that testified are: CLASP, Center for Economic and Policy Research, Institute for Women's Policy Research, and Legal Momentum.

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